



Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of Architectural Association School of Architecture

June 2016

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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 the Architectural Association School of Architecture. The review took place from 31 May to 2 June 2016 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Alan Jago
- Ms Francine Norris
- Miss Amy Woodgate (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review (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.

A check is also made on the provider's financial sustainability, management and governance (FSMG) with 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.

In reviewing the Architectural Association School of Architecture 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,² and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

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.

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

¹ The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code.

² Higher Education Review themes: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2859.

³ QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us.

⁴ Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers): www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Educational-Oversight.aspx.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about the Architectural Association School of Architecture

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at the Architectural Association School of Architecture.

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding body **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following feature of **good practice** at the Architectural Association School of Architecture.

- The very high level of support for students that makes a significantly positive contribution to their personal, professional and academic development (Expectation B4).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to the Architectural Association School of Architecture.

By January 2017:

- revise the School's alignment of the undergraduate programmes to accurately reflect the levels of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (Expectation A1)
- make rigorous use of achievement and progression data to monitor standards (Expectation A3.3)
- put in place a process that provides comprehensive oversight of the design and development of undergraduate programme units (Expectation B1)
- develop and publish clear criteria for the allocation of students to programme units (Expectations B1, B3)
- clarify the role of student representatives and put in place effective development to support them in this function (Expectation B5)
- ensure all external examiners have available to them the full range of assessed work so that confirmation of the standards of the professional undergraduate award is fully informed (Expectations B7, A3.4)
- revise the mitigating circumstances policy to incorporate the full range of occurrences that can impact on a student's ability to submit assessments within agreed deadlines (Expectation B9)
- document the processes for managing and reviewing information the School produces about itself (Expectation C).

Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms** the following actions that the Architectural Association School of Architecture is already taking to make academic standards secure and improve the educational provision offered to its students.

- The steps being taken to formalise the School's approach to academic staff review and development (Expectation B3).
- The introduction of a new policy for the nomination and appointment of external examiners for both the undergraduate and graduate schools (Expectation B7).
- The introduction of a process for the internal monitoring and review of the undergraduate programme (Expectation B8).

Theme: Digital Literacy

The School believes itself to be an early pioneer of the use of digital technology in architectural design, predominately through the integration of computer-aided design within the curriculum and a programme of digital literacy training offered through the central support services. Support for digital skills ensures students are well prepared for a future career trajectory within an ever-digitising discipline, while also acknowledging the value of traditional skills and methodologies - a balance facilitated through the diverse course option portfolio on offer. While the digital literacies offering at the School has emerged as a strong portfolio for the student learning experience, there is no identified strategy leading to developments.

Financial sustainability, management and governance

The Architectural Association School of Architecture has satisfactorily completed 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 the Architectural Association School of Architecture

The Architectural Association (the Association) was established in 1847 as a public forum and learned society in London, opening as a day school in 1901. It was the first independent school in the UK dedicated to the education and practice of architecture.

Today the School is called the Architectural Association School of Architecture (the School). It comprises five parts, three of which deliver full-time programmes and two part-time. The three full-time parts consist of a foundation course; an Undergraduate School, delivering programmes that are professionally accredited by the professional body, the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) and prescribed by the statutory regulator, the Architects Registration Board (ARB); and a Graduate School with 11 programmes of advanced studies. The two part-time parts are The Architectural Association Professional Practice and Practical Experience Course leading to ARB/RIBA Part 3; and the Visiting School delivering short programmes worldwide.

The broader Association includes a professional and alumni association; a membership of more than 7,000 members; a registered charity; a publishing house for books and journals - AA Publications Ltd; the AA Bookshop; and a Public Programme of exhibitions, lectures, symposia, seminars, conversations, research clusters and excursions.

Activities take place in three main settings: Bedford Square, London; Hooke Park in Dorset; and approximately 50 annual part-time Visiting Schools at locations in the UK and around the world.

The Association's mission is to promote and afford facilities for the study of architecture for the public benefit. The Association envisions itself as 'an international hub for architectural learning, where students and staff comprise a creative, intelligent and adaptable network of knowledge and experience'.

The total number of students enrolled in October 2015 was 807; all are full-time. Undergraduate students number 515 and postgraduate 292. Sixty per cent of students (490) are international, non-European Union students and 85 per cent are over the age of 21. The School has 20 full-time academic staff and 130 part-time. The Visiting School delivered short programmes to 1,332 students during the academic year 2014-15.

The key change since the QAA 2012 Review for Educational Oversight is the introduction of a new strategic plan covering the period 2015-20. Notable changes occurring in the lead up to the new strategic plan include an increase in student recruitment to the undergraduate programmes; an increase in financial income; a consolidation of all full-time activity at the Bedford Square, London campus; and continued and improving public engagement through, for example, an extensive programme of public lectures, presentations and exhibitions.

The School's undergraduate programmes are not associated with any higher education awards but are designed to meet the professional standards prescribed by ARB and accredited by RIBA. Postgraduate programmes are awarded by the Open University, who have been the School's awarding body since 1995. The Association is also an Affiliated Research Centre of the Open University.

The School had its first review by QAA under the scheme for Educational Oversight (EO) in May 2012. In the succeeding three years it has been subject to annual monitoring under the QAA's EO processes. In the first year, 2013, the School was found to be making commendable progress with its action plan arising from the 2012 review. In 2014 the School submitted a report and was found to be making good progress and was not required to undergo a monitoring visit. The 2015 visit again concluded that the School was making commendable progress. The School continues to meet the requirements of the professional, statutory and regulatory bodies RIBA and ARB.

Explanation of the findings about the Architectural School of Architecture

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 Postgraduate and research degrees in the Graduate School at the Architectural Association School of Architecture (the School) are validated and approved by the Open University. The School's self-evaluation document, prepared for the review, explains that the relationship is governed by the requirements set out in the Validation Agreement and detailed in the Handbook for Validated Awards. These qualifications are allocated to the appropriate level of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and defined in terms of a minimum credit threshold consistent with the expectations of the *Higher Education Credit Framework for England*. This position is reinforced by the School's Academic Regulations which require alignment with both.

1.2 Programmes in the Undergraduate School are professionally accredited by the professional body, the Royal Institute of British Architects and prescribed by the statutory regulator, the Architects Registration Board. The self-evaluation document states that all qualifications have been mapped against levels of the FHEQ. Students are not awarded academic credits or exit awards, awards being given on a satisfactory completion basis.

1.3 These arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.4 The review team tested the arrangements described in the self-evaluation document by considering documentation including that explaining the processes for the approval and monitoring of programmes, documents produced during programme approval, annual monitoring reports and external examiner reports.

1.5 The review team concluded that the policies and procedures that ensure that the programmes meet UK threshold standards through alignment with the FHEQ are implemented effectively in the postgraduate programmes. There is a clear process in place for the approval of programmes. Programme guides include programme specifications which refer to intended learning outcomes, teaching and learning strategies and the programme's structure. Programme descriptions contain reference to FHEQ levels. External examiners confirm that the standards that are set are appropriate. Annual monitoring reports include reference to the appropriateness of aims, objectives and intended learning outcomes.

1.6 In the undergraduate programmes, which are professionally accredited, the review team saw evidence that the programmes currently meet the standards set by the two bodies that scrutinise them. The Programme Guides include programme specifications that refer to intended learning outcomes, teaching and learning strategies and the programme's structure. There is also reference to the appropriate subject benchmark. In the self-evaluation document the programmes are assigned FHEQ levels, the Foundation at Level 5, the Part 1 programme at Level 6 and the Part 2 programme at Level 7. The review team heard that students enter year 1 of the Part 1 programme and progress through it such that they reach Level 6 in their final year. Staff also described how the level of challenge increases as the programme progresses. The wording of learning outcomes reflects this progression through the programme. They concluded that students achieve Level 6 on exit but it is not the case that the whole Part 1 programme is delivered and assessed at one level as the mapping of levels would indicate. This being the case, the Foundation programme, which is preparatory to the Part 1 programme, is not appropriately mapped at Level 5. The review team came to the view that the levels ascribed to some of the undergraduate programmes are not entirely appropriate and **recommends** that the School revises the alignment of the undergraduate programmes to the FHEQ to accurately reflect the levels.

1.7 External examiners confirm that the professional standards are met. The annual monitoring reports to the ARB contain the external examiner reports, the response of the institution to them and pass lists.

1.8 The consideration of documentation and discussions with staff confirmed that the School employs qualification frameworks effectively in its published approval, review and assessment processes. The review team therefore affirms the assertions made within the self-evaluation document. The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.9 The School states that Academic Regulations govern how it awards its qualifications. The regulations, which contain sections on admissions, assessment procedures and academic organisation, cover all awards delivered. The regulations in relation to the Graduate School comply with the regulations of the validating university. In addition, there are Programme Guides for all programmes which provide more detailed guidance on the assessment criteria and learning outcomes of each programme.

1.10 The frameworks and regulations would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.11 The review team tested the arrangements described in the self-evaluation document by considering documentation including the Academic Regulations and the Programme Guides, external examiner reports and through discussions with staff.

1.12 The Academic Board maintains strategic oversight for the development, monitoring, quality control and approval of the School's academic regulations. The School Registrar works with the Undergraduate Management Committee and the Graduate Management Committee to regularly review and update regulations. Any amendments are presented annually to Academic Board for approval.

1.13 External examiners in the Graduate School comment in their reports on the application of the regulations. Those in the Undergraduate School do not. Reports in the Graduate School are considered by the Graduate Management Committee; those in the Undergraduate School are summarised by the Chair of Examiners and then considered by the Director, who presents a summary to the Undergraduate Management Committee and the Academic Board.

1.14 In discussion with staff and following scrutiny of the evidence provided, the review team concludes that the academic framework and academic regulations have been developed and implemented in ways that enable the School to maintain academic standards and to meet the expectations of the Quality Code in this area. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.15 The School operates a dual process for approval of academic awards: the undergraduate programme aligns with ARB/RIBA professional requirements but awards no academic credit or exit awards; and postgraduate programmes are approved through a relationship with the Open University. In both cases, the Programme Guide is considered the definitive document for the award, outlining learning outcomes and assessment criteria for programme and composite units.

1.16 The processes and procedures in place would allow the School to meet the Expectation.

1.17 The team reviewed programme-specific documentation, including programme handbooks and external examiner reports, and met with senior management and teaching staff to assess the School's adherence to delegated operational standards.

1.18 For the externally validated postgraduate provision, a Curriculum Map is produced and provides the definitive document at validation. This is included in the annually produced Programme Guide. Graduate School Programme Guides are submitted to the Open University for approval and are further supported by Annual Programme Evaluation Reports, additionally submitted to the Open University, with this full process outlined within the Open University Handbook for Validated Awards.

1.19 Each level of the Undergraduate School (First Year, Intermediate and Diploma) also has its own Programme Guide, which are ARB-prescribed and RIBA-validated. These documents include detailed Unit Descriptors and lists of Learning Outcomes and Assessment Criteria. A definitive list of Programmes and Programme Guides is available on the School's website.

1.20 It is the responsibility of the Programme Director (Graduate School)/Accreditation Facilitator (Undergraduate School) to submit the Programme Guide, with any required changes, to the School's Director annually prior to publication on the website. In the case of postgraduate Programme Guides, all documents are submitted to and signed off by the Open University prior to publication. Programme Guides are presented in the September meetings of the Undergraduate Management Committee and Graduate Management Committee. The School does not operate a formalised annual review process.

1.21 The Terms of Reference for the Academic Board include responsibility for the review of teaching and learning provision. The Terms of Reference for both the Undergraduate Management Committee (UMC) and Graduate Management Committee (GMC) include reporting on changes within academic programmes to the Academic Board. The overarching annual reporting and operations schedule of the Academic Board does not acknowledge this function explicitly; however, newly approved quarterly schedules for the Academic Board clearly outline this responsibility and highlight summary outcomes of the Board within the first quarterly report of the academic term. The School has recently initiated a review of academic regulations and governance structures, indicating efforts to improve

transparency of committee structures and processes, and scrutiny of academic content. The School Registrar has ex officio membership of the UMC, GMC and Academic Board, and manages the academic regulations and responsibilities of the institution.

1.22 While there is no reference to the ownership, responsibility or review of the programme guide within the Academic Regulations or formal staff induction activities, academic staff are aware of key information associated with each programme, highlighting the programme guide as the definitive record for academic programmes offered. All programme guides are published on the School's website.

1.23 The School is aware that ultimate responsibility for meeting this Expectation resides with the awarding bodies and awarding organisations. Within this context, the 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

1.24 The School has a broad portfolio of programmes focused within the subject discipline of Architecture. Undergraduate programmes are concerned with professional architectural practice while the postgraduate programmes address specialisms across a wider range of practical and theoretical areas. Programme design, monitoring and review operate differently for the postgraduate and undergraduate parts of the provision, although there are reservations about the current way in which the external examining system operates in the Part 1 and 2 programmes.

1.25 The undergraduate programmes are aligned to the professional standards set by the ARB and RIBA and the Subject Benchmark Statement for Architecture 2010. The programmes are well established and are subject to periodic review every five years by RIBA. The School received renewed ARB prescription and RIBA validation for its undergraduate programme in 2015.

1.26 The professional bodies have a set of criteria and graduate attributes that define standards in terms of outcomes but are not prescriptive in how these are demonstrated. As such the School has some flexibility in the design of the programme of study and has mapped where these attributes will be assessed within the undergraduate programme. New design studio units are introduced annually and are approved by the Director subject to appropriate resources and alignment with the criteria.

1.27 Postgraduate programmes are validated by the Open University. Proposals for new programmes undergo internal scrutiny at the School before being presented for validation to the University. Responsibility for course design sits with the School but is expected to align with the regulatory framework and documentary requirements of the University. External panel members from the subject specialism sit on the validating panel, ensuring a level of externality.

1.28 For both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, annually updated Programme Guides set out the programme structure and content, including specific assessment criteria and learning outcomes.

1.29 The School has developed its own regulatory framework that sets out procedures for student assessment and progression. For the postgraduate programmes these regulations are additional to the Open University regulations and alignment with these is monitored and reviewed annually and at five-yearly periodic review.

1.30 These arrangements allow for the Expectation to be met, ensuring that there are appropriate processes for oversight of the approval of programmes. For the undergraduate School the alignment of the programme with the outcomes required by the professional bodies is reviewed periodically by RIBA. For postgraduate programmes the validating body approves programme design at initial validation to ensure alignment with the appropriate level of the FHEQ.

1.31 The team reviewed documentary evidence including the School's regulatory framework, the Partner Handbook for the Open University, templates for validation documentation and individual Programme Guides. For the Graduate School the team also saw minutes of meetings where course development was discussed and those from an internal mock panel event. The team met staff from both parts of the School involved in programme design and met with undergraduate and postgraduate students.

1.32 Processes for programme design in the Graduate School are clearly set out by the validating university and are effectively operated and understood by staff. In the Undergraduate School the programme follows a well-established overall format which is overseen by the professional bodies but new units, which make up a significant proportion of the programme, are not subject to the same level of scrutiny prior to delivery (see also paragraph 2.14). However, the external examiner system and external reporting to the professional body ensure that standards are maintained at the point of assessment and award. The team does, however, have reservations about the current way in which the external examining system operates in the Part 1 and 2 programmes (see Expectation B7).

1.33 Overall, the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low. The validation and review processes provided by the validating body for postgraduate programmes are effective. For undergraduate programmes, although there is a high level of flexibility in programme design from year to year, overall oversight by the professional body ensures that standards are maintained.

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

1.34 The School does not award academic credits or exit awards for the Foundation or ARB/RIBA Part 1 and 2 programmes within the Undergraduate School. The final award of the Architectural Association Diploma and professional exemption from RIBA Part 1 and 2 are made only on a satisfactory completion basis when all the required criteria are met. Master's programmes in the Graduate School, awarded by the Open University, operate on a credit-based system. These awards are defined in terms of the level and volume of credit required in relation to the FHEQ.

1.35 Individual Programme Guides and Unit Descriptors for both undergraduate and graduate programmes set out each Learning Outcome that the student must demonstrate to pass or progress and the assessment criteria that will be used to assess achievement.

1.36 The School uses panel and double marking which, along with the visibility of the predominantly practice-based work, assures the School that it is maintaining standards in its internal marking.

1.37 There is comprehensive use of external examiners to oversee programmes in both Schools. For the undergraduate provision, the School has developed an external examiner handbook that sets out the ARB/RIBA Criteria and Graduate Attributes in relation to the programme units. This is intended to enable the external examiners to explicitly ensure that all the required criteria have been met.

1.38 Exam boards are held twice a year for the Graduate School, which are attended by an Open University Academic Reviewer. External examiners are required to attend the Board to confirm the standards of the assessment and the awards being made. In the Undergraduate School the role of the external examiner differs. A team of at least 10 examiners working in pairs examines all students recommended for a pass by the internal assessors. The outcome of this process is confirmed at an Examiners' Meeting, chaired by the Director, with successful candidates then recommended to the Architect's Registration Board for professional recognition.

1.39 The design of these procedures would allow the Expectation to be met. Decisions to award credit or qualifications are based on evidence that the learning outcomes or criteria have been achieved. Processes are overseen by external examiners and awards only made with the authority of exam boards or similarly constituted senior bodies.

1.40 The team reviewed documentation that included the School's regulatory framework and Open University partnership handbook, examples of Programme Guides for both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes and the minutes of exam boards and examiners' meetings. The team met with academic and support staff involved in assessment and a range of students from across the provision.

1.41 The team heard evidence of the effectiveness of processes including a recent example in the undergraduate programme of where disagreement regarding threshold standards had been satisfactorily resolved.

1.42 There are clear procedures in place to ensure that assessment is robust, valid and reliable. These processes and their application by the School ensure that the award of qualifications is based on the achievement of the intended learning outcomes or the meeting of professional criteria as appropriate. Therefore, the team conclude 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

1.43 The School states that its quality assurance systems and arrangements have been developed to monitor and enhance the effectiveness of its learning and teaching activities in relation to academic objectives and intended learning outcomes. These have been considerably developed in the last year in recognition of the need to focus on internal processes, having been previously reliant on external scrutiny to assure the provision.

1.44 Annual monitoring is undertaken by the Open University in respect of the Graduate School provision and the ARB for the Undergraduate School. A full periodic review takes place every five years with interim reviews every two years undertaken by the RIBA in respect of the professional Parts 1, 2 and 3 programmes. The last review took place in 2015. For the Open University there is a requirement for periodic Institutional Validation; this last occurred in 2012.

1.45 Each master's-level programme is required to produce an Annual Programme Evaluation Report for the purposes of monitoring. The report includes external examiner reports with the School's responses; a summary of student feedback on the programme; staff information; and an annual action plan.

1.46 The annual report to the Architects Registration Board is factual rather than reflective and comprises student progression and completion data, external examiner reports and associated responses, and full course documentation including Programme Guides.

1.47 In addition to this external reporting, internal monitoring and review is principally conducted through the committee structure. For the Graduate School, Evaluation Reports are discussed and action plans monitored at the Graduate Management Committee. For the Undergraduate School, the Director takes an active role in monitoring the provision through direct observation of outcomes and engagement with staff and students. Issues arising from this process can be dealt with directly or brought forward to the Undergraduate Management Committee or Academic Board for action. Each year the Director makes a formal presentation to all students in the autumn term, where actions taken in response to the findings of the previous year's review are described.

1.48 The newly updated Terms of Reference for the Academic Board include positions for two external members intended to provide external expertise in setting and maintaining academic standards.

1.49 The monitoring arrangements for the different parts of the provision differ but overall enable the Expectation to be met. External reporting requirements ensure that the maintenance of UK threshold academic standards, where applicable, or the standards set by the professional bodies are monitored and kept under review.

1.50 The team reviewed a range of documentary evidence including periodic review reports, annual monitoring reports and minutes of relevant committees. The team also

considered statistical data on progression and completion rates provided by the School and discussed this with academic and support staff during the visit.

1.51 During the visit, the team learned that the School had only begun to gather comprehensive data on student progression and completion within the last two years, and as such did not have clear oversight of longitudinal success rates. Additionally, the team learned that in the Undergraduate School, the use of the summer break between years as a retrieval period meant that in-year success rates were not always apparent. As such, it is **recommended** that the School makes rigorous use of achievement and progression data to monitor standards.

1.52 Overall, the team concludes that the Expectation is met but the risk is moderate. External monitoring to the validating university and professional bodies ensures that standards are being maintained; however, more rigorous use of achievement and progression data would enable the School to identify more effectively any trends that could be a risk to standards.

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

1.53 Course validation and re-approval processes in the Graduate School follow those required by the validating university. These require the involvement of external and independent expertise in setting academic standards for all courses mapped against UK thresholds. Prior to submission to the university there is an internal process of mock validation and approval by the Graduate Management Committee. All the programmes in the Graduate School have external examiners approved by the validating university.

1.54 Programmes in the Undergraduate School are professionally accredited by the professional body and statutory regulator. They are subject to annual monitoring and periodic review by those external bodies. External examiners in the Undergraduate School are appointed by the School on the basis of recommendations of the Director and the School Undergraduate Management Committee.

1.55 The review team tested the arrangements described in the self-evaluation document by considering relevant documents, and meeting with staff who had been involved in examining, monitoring and reviewing programmes.

1.56 The review team concluded that the policies and procedures in the Graduate School for setting and maintaining academic standards involved independent and external expertise at all stages. External examiner reports demonstrated the procedure is followed. All these reports are considered by the Graduate Management Committee. Proposals for new programmes or modifications to existing programmes involve external and independent expertise at all appropriate stages and this provides assurance that academic standards are maintained.

1.57 The policies and procedures in the Undergraduate School for setting and maintaining academic standards involve independent and external expertise at some stages. The courses are monitored by the professional bodies and the external examination process is rigorous in scrutinising the meeting of professional minimum standards. However, the team has reservations about the operation of the external examiner system within the context of the Quality Code (see also Expectation B7). The process of modifying the courses is more fluid, and includes regular annual review of all content led by the Director. The School is, however, aiming to implement similar processes and procedures in the Undergraduate School to those already used in the Graduate School.

1.58 The review team is satisfied that the School has in place appropriate mechanisms to ensure that independent and external expertise is used at key stages of its procedures for setting and maintaining academic standards. Therefore, 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 other awarding organisations: Summary of findings

1.59 In reaching its judgement about the maintenance of academic standards, the team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.60 The School follows effectively the requirements of its awarding body and professional and regulatory bodies to maintain academic standards. These processes are supported by the School's own internal procedures and guidance.

1.61 All seven of the Expectations in this area are met. Two recommendations are made. One relates to a need to accurately align undergraduate programmes to the FHEQ. A low level of risk is associated with this recommendation as the programmes do not currently carry academic credit. However, the School has chosen to map the awards to the FHEQ and it is therefore important that the outcome of the exercise is valid. The second recommendation relates to a need to make more rigorous use of data to monitor standards. There is no evidence that standards are or have been compromised, but addressing this recommendation will enable the School to identify emerging trends as they occur and demonstrate more robust accountability for the standards of the professional and academic awards it delivers. The team therefore assesses the level of associated risk as moderate for this Expectation. A third recommendation, made in Expectation B7, relates to academic standards. This impinges on academic standards in that it relates to the role of external examiners in confirming standards.

1.62 The team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards at the School **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 School's portfolio of programmes is closely aligned to its original mission to provide publicly accessible education in architecture. This intention is set out in the current Strategic Plan. There are no plans to change the portfolio and it is only in the Foundation programme within the Undergraduate School that any growth in student numbers is planned over the next five years.

2.2 The School's provision currently comprises a Foundation year and two successive undergraduate programmes aligned to the requirements of RIBA Part 1 and 2 exemptions. A further professional programme leading to RIBA Part 3 exemption is also offered. There is a series of master's degrees validated by the Open University. The School is additionally an Affiliated Research Centre of the Open University and is able to register research degree students for programmes leading to MPhil and PhD.

2.3 The programmes are designed in relation to the comprehensive professional standards set out by ARB and the RIBA and the School's provision is mapped against these. Additionally, programmes are developed with reference to the Subject Benchmark Statement for Architecture 2010.

2.4 The undergraduate programmes comprise year-long design studio units supported by mandatory complementary studies courses. New units are proposed annually and are approved by the Director. The School regards this process of renewal as a strength, ensuring that the overall programme remains current and innovative but within an established academic framework.

2.5 The undergraduate programme is subject to periodic review every five years by the RIBA, with interim visits every two years. Additionally, on an annual basis course documentation is submitted retrospectively to the ARB as part of a monitoring process.

2.6 For the Graduate School, new course proposals are presented to the Graduate Management Committee (GMC) for approval. Following this the proposal will become subject to the Open University's new course approval process, which requires the production of a detailed curriculum map for presentation to a panel validation event.

2.7 The School ensures external perspectives by means of its policy to employ practising or recently practising architects as staff to contribute to the design of programmes and units. A wide range of external jury members and the active input of external examiners also contribute to the currency of programme design. Additionally, in the Graduate School external panellists are present at both the mock validation event and the actual validation event.

2.8 A high percentage of the School's academic staff are involved in curriculum development. Teaching staff are encouraged to be creative in their unit agendas and briefs but are expected to ensure alignment with the overall learning outcomes of the programme.

Mentoring for staff presenting new units is provided by more experienced teachers, the new Head of Teaching and the School Director.

2.9 Students are involved in course design through the formal committee structure and more informally through the feedback they provide to the Director during the course of their studies.

2.10 These procedures enable the Expectation to be met in providing the basis for effective programme design, development and approval. The School recognises that a single course approval system will need to be developed. In anticipation of this, work has been undertaken to review current processes and clarify academic staff roles and responsibilities.

2.11 The team reviewed documentary evidence including the professional body criteria and the associated mapping templates created by the School, the Open University Partner Handbook and templates, and sample Programme Guides. The team also reviewed meeting and panel event minutes and the reports of periodic reviews. The team met with a wide range of staff including the Director, Programme and Unit Leaders as well as students, some of whom had been involved in programme validation events.

2.12 Within the Postgraduate School, processes for programme design, development and approval are well established and understood. Staff met by the team confirmed the way in which new programmes evolve in relation to the work of existing programmes through team dialogue and debate.

2.13 In the Undergraduate School there is an emphasis on the 'pivotal' role of the Director to ensure that from year to year newly introduced units align with the overall mission of the School and that standards are maintained. There is no systematic scrutiny by the committee structure in the same way as for the postgraduate provision.

2.14 The Director attends all new unit introductions, juries and assessment activities to ensure that they are meeting their stated learning outcomes, and that the student voice is heard directly. Staff met by the team described the expectation that units develop over a period of years. There has been feedback from external examiners and the RIBA periodic review panel that suggests there can be a lack of consistency between different units and a perception among students that this is the case, as indicated in the most recent student survey. As such, it is **recommended** that the School puts in place a process that provides comprehensive oversight of the design and development of undergraduate programme units.

2.15 During the visit the team learned about the process through which students are allocated to units. Students select three choices of unit and on a single day attend competitive interviews where allocations are decided. The team heard that students did not always get to take the unit of their choice and are not fully aware of the grounds on which decisions are made. It is therefore **recommended** that the School develops and publishes clear criteria for the allocation of students to programme units.

2.16 Overall the team concludes that the Expectation is met but that the level of risk is moderate. While the processes for course design and approval specified by the validating body for the postgraduate provision are consistent and robust, the level of flexibility in the range of undergraduate programme units offered from year to year, together with the current staff-led allocation process that is not fully transparent or equitable for all students, has the potential to risk the quality of student learning opportunities.

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

2.17 The School is responsible for conducting the recruitment, selection and admission of students, although there is shared responsibility with the Open University on postgraduate programmes. Each programme has clearly defined entry criteria set out by the awarding body and this information is available on the School's website. Responsibility for recruitment and selection of applicants, including delivery of interviews, is devolved to the Programme Director. The School's Academic Regulations outline the specific process for admissions at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. These regulations and associated processes allow the Expectation to be met.

2.18 The team reviewed relevant admissions documentation, including School policies and applicant information, met with teaching and support staff who participate in the admissions process and asked students about their application experience.

2.19 Clear and effective mechanisms for communicating with applicants throughout all stages of recruitment have been established. These identify to the applicant the progress and outcome of their application. Selection criteria are clearly outlined on the institution's website for both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Staff are aware of the selection criteria and feel adequately supported to fulfil their responsibilities throughout the process. Responsibilities of support and teaching staff are also communicated effectively, with the Admissions Office supporting both the academic staff and applicants from initial enquiry through to student induction. While the process of application is made clear to applicants, the way in which the criteria are applied in the assessment of their portfolio/interview is not (see paragraph 2.22).

2.20 All eligible applicants deemed suitable for consideration are invited to interview in person and are required to provide a portfolio presentation. Initial scrutiny of applications submitted is conducted by the Admissions Office, which checks qualifications, including equivalencies, for international applicants. A cover sheet, which shows a summary of this assessment, is then associated with the application before it is passed to the relevant academic interview panel.

2.21 The interview is conducted by the academic programme team, coordination of which is the responsibility of the Programme Director. For undergraduate admissions, an interview with two members of staff is standard procedure and a portfolio assessment is undertaken. Academic staff new to the institution are paired with more experienced staff members to conduct the interviews and mentor through the process. Interviews are not always undertaken for postgraduate applications; however, portfolio assessment is required. PhD assessment is based on the School's ability to supervise the candidate.

2.22 Applicants are provided with follow-up information documenting the outcome of their application, although not the nature of rejection if unsuccessful. This information is kept on record but not shared with the applicant. There is no right to appeal against the application decision with the exception of evidence indicating that the process was not conducted in accordance with the Schools' Academic Regulations. For postgraduate applicants,

responsibility for the application process is shared with the Open University and student recruitment information is shared with the awarding body.

2.23 Complaints are dealt with through the School and Open University processes as outlined on the School's website and in the Academic Regulations. The ability to defer and requirements for additional documentation post offer are outlined in the Academic Regulations and this is reflected in the School's public information, although the website does not make explicit reference to the regulations.

2.24 Students met with described the application process as clear and straightforward with all information required available through the main School website.

2.25 At undergraduate level, students are clear that the offered award does not confer an academic degree qualification and value its currency within the architectural sector. Postgraduate students are generally aware at the point of application that the degree they are studying is validated through the Open University but delivered by the School. There is no requirement within the validation agreement with the awarding body for this arrangement to be made publicly explicit.

2.26 The review team conclude 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

2.27 The School's approach to effective learning and teaching is set out in the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy within the overall context of the Strategic Plan, which is committed to strengthening learning and teaching. The Strategy is subject to annual review. The Programme Guides provide detailed guidance to staff and students on each programme. A Head of Teaching has been appointed to support the strategic direction of teaching and learning activities.

2.28 The review team found that the School has appropriate policies and processes in place in relation to learning and teaching that allow the Expectation to be met.

2.29 To test the effectiveness of the School's policies and procedures, the review team examined policy documents and supporting programme guides. It also looked at committee minutes, items related to teaching staff and the learning environment. The review team met with staff and students to discuss matters related to teaching and learning.

2.30 The minutes of the UMC and GMC, as well as information provided for annual monitoring, demonstrate that there are clear mechanisms in place for the systematic review and enhancement of the provision of learning opportunities and teaching on all the provider's courses.

2.31 Teaching staff are assessed on an annual basis by the Director. This process contributes to whether they are appointed or re-appointed. Once appointed, all teaching staff are required to attend a Staff Induction Day at the beginning of the academic year. Prior to attending this day all staff are provided with an Academic Induction Pack. Teaching staff are not required to have a teaching qualification. There is no formal staff appraisal system for teaching staff, although such a system exists for support staff. It is normal practice for new teaching staff to teach jointly with more experienced colleagues but there is no formal system of peer or management observation, except that exercised by the Director and Head of Teaching. All staff have access to staff development opportunities; that for support staff is a function of the staff appraisal system. The review team **affirms** the steps being taken to formalise the School's approach to academic staff review and development.

2.32 Students from both the Graduate and Undergraduate Schools whom the review team met are positive about the teaching and the level of support they receive. There is a generous staff-student ratio and students have weekly reviews of their work on a one-to-one basis. Students commented that all the staff, both academic and support, are approachable and offer support as necessary. Students in the Undergraduate School in the second, third, fourth and fifth years are required to select programme units for their design work each year. The process for selection and interview is set out, although it is not always clear to students how the final selections for each unit are made. The review team therefore **recommends** that the School should develop and publish clear criteria for the allocation of students to programme units.

2.33 Information on learning opportunities is provided to students through a variety of media, including in person at the beginning of the year and via delivery of courses in print and online. Students commented favourably about the resources to which they had access and also about the information available to them in their handbooks and programme guides about their courses, intended learning outcomes, assessment methods and learning resources.

2.34 The review team is assured that the provider has in place effective procedures to review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching to enable and support students to develop as independent learners and study their chosen professional discipline. The School works with its staff and students to implement these procedures. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement

Findings

2.35 The School's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy emphasises that a high-quality student experience is delivered by making students' academic, personal and professional development a priority. The strategy claims that this is delivered by setting a challenging and ambitious agenda for students by encouraging experimentation and innovation. This is monitored and reviewed by the academic committees' structure internally, and by the scrutiny of external examiners and the professional body and validating university.

2.36 All students are supported by working closely with their tutors, with at least one one-to-one tutorial each week, and by support from all the School's staff throughout their academic journey.

2.37 The review team found that the School has appropriate policies and processes in place to monitor and evaluate the services and resources needed to enable students to develop their potential, and that these allow the Expectation to be met.

2.38 To test the effectiveness of the School's policies and procedures, the review team looked at relevant documents and committee minutes, and discussed the availability of academic and support services and the development of skills for higher education in meetings with staff and students.

2.39 Once on the programme, the quality of student experience is seen as central; this is achieved by adopting and embedding a number of key principles in delivering and supporting its programmes. An important element of the way in which students are supported is the level of tutorial and other services available to them. This includes all teaching staff and also the availability of strong support from administrative and technical staff. This is reinforced by the visibility of course outputs and the School-wide discussion of project development. Examples of opportunities which encourage student development and achievement include Open Juries, the Public Programme, student awards, the Visiting School and the celebration of the work produced by the end-of-year exhibition and book.

2.40 To ensure that the appropriate level of student support is available, staff continually monitor each student's academic performance and overall experience during their time at the institution. It is made clear that the overall responsibility for development and achievement lies with students themselves. Each student is supported to demonstrate personal responsibility and initiative in making judgements, identifying problems and communicating why and how academic and professional decisions have been made in visual, written and verbal formats. There is a high staff-student ratio (1:3) which means that the level of personal support can be consistent and intensive. There is a consequent highly trusting relationship between students and staff. An open-door policy is also practised by all tutors, the Registrar and the Director. Students whom the review team met were positive about the way in which the School enabled them to achieve and develop. The number of withdrawing students is low. In the current year this totals 14 undergraduate and two postgraduate. Overall, the high levels of support for students make a significantly positive contribution to their personal, professional and academic development, and is **good practice**.

2.41 The School's student support arrangements and provision of learning resources are effectively designed to enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential from entry through their programme of study and into professional activity. Arrangements are monitored through a number of mechanisms which include the opportunity for both formal and informal student feedback. Therefore, consideration of documentation and meetings with staff and students enable the review team to conclude 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

2.42 The student voice is recognised on all formal committee structures, with students invited to attend membership of all three academic committees and eligible for self-nomination to the Association Council membership, which manages all business and affairs of the School. Due to structured and regular contact opportunities with staff, students feel their voice is valued and that they are able to influence the development of their learning experience. However, the School's student representative system is undefined with no formal support or training. The process by which students are selected and appointed to committee structures is emergent and membership of the Student Forum is via an opt-in process.

2.43 The team met teaching and support staff to evaluate the extent to which the student voice is heard throughout School structures, including representatives of School support services, and with students directly, both student representatives and non-representatives, to garner views from the student body.

2.44 Formal academic committees pertaining to the oversight of academic standards (Undergraduate Management Committee, Graduate Management Committee and Academic Board) comprise minimum student membership of one student per academic level of study, with the overarching Academic Board drawing from the existing membership of the devolved undergraduate and postgraduate committees. The process by which students are selected and co-opted onto these committees is not formalised - students are informally identified, typically by course tutors, and encouraged to be programme representatives, from which the committee membership is selected based on a non-democratic, volunteer basis.

2.45 The Student Forum is a voluntary-based and funded student organisation within the School, which aims to represent the student body within the wider Architectural Association community and provides a further channel for student feedback. However, due to the opt-in and voluntary nature of membership, the activity and effectiveness of the Student Forum are variable. Members of the Student Forum met by the review team highlighted effectiveness in years when the students have been well organised, including improvements to the Open Jury system. The existence and role of the Student Forum are not currently communicated to students; instead, students hear about the Student Forum informally through their peers.

2.46 The institution holds a joint meeting of the UMC, GMC and Student Forum annually, the outcome of which is communicated by Student Forum representatives back to the student body. Student representatives are proud of their autonomy and that of the Student Forum. However, this body has no defined remit within the School's deliberative structure and no formal channels through which to communicate with students. The Student Forum underwent constitutional reform in 2012, yet this has only resulted in one student election within the same year. Despite this context, the institution identifies the Student Forum as an important point of contact with the student body, with a remit to represent student issues.

2.47 Council membership is drawn from self-nominated Association community members. Minutes of Council in the current year (2015-16) do not specifically identify any of the members as student representatives. However, the team was told that two members are nonetheless students.

2.48 In the context of the informal nature of the student representative system and to ensure institutional impact and effectiveness of the student voice through formal governance structures, it is **recommended** that the School clarifies the role of student representatives and puts in place effective development to support them in this function.

2.49 Unit and programme evaluations are held consistently across all academic levels and a culture of engagement between staff and students facilitates prompt identification and rectification of issues on an ongoing basis. The School Director holds a meeting with the student body twice per year which, in conjunction with student survey information, they inform the Director's strategic plans for programme and School development, which is communicated back to the Association community through the Director's annual presentation. Any academic matters are passed onto relevant academic committees through the Director's membership of these governance bodies.

2.50 Action-specific references to follow-up on student feedback and complaints are not currently produced and there are examples of recurrent issues raised by students annually. However, students are largely satisfied with their student experience and praise the close but professional relationship they build with staff members.

2.51 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

2.52 The School's approach to assessment at each level of the provision is described in the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy. The format of assessment is intended to maximise student development and achievement and uses processes that are often public seeking to emulate the professional requirements for architects to advocate and present their work.

2.53 Assessment policies and processes are set out in the Academic Regulations, the Examiner Handbooks, the Unit Descriptors in the Undergraduate School Programme Guides, and the Course Documents for each of the postgraduate programmes.

2.54 In the Undergraduate School, regular formative assessment of student work for the design units is undertaken throughout the year by tutors and Studio/Unit Masters. Additionally, there are opportunities for students to take part in Studio/Unit or Open Juries to expose their work to a larger audience. Feedback is generally verbal and immediate and is intended to ensure that students are well aware of their progress in relation to professional standards.

2.55 Summative assessment for design units takes the form of formal portfolio reviews whereby each student presents their work to a panel of staff. The format of the portfolio presentation varies as students are encouraged to design their own format in relation to their unit and working methodology but consistency of opportunity is ensured through the stipulation of a time limit.

2.56 Portfolio reviews take place at key points in the academic year: January for Progress status, March for Preview status and June for End-of-Year Review status. Students are provided with immediate verbal and then written feedback following each review. For complementary studies units the approach to assessment is different, with coursework including essays and projects being marked on an ongoing basis throughout the year.

2.57 The achievement of a pass grade at the end-of-year review leads to progression to the next year of study or in the case of Year 3 and Year 5, recommendation to the external examiners for the conferment of the Intermediate or Final professional award.

2.58 In the Graduate School, coursework and final dissertations are double-marked by two members of staff with marks averaged to reach a final grade. For programmes where the final thesis is in project format, a review panel similar to those for the Undergraduate School is convened.

2.59 The School uses plagiarism-detection software to ensure against plagiarism in written work, while at all levels the requirement for students to present and be interrogated about their work is intended to promote rigour and minimise opportunities for plagiarism or substitution.

2.60 All programmes use external examiners, although the role varies between the Undergraduate and Graduate School, who report to formal meetings at the end of each academic year. For the Graduate School, there is an Examination Board attended by external examiners, teaching staff and an Academic Reviewer from the validating University who confirms that the Board is conducted in accordance with their regulations. For the Undergraduate School, an examiner's meeting, chaired by the Director of the School, confirms the recommendations to be made to the professional bodies.

2.61 The School has an academic appeals policy and procedure which is set out in the Academic Regulations. For the graduate programmes the validating university has its own procedure which is described separately. The School has also recently subscribed to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator and is reviewing its internal procedures in light of this.

2.62 The School has a stated commitment to enhancing assessment practices and encourages staff to make recommendations for improvements through the Graduate Management Committee and Undergraduate Management Committee. The School also seeks student feedback on how appropriate and adequate the assessment process is for developing their work through the annual Undergraduate Student Survey and the Graduate Programme Evaluation.

2.63 The School's procedures would allow the Expectation to be met in providing the basis for effective assessment of student achievement. The approach varies across the School but in all cases is closely aligned to the professional or academic aims of the programme of study.

2.64 The team reviewed documentary evidence including the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, Regulations and the External Examiner Handbook, Assessment Board and Examiner meeting minutes. The team also reviewed samples of written feedback to students and during the visit met staff involved with assessment, and students.

2.65 The portfolio review process and double marking of studio submissions and dissertations ensure that work is widely seen across the School and that academic standards are publicly discussed and visibly maintained. The review team heard that review panels are designed to ensure that a mix of staff see a student's work throughout the year to avoid bias and increase challenge. The team also heard how this panel approach to assessment is effective in developing new members of staff.

2.66 During the visit the team learned that students value the approach taken to assessment and that they have a good level of understanding of what is expected of them. [M3] Students are also supportive of the wide grading bands used by the School marking scheme.

2.67 Completion of studies data seen by the team indicates that success rates are generally high. In the last year there was 99 per cent completion in the Graduate School and 97 per cent in-year completion for undergraduate students. In the Undergraduate School the use of September Review and Tutor Checks enables weaker students to undertake further work during the summer, contributing to the overall high progression rates from year to year.

2.68 The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low. The open approach to assessment based on display and presentation, supported by the double marking of written submissions, ensures rigour and collective understanding of expectations, while the marking scheme and emphasis on formative feedback and review support the high success rates.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining

Findings

2.69 External examiners in the Graduate School are nominated by the School and approved and appointed by the validating university, to whom they report. They are normally appointed for four years. They receive an induction from staff in the Graduate School on appointment. Their reports are considered by the GMC as well as the OU. They consider a sample of students' final dissertations or projects and a sample of course work.

2.70 External examiners in the Undergraduate School are appointed by the Director in consultation with the relevant academic committee. There are at least 10 such examiners and they can serve for up to five years; one of the examiners acts as Chair of Examiners. Their role is to review the portfolios and all relevant complementary studies submissions of all third and fifth-year students who have been passed by the internal examiners. Each external examiner makes a report on the portfolios and submissions they have examined; the Chair of Examiners provides a summary statement and report. External examiners in the Undergraduate School are provided with a Handbook.

2.71 The review team tested the arrangements described in the self-evaluation document by considering documentation, including external examiner handbooks, external examiners' reports and committee minutes, and by meeting staff and students.

2.72 The review team concluded that the policies and procedures followed in the Graduate School ensure that there is effective and appropriate use made of external examiners. There is a clear process for nomination and approval. There are external examiners appointed for each named postgraduate programme; for smaller programmes this may be only one external, the larger having two. The reports produced by the examiners follow the format set down by the Open University and their reports are considered by the GMC and the University. External examiners attend individual Examination Boards for the programme they are examiner for, and also attend Joint Assessment Boards where the results of all the programmes are considered and approved.

2.73 In the undergraduate programmes that are professionally accredited, the role of the external examiner is currently defined differently. Their role is to attest that the standards achieved by the students at the end of years three and five meet the minimum standards set by the professional body and the statutory regulator. Most significantly, they only see work which is deemed to have passed by the internal examiners, although they may upgrade or downgrade work, and thus may fail work which has been passed internally. Between them the external examiners see all the third and fifth-year work, the students presenting their work to a pair of external examiners. A pair of examiners review the First Year Course and students attend the examination with their second and fourth-year portfolios. Following the presentations, the external examiners meet with relevant unit masters, and then with the Director, Head of Teaching and Registrar to report the results of the examinations. They produce a report on the work they have seen, and a summary of these reports is produced by the Chair of Examiners, who is also asked to review the assessment processes and to confirm that all students have met the professional criteria.

2.74 The review team concludes that the procedures in the Undergraduate School would be more scrupulous if a more comprehensive moderation of assessed work, including the work of students who fail, was made, and therefore **recommends** that the School should

ensure that all external examiners have available to them the full range of assessed work so that confirmation of the standards of the professional undergraduate award is fully informed.

2.75 The review team noted that the School is working on making a new policy for the appointment and approval of external examiners, which would lead to similar procedures being adopted in the Undergraduate School to those followed in the Graduate School. Accordingly, the review team **affirms** the course of action that the Association has identified to introduce a new policy for the nomination and appointment of external examiners for both the undergraduate and graduate schools.

2.76 The review team considers that the School has a comprehensive set of procedures governing the use of external examiners. However, these are significantly different in the undergraduate and graduate schools. For the undergraduate programme, external examiners only look at examples of assessed work from part of the total range of work that students submit. This may be enough for it to meet the requirements of the professional body for affirming professional standards, but does not go far enough to fulfil the Expectation of the Quality Code and guarantee academic standards and quality across the whole programme.

2.77 The way in which they are used in the Undergraduate School means that some aspects of the assessment process are not scrutinised by the external examiners. Consequently the Expectation is not met and the level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Not 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

2.78 The School claims to encourage a responsive and informal approach to the ongoing development and review of its provision, supported by open-door policies and the low 1:3 staff-student ratio.

2.79 For both the Graduate and Undergraduate School there are formal processes in place for the periodic review of the provision, which are undertaken by the validating university and professional bodies respectively. The School underwent institutional review by the Open University in 2012, receiving five years' validation with no conditions, and last underwent periodic review by the RIBA in 2015, similarly receiving a five-year validation.

2.80 Annual review for Open University programmes is prescribed in the Handbook for Validated Awards and requires the completion of an evaluative report that reflects upon success rates, external examiner comments and student feedback. The process is comprehensive and requires student and staff participation and a focus on enhancement.

2.81 Each year the School is required to make an annual report to the Architect's Registration Board. This is not evaluative but comprises external examiner reports with the Director's responses, cohort completion data and programme documentation.

2.82 Internal monitoring of the undergraduate provision is described by the School as a 'live intervention' system and is undertaken by the Director. This comprises direct observation of teaching delivery in the first term and Academic Review meetings in the second term, where staff are asked to discuss the progress of the programme units, including results to date and future objectives. In the final term further meetings with staff are informed by student and external examiner feedback, in addition to the end-of-year outcomes of the unit. The School claims that this process is effective in enabling the identification of issues and the implementation of changes and developments on a year-on-year basis. The outcomes of this process are shared with staff and students in the Director's Annual Presentation to the School each autumn.

2.83 The externally prescribed periodic and annual review processes are comprehensive and enable the School to meet the Expectation. However, the internal processes for monitoring the undergraduate provision are currently reliant on one person and are not formally recorded. The School states that it recognises the benefits of end-of-year monitoring in terms of garnering a wide range of information for internal and external scrutiny, and in terms of establishing more readily auditable trails for decision making, and has set out plans to introduce its own system of rigorous self-analysis to address this issue. As such, the team **affirms** the introduction of a process for the internal monitoring and review of the undergraduate programme.

2.84 The team reviewed documentary evidence including the reports from external reviews, such as the previous QAA reviews and recent ARB and RIBA review visits. They also saw annual monitoring and institutional review reports in relation to the University-validated parts of the provision. For the undergraduate provision the team saw notes from Academic Review and student meetings undertaken by the Director in addition to material relating to the Director's Annual Presentation. During the visit the team met with staff and

students from both undergraduate and postgraduate parts of the provision along with support staff with responsibility for student data and statistics.

2.85 During the visit the team learned that staff and students have a clear understanding of the range of processes in place to monitor the provision. Staff in the Graduate School are actively engaged in annual monitoring using student surveys, statistics and external examiner feedback to inform critical reflection. In the Undergraduate School, staff are made aware of the outcomes of external review by the professional bodies as well as the Director's response.

2.86 Students met by the team valued the informal mechanisms by which they could raise individual issues and have them addressed, although the outcomes of the recent student questionnaire indicate that overall students do not always know how their feedback is acted upon.

2.87 Overall the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low. The monitoring and review processes specified by the validating body for the postgraduate provision are well established and operating effectively. Similarly, the review and reporting requirements of the professional bodies for the undergraduate provision are robust. The School has recognised that the implementation of a formal annual internal monitoring process for the undergraduate school will be beneficial.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints

Findings

2.88 The School complaints and appeals procedures are outlined in the Academic Regulations. There are separate processes for undergraduate and postgraduate provision due to different validation arrangements. The School Registrar is central to these operations and provides continuity through membership on formal committees that consider cases of academic appeal and complaints. It is directly through the Registrar that students raise concerns and these are at the discretion of the Registrar to take forward, including cases of academic mitigation.

2.89 The review team tested the School's approach to student appeals and complaints through meetings with students, professional support staff, senior staff, academic staff and representatives from the awarding body.

2.90 It is expected by the School that an informal process will rectify most issues. The postgraduate process is clearly outlined in the Academic Regulations, in alignment with Open University regulations, enacting an informal and formal procedure. Cases that cannot be rectified locally are ultimately raised to the awarding body, with the highest escalation available through the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.

2.91 At undergraduate level, an Appeals Panel is established and convened by the Registrar in response to an appeal being submitted. The Appeals Panel does not have the authorisation to change the academic outcome directly but informs a Review Panel of its position post consideration of evidence. It is to the Registrar directly that a student submits their appeal and this process is outlined to students during their induction period.

2.92 The Undergraduate and Graduate Management Committees are responsible for processing academic appeals and complaints for their respective academic level, as per the terms of reference for each committee, with the Registrar acting as the main channel for addressing complaints and appeals. The Academic Board reviews all academic complaints and appeals annually; however, to date, there have been no recorded complaints or appeals to evidence the effectiveness of these processes or the framework for monitoring progress.

2.93 The policy for academic appeals applies to major issues and mitigating circumstances equally. It accounts only for circumstances where a student may need to take leave of absence for a period. No reference is made to circumstances that may only require a short extension for submission, for instance in the case of minor illness. All submissions received after the submission deadline are marked as late, irrespective of the circumstances. This results in a student's submission being classified as late and assessed to a maximum of a low pass grade. Staff met during the review visit were clear that the policy does not allow for discretionary mitigation where issues of lower severity exist. It is therefore **recommended** that the School revise the mitigating circumstances policy to incorporate the full range of occurrences that can impact on a student's ability to submit assessments within the agreed deadlines.

2.94 At initial application, unsuccessful candidates have no right to appeal against the final outcome of the interview panel, unless there is substantive evidence of misconduct of the interview procedure or exceptional circumstances where the portfolio was not considered

at the time allocated. This position is later reiterated within follow-up correspondence with the applicant. The criteria against which applicants are measured are not made available to candidates, highlighting a potential issue of transparency within this process.

2.95 The School has recently become a subscriber to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator and is reviewing its procedures and approach to complaints in light of this development and as part of the School's 2016 action plan.

2.96 As the School is aware of the need to review procedures in reference to appeals and complaints, and evidence indicates that this process is already in progress, 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

2.97 The School has two main collaborations for academic awards: ARB/RIBA for undergraduate awards and the Open University for validation of postgraduate taught and research degrees. Programme validation documents are submitted to the relevant external body, as the School does not possess degree awarding powers.

2.98 The Open University outlines clearly the responsibility of partner institutions with regards to revalidation of programmes and institutional audit every five years within their validated awards handbook and Validation Agreement. Responsibilities of the partnership for validated awards is outlined in the agreed QAA checklist.

2.99 Certificates and transcripts for postgraduate provision are coordinated through the Open University awarding body. Undergraduate certificates and transcripts are awarded by the School after ratification by the ARB. The School is required to submit a list of graduating students annually for ARB approval.

2.100 The School has a strong track record of links with industry, for example through regular talks held as part of its Public Programme. However, formal placements are not provided as part of the programme portfolio offered.

2.101 Under this Expectation, the School does not currently possess any direct responsibilities and as such the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Findings

2.102 The School provides a research environment in which research degree study may be undertaken. It is an Affiliated Research Centre of the Open University. It first enrolled students in the Centre in 2007. However, research degree students have been enrolled at the School since the 1970s; first through the Council for National Academic Awards and later through the Open University. Students are registered for an Open University research degree and Open University procedures for student progress and assessment are followed. All the local arrangements made are subject to Open University approval, monitoring and review. To support the research environment the School supports the scholarly activity of its staff, and has made 'focusing on increasing research activity' one of the strategic aims in its Strategic Plan.

2.103 The review team found that the School has appropriate policies and processes in place in relation to research degrees and that these would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.104 To test the effectiveness of the School's policies and procedures in relation to research degrees, the review team examined policy documents and supporting committee minutes and met students undertaking research degree study.

2.105 The regulations governing research degree students are those of the Open University. Students on the PhD programme are registered with both the Open University and the School. On enrolment, students are provided with a copy of the PhD Programme Guide which sets out clearly the stages of PhD study that a successful student follows. It includes procedures for progression, responsibilities of the supervisory team, final and interim assessment, the role of the PhD committee and the research context.

2.106 The PhD committee oversees applications, admissions, planning of events, the award of bursaries, appointment of supervisors, the submission of research proposals for Open University approval, probationary reviews and annual monitoring reports. It reports to the GMC.

2.107 The supervisory team assigned to each research student includes a Director of Studies from the School and at least one other supervisor.

2.108 The research environment at the School is a developing one, with growing numbers of research students and research supervisors. The focus on increasing research activity outlined in the Strategic Plan includes encouraging staff to publish with support through its own publications, preparing an application for UK Research Council Independent Research Organisation status, and the creation of a School Research Database.

2.109 The review team concludes that the School has provided a research environment that secures academic standards for doing research and learning about research approaches, methods, procedures and protocols. The environment offers students the quality of opportunities and support they need to achieve successful outcomes from their

research degrees. Overall, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.110 In reaching its judgement about the quality of student learning opportunities, the team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

2.111 The School has effective systems in place for programme approval, admissions, learning and teaching, student support, assessment, programme review, complaints and appeals, and working with others. The team does, however, conclude that the School's approach to external examining, with particular reference to undergraduate programmes, does not meet Expectation B7.

2.112 Nine of the 10 relevant Expectations are met. One of the met Expectations (B1) has a moderate level of associated risk. The unmet Expectation (B7) is also associated with moderate risk. The review team affirms actions being taken in three instances. One feature of good practice has been identified. Overall, five recommendations and three affirmations are associated with this judgement area.

2.113 There are two recommendations relating to Expectation B1. The two recommendations taken together led the team to consider that the level of risk is moderate in this area. The School is recommended to put in place a process for the comprehensive oversight of the design and development of the undergraduate programme units. Current arrangements whereby formal scrutiny and risk assessment rest with a person rather than a deliberative body could be strengthened. The second recommendation is associated with the arrangements for allocating students to the programme units. The team formed the view that the current decision-making process does not possess the required degree of transparency to assure students that such decisions are made fairly.

2.114 The recommendation made under Expectation B5 is associated with a low level of risk. This recommendation relates to arrangements for student representation. The risk is considered low because the informal arrangements are currently allowing the student voice to be heard. However, such informality means that the effectiveness of such arrangements cannot be guaranteed and are not open to transparent evaluation.

2.115 In the case of Expectation B7, which is not met, the team concludes that since external examiners do not have available to them the full range of assessed work on undergraduate programmes, they may not be in a position to reach fully informed decisions about the achievement of programme standards. This is considered to carry a moderate risk rather than a serious risk because the ultimate authority to confer awards rests with the awarding body or regulatory authority.

2.116 The team affirms actions being taken by the School in three areas. These are the formalisation of the approach to academic staff review and development; the introduction of a new policy for the appointment of external examiners; and the introduction of a process for the internal monitoring and review of undergraduate programmes.

2.117 The feature of good practice identified by the team is a significant one in that it relates to a very wide area of the student learning experience: the very high level of support that students receive for their personal, professional and academic development.

2.118 Taking into account the balance of good practice, recommendations and affirmations and the associated levels of risk, the team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the School **meets** UK expectations.

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Findings

3.1 The School provides a wide range of information and evaluates its effectiveness and accuracy through a range of formal and informal means. Regular dialogue with students provides general feedback on accuracy and completeness. Annual student survey and postgraduate course evaluations ask specific questions regarding accuracy of information. There are processes for the review of information that the School implements and these enable the Expectation to be met, but there is no documentation of these processes.

3.2 The team scrutinised a wide variety of available materials, including but not exclusively the public website, internal microsites, student handbooks, awarding bodies' quality assurance guidance and partnership agreement documents, and corroborated this evidence in meetings with staff and students.

3.3 There is no formal process by which information across the School is created and reviewed. The institution has acknowledged this gap in processes but at present there is no identified plan to formalise existing informal practices. Emergent, annual practice for the development of School information is embedded and staff are able to explain relative methodologies for different key information sets.

3.4 Programme guides, the main document for all programme information, are considered by the Director prior to external publication annually, officially through academic committee structures. Newly created terms of reference for key academic committees include consideration of documentation pertaining to the academic provision, of which the Director is an ex officio member. Senior management outlined the academic input by all academic members of the programme team but there is no clearly defined guidance as to which is the accountable role.

3.5 For prospective students, employers and externals, the institution's website is an important resource for public information about the School provision and opportunities. The School operates two distinct online areas: the main website, which is centrally coordinated, and microsites owned by academic staff members. Content copy for print and online publications, such as the academic prospectus, is approved by the Director before release. The Prospectus is a joint effort with content generated at unit and programme level, and reviewed and signed off by the Director or Registrar as appropriate. The main website content is managed and overseen by the Digital Platforms team in school support services.

3.6 Microsites are an important source of student information on academic units and facilitate a digital dialogue between staff and students. Both staff and students met by the team commented that they are used as the main source of reference. However, there is no central minimum standard or template for these sites, which operate unregulated despite them linking from the official School website presence and bearing the School logo.

3.7 An annual reporting calendar for undergraduate provision has been drafted to align with Academic Board and Council activities, to enable institutional oversight of its responsibilities to external bodies and key internal dates for students.

3.8 While the external bodies with whom the School works require formalised official sign-off for all public information bearing its brand, there exists no equivalent procedure for information bearing the School's name. Without adequate institutional scrutiny there is the potential for unintended inaccuracies or gaps to contaminate the reliability of publicly available information. As such, it is **recommended** that the School documents the processes it uses for managing and reviewing information it produces about itself.

3.9 Annual monitoring of survey information and student data, although collected and fed into programme revalidation reports, is not discussed above the programme level or transparently within committee structures to scrutinise institutional trends. At present, this information is analysed by the Director to inform institutional strategy and annual plans, with information shared with committees if feedback gained is deemed of interest to the group. There exist annual review processes for complaints and appeals, but as yet there have been no formal complaints or appeals submitted to evidence their effectiveness. Responsibility for ensuring the effectiveness and appropriateness of student surveys is not explicitly outlined in the terms of reference for any of the academic committees.

3.10 As the School is aware of the need to review procedures in reference to information and is making steps to improve process transparency, 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

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

3.12 Expectation C is met and the associated level of risk is low. One recommendation is made: to document the processes for managing and reviewing information. The level of risk is low as the processes are being implemented but without the security of a defined procedure. There are no affirmations or features of good practice located in this area.

3.13 Given that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low, the team concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the School **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 School's commitment to enhancing student learning opportunities is set out in the Strategic Plan. The plan identifies three strands of enhancement activity related to teaching and learning, support for staff through engagement with the Higher Education Academy, investment in resources and development of research.

4.2 An annual Operational Plan related to the Strategic Plan as well as other internal and external plans and reports identify specific actions and timescales across 10 operational areas of the School. The range of sources that inform the operational plan include the external examiner reports, the Action Plan developed in response to previous QAA reviews and a report on the School commissioned from the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education.

4.3 Implementation of the plan is overseen by the Director's Group and the Director makes regular reports to the governing body, the Association Council providing a link between academic and corporate governance.

4.4 The School aims to use its committee structure to drive enhancement through providing a forum for critical self-reflection and opportunities for the dissemination of good practice. The Academic Board meets quarterly and has two subcommittees, the Graduate Management Committee and the Undergraduate Management Committee, which meet monthly. These meetings all include student representation. Each year there is a joint meeting of the Graduate and Undergraduate Management Committees with the Student Forum, which aims to provide an opportunity for discussion of the effectiveness of student engagement.

4.5 In the Graduate School the annual monitoring processes for the validating University provide a cyclical mechanism for action planning in response to student and external examiner feedback which underpins incremental enhancement.

4.6 In the Undergraduate School, the Director and the Registrar hold formal meetings with students at all levels of the School twice a year - one at the beginning of the first term for all students and one in the final term, which is unit and programme-specific. These meetings are intended to gather feedback to facilitate enhancements. Meeting minutes are produced and feedback on matters arising is passed to the relevant academic committee and/or the relevant department so that action points can be monitored. An annual student survey provides formal, anonymised opportunities for student feedback with the results being reported back to the relevant committees for discussion and any action.

4.7 The overall environment of the School offers much in terms of enrichment to learning opportunities, including public lectures, visiting schools and other networking possibilities for students. The broader remit of the Association, including its programme of public events, publications, Visiting Schools and operation as a membership society, provides extensive opportunities as well as the maintenance of thought leadership and professional networks.

4.8 Open Juries, where students present their project to an audience of students, staff and invited critics, are intended as a tool for maintaining high standards, and offer an

opportunity for students to prepare for professional practice where it is common for architects to present a proposal. There are a range of Student Awards offered at all levels of the provision in recognition of achievement. At the end of each year there is a Projects Review, taking the form of an exhibition and associated book that celebrates the work produced by students.

4.9 The Strategic Plan and associated operational plan, the range of processes for monitoring and reviewing the provision both internally and externally, and the wide range of networks and events in place to enrich the overall student learning experience allow the Expectation to be met.

4.10 The team reviewed the Strategic Plan, Operational Plan and evidence of the use of professional networks to develop and enhance provision. The team also met staff and students to explore how provision is developed and enhanced. The review team was provided with evidence of the public programme and visiting school of over 50 annual workshops and short courses that are accessible to students and allow them to further explore their subject discipline.

4.11 During the visit the team heard how the actions from the Strategic Plan are being advanced. They heard that the School has recently subscribed to the Higher Education Academy and that a working group is developing a strategic approach to staff development.

4.12 Investment in resources at the Hooke Park campus had been ongoing and a review of staffing and opening hours at Bedford Square has been undertaken in response to student feedback.

4.13 The development of research-informed teaching has been progressed through a new policy that provides teaching opportunities for PhD students and allows existing teaching staff to register for research degrees at reduced fees.

4.14 Students met by the team are positive about the open and responsive ethos at the School and the ways in which they can engage to enhance their experience. Recent changes to the operation of the Student Forum and engagement with the Association Council were described as evidence of this. The School makes good use of professional networks to enhance the quality of the student learning experience, which is commented on favourably by students. The team heard that the Public Programme, which comprises four open lectures a week from a wide range of speakers, including highly respected members of the architectural profession and design world, is regarded as invaluable by students who welcome the opportunity to request particular speakers.

4.15 The School is intending to implement a new Quality Enhancement System in 2016 to improve its monitoring of quality and the effectiveness of enhancement. The system has been designed to be proportionate to the scale and specialist nature of the School and simplify the current complexity involved with working with three validating bodies.

4.16 The team concludes that the strategic approach to enhancing the provision of student learning opportunities is effective and that as such the Expectation is met and the associated risk is low. The School is currently in a transition phase and has plans to develop its internal systems and processes, particularly through the implementation of a new Quality Enhancement System.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

4.18 The Expectation is met and the associated risk is low.

4.19 There are no recommendations, affirmations or features of good practice associated with this judgement area.

4.20 Given that the Expectation is met, the team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the School **meets** UK expectations.

5 Commentary on the Theme: Digital Literacy

Findings

5.1 The School believes itself to be an early pioneer of the use of digital technology in architectural design, predominately through the use of computer-aided design integration within the curriculum and a programme of digital literacy training offered through the central support services. Support for digital skills ensures students are well prepared for a future career trajectory within an ever-digitising discipline, while also acknowledging the value of traditional skills and methodologies - a balance facilitated through the diverse and emergent course option portfolio offered.

5.2 Professional expectations are high both for design and manufacture. Students are exposed to specialist services to provide them with competencies anticipated of a future industry environment, such as the ability to print work in 3D and use robotic manufacturing techniques via the Hooke Park Dorset campus.

5.3 A student's level of digital literacy is established at interview through assessment of their portfolio submission. While many students come to the School with a high level of knowledge and experience already, for successful applicants who require additional support, the School makes effort to signpost them to appropriate resources and support through their tutors to help synthesise digital competencies.

5.4 Specialist services require student induction prior to use to ensure that students operate safely and effectively, and are typically conducted during induction week by School specialist staff. Should a student miss their formal induction, they are unable to operate the service until training is complete, and these sessions run throughout the year.

5.5 Current infrastructure to support students comprises central support staff, in both IT and library provision, and four dedicated computer suites. In addition, wireless access across the School campus area allows students to access personal file space online. Working server space is provided for all students and unit storage space is available for collaborative work. However, student satisfaction with computer provision is not high and indicates that despite the emphasis, this area is possibly under-resourced.

5.6 All networks are monitored 24 hours a day all year round to ensure student access to online facilities. 2D and 3D printing are available 12 hours per day, seven days a week, with specialist staff and trained students available to support students as required.

5.7 The Media Studies programme offers courses in video, photography, drawing, animation, narrative, physical assemblage, textiles, analogue and digital fabrication, electronics, web-based media, fieldwork and curation. These are supported by online subscription-based courses and additional courses can be provided to support the particular needs of individual units, in consultation with school support services.

5.8 In addition to competencies directly related to the curriculum, Library staff provide a growing portfolio of broader, transferable digital literacy training in the areas of digital security, information literacy, effective web search and source evaluation.

5.9 The majority of internal communication is digitally based and unit masters lead this connectivity through the use of microsites, apps and social media. It is through the unit microsites that students find additional information about unit offerings, assessment requirements and tutor information, in advance of annual unit selection. Students clearly communicated to the team that the microsites were important sources of information and

reference. The website is also used for online submission and feedback to students during unit delivery.

5.10 While the digital literacies offering at the School has emerged as a strong portfolio for student learning, there is no identified strategy leading developments. A fluid approach to academic enhancement does not safeguard a minimum standard or expectation for each student year, leaving this solely to the discretion of the Director to consider balance within the School's offering.

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

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

Academic standards

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

Award

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

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* (FHEQIS).

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.

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