



# Higher Education Review of Middlesex University

November 2015

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## About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Middlesex University. The review took place from 2 to 6 November 2015 and was conducted by a team of six reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Sally Bentley
- Mr Gregory Clark
- Professor Mark Davies
- Professor Hillary J Grainger
- Mr Alam Mahbubul (student reviewer).
- Dr Ann Read

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

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 6.

In reviewing Middlesex University the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland.

The [themes](#) for the academic year 2015-16 are Student Employability and Digital Literacy,<sup>2</sup> and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.<sup>3</sup> A dedicated section explains the method for [Higher Education Review](#)<sup>4</sup> and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents. For an explanation of terms see the [glossary](#) at the end of this report.

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

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

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

<sup>4</sup> Higher Education Review web pages:  
[www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review).

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about Middlesex University

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

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

### Good practice

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

- The Graduate Academic Assistant and Student Learning Assistant schemes which foster student engagement in their academic experience (Expectation B4).
- The transparent use of benchmarked targets, based on robust data, which strengthens the annual monitoring process (Expectation B8).

### Recommendations

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

By June 2016:

- ensure variations in regulations are routinely recorded and monitored (Expectation A2.1)
- implement and embed a system to ensure that the University's requirements for the establishment of formal agreements with partners are met (Expectation B10).

By September 2016:

- ensure external scrutiny of the grading scales associated with the importation of marks impacting upon classification (Expectation B6)
- ensure external examiner scrutiny of recognition of prior learning decisions at Level 5 and above if not considered by the accreditation boards (Expectation B6).

By November 2016:

- implement and embed a mechanism to ensure the timely completion of the external examiner report and response cycle (Expectation B7).

## Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms** the following action that Middlesex University is already taking to make academic standards secure and improve the educational provision offered to its students.

- The positive steps being taken to improve the recording and monitoring of complaints (Expectation B9).

## Theme: Student Employability

The University's Employability Policy makes a commitment to enabling students to plan a route to employment or further study, gain employability skills, secure a graduate-level job, plan ongoing professional development and enhance career progression once in work.

The University's approach to employability has resulted in a significant rise in employability outcomes reported through the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey. The University's Students' Union is strongly committed to working in partnership with the University on student employability and directly supports volunteering and paid employment opportunities for its students.

Working with its Schools, the University's Employability Service is a key team in the collaborative and pan-University approach to employability and leading on the implementation of the new Employability Strategy. An Employability Model for undergraduate students articulates what support and activities the University offers and what students need to do at each level of study.

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

## About Middlesex University

Middlesex University, based in North London, is one of the largest universities in the UK, with origins dating back to 1878. Over the years, through merger and expansion, the University has grown both in student numbers and in the range of its academic provision. Notable milestones include the establishment of Middlesex Polytechnic in 1973, and the University in 1992. In 2005, the University opened its first overseas campus, in Dubai. The Mauritius campus opened in 2010 and the Malta campus in 2013. The University offers a range of provision, both on campuses in London and overseas, and in collaborative partnership, and since the Institutional Audit in 2009 student numbers have grown from 27,000 to 38,000 globally.

In relation to partnership development, the University currently has links with 88 partners. Many of the partners now offer validated rather than franchised provision, in some cases under the dual award model. In March 2013 Academic Board agreed that accredited partner status should be deleted from the regulations.

The University's approach is shaped by its Strategic Plan which articulates its mission to 'produce a global community of staff, students and partners, who make vital contributions to the economic, cultural and social wellbeing of the societies in which they live and work'.

The student body is ethnically diverse, with around 49 per cent of students from ethnic minority groups and the majority of students from the state-funded schools sector. In terms of gender, the University has maintained a 60 per cent female, 40 per cent male split, although the distribution of gender varies across discipline areas. The long tradition

of work-based studies, allocating credit on the basis of learning gained in professional settings, alongside traditional and vocationally orientated academic provision, provides students with a wide range of opportunities to enable them to succeed.

Since 2012, the University has engaged in a dynamic period of change and strategic reorientation. The University reorganised its academic provision into six new Schools - Art & Design, Business, Health & Education, Law, Media & Performing Arts, and Science & Technology. In 2014, the Institute for Work-Based Learning (IWBL) was aligned to the Business School, and the Department of Psychology and the London Sport Institute moved from Health & Education to Science & Technology to aid the development of interdisciplinary strengths in research.

The University implemented a revised academic staffing structure which now includes a professional practice and teaching route, a research and teaching route, and a research and knowledge transfer route, affording an appropriate acknowledgement of those areas where professional practice is a core part of the academic role. Fifty new professors and 200 new academic staff have been recruited. Roles of Graduate Academic Assistant (GAA), Senior Graduate Academic Assistant (SGAA) and Associate Lecturer have been created to support the day-to-day operation of Schools, provide specific support to programme delivery and student support that enhances the student experience, and support research activity. The role of Director for Student Experience was created in 2011 with the remit of extending student engagement both within the learning journey and beyond it into administrative, student support and extracurricular activities. More recently, the Learning and Teaching and Student Experience remits were combined, bringing together the support for student engagement and the student voice and the development of learning and teaching.

The new academic and support structure was accompanied by a new deliberative committee structure, reporting to Academic Board. There have also been a number of recent senior leadership changes including a new Vice-Chancellor from July 2015.

The majority of the provision has been consolidated into one campus in Hendon. Only a small number of students are now located off-campus. Administrative functions at the Hendon campus have been centralised to offer a single student helpdesk for all enquiries, services and support, via UniHelp, in Library and Student Support (LSS), providing a single port of call for non-academic support for students. School administrative support was centralised within the Academic Registry, across the areas of academic quality, admissions, student registration, assessment and graduation. In 2013, the University launched its Employability Service following a reorganisation of its employability and career offerings.

In both the 2009 Institutional Audit and the 2011 Collaborative Provision Audit the audit teams judged that confidence could reasonably be placed in the soundness of the University's management of academic standards and of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students. In 2014, MU Dubai and the partnership with SAE Institute Dubai were reviewed during the QAA Review of Transnational Education in the UAE.

Generally, the University has made sufficient progress addressing the outcomes of its previous QAA engagements. The responses to the recommendations have been against a background of considerable change as articulated above. Recommendations have been reviewed by Assurance Committee or its predecessor, the Academic Standards and Quality Committee.

## Explanation of the findings about Middlesex University

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Findings

1.1 The academic awards that the University can confer are set out clearly and explicitly in the University's regulations, which also specify the requirements for programmes to meet national academic standards. The descriptors of the awards draw heavily on, and make clear links to, *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and the Quality Code. Credit requirements are also explicit. For example, the regulations define the credit for prior learning that can count towards a qualification and the limits that apply.

1.2 The framework for safeguarding academic standards is set out in the Academic Quality and Standards Policy, which notes the importance of 'key stakeholders' in shaping the University's standards and quality infrastructure. This policy is operationalised through the Learning and Quality Enhancement Handbook (LQEH), which provides much guidance on the use of the Quality Code and other external reference points in the University's policies and procedures, for example in the design and validation of programmes. These arrangements enable the Expectation to be met in design.

1.3 The team met senior staff with responsibility for quality assurance matters, and with teaching staff with experience of module and programme design, validation, monitoring and review. The review team viewed a range of validation/revalidation documents, together with a selection of minutes from Academic Board and Assurance Committee.

1.4 The review team saw much evidence of a corporate cognisance of the external national position. Revised Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications of UK Degree-Awarding Bodies were considered by Assurance Committee in 2015. Assurance Committee minutes show consideration of revised Subject Benchmark Statements as they are published and show action points for the relevant Schools to ensure compliance. The LQEH makes numerous appropriate references to the Quality Code, including an annotated checklist for programme leaders as they design programmes. However, teaching staff met by the team were unclear on the use of external reference points in their activities.

1.5 Subject Benchmark Statements and QAA's guidance on qualification characteristics are used as external reference points in the design of new programmes and programme specifications, and in programme review. An extract from the FHEQ on qualification descriptors and Subject Benchmark Statements is provided to validation and review panels, as are professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) requirements where relevant. The University noted that the provision of such materials to panels enables them to check that award standards are calibrated appropriately against the UK threshold standard for the qualification and that the knowledge and skills outcomes of the programme specification are matched against the relevant Subject Benchmark Statement. The review team agrees with this statement.

1.6 Though the Quality Code is not explicitly referred to in validation and review reports, its influence in setting standards is evident and it may be listed as a source document. Reports of validation and review events demonstrate that panels are ensuring that the expectations of the Quality Code are met.

1.7 Gap analyses in relation to the Quality Code have been carried out and are reported to Assurance Committee, the minutes of which showed discussion largely with the purpose of enabling students to reach their potential. The review team concludes that the University is clearly incorporating elements of the Quality Code into its regulations and procedures as they become available. The gap analyses themselves are comprehensive and contain an action plan with timescales submitted to Assurance Committee.

1.8 Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation A1 is met and the associated level of risk is low because arrangements for securing threshold academic standards are appropriate and implemented effectively.

**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 Academic Quality and Standards Policy sets out the policy framework within which safeguarding academic standards and assuring and enhancing academic quality takes place. The policy makes little reference to other policies or formal procedures but indicates what is expected of the University and its policies in general terms.

1.10 The LQEH serves as the University's quality manual and comprises a comprehensive set of procedures, written largely as guidance on how to operate them. The definitive version of the LQEH is online and each year a document is published electronically indicating changes, as approved by Assurance Committee. Guidance provided in the LQEH on, for example, distance learning and diversity is fit for purpose.

1.11 Deliberative consideration of academic standards and quality matters is undertaken at University-level by Academic Board and its subcommittees. The terms of reference of Academic Board specify its authority in overseeing standards and quality. Academic Board was restructured in 2012 with strong cognisance of the Quality Code and approved a new deliberative committee structure, implemented from 2012-13, designed to give Academic Board oversight of the University's performance against its Strategic Plan. The manner in which Academic Board interacts with its committees, also known as subcommittees, is well set out, as is how work is partitioned between the various committees. The committees undertake the more detailed work and discussion necessary to either provide an assurance to Academic Board that relevant University academic procedures, regulations and codes of practice are appropriate and are properly implemented, or to approve plans, policies or strategies for final submission to, and consideration by, Academic Board. The three main committees are Assurance Committee, which oversees academic regulation and quality assurance procedures; Achievement Committee, which focuses on the academic performance of students; and Strategic Planning Committee, which agrees academic strategies and plans that shape the University's curriculum. Other committees have responsibilities in relation to standards; for example, Academic Provision Approvals Committee (APAC), reporting to Strategic Planning Committee, considers whether new programme proposals accord with the University's qualification structure; and Research Degrees Board, reporting to Assurance Committee, is responsible for research degree standards.

1.12 A systematic review of the new committee structure in 2015 resulted in a small number of changes being approved by Academic Board. A follow-up report indicating progress with changes was presented to Academic Board in October 2015. Assurance Committee and Academic Board have annual cycles of business, which the review team regarded as appropriate.

1.13 Schools and the IWBL are free to devise their own structures in relation to quality and standards, following guidance in the LQEH. For example, in the Business School, the School Management Team also functions as the School's group for dealing with quality matters. Groups at this level have so far not reported to University-level groups but will do so from the current academic session, and will produce an annual report on their business to Academic Board.

1.14 The University's regulations for undergraduate and postgraduate taught and research awards are clear and fit-for-purpose and show good articulation with the Quality Code. Elements of the regulations, specific programme-specific regulations, and a link to the full regulations are provided for students in programme handbooks.

1.15 Changes to regulations are considered and approved annually by Assurance Committee on behalf of Academic Board, though other changes may be approved as required. Discussion at Assurance Committee around changes to the regulations is effective. The views of students are taken into account when the regulations change, either through student membership of deliberative bodies, or through direct consultation with the Students' Union (MdxSU).

1.16 The University registry maintains a register of the University's policies that includes review dates and the body responsible for each policy's approval. Registry ensures that a list of academic policies due for review comes to Academic Board and such reviews are part of the relevant bodies' annual schedule of business.

1.17 When working with other providers, APAC checks before validation whether the University's or the partner's regulations will apply. Where programmes do not adopt the University's regulations in full, the proposed regulations are approved or otherwise by the Academic Registrar and, from the current academic session, noted by Assurance Committee. The Academic Registrar acts in this capacity following a set of principles approved by Assurance Committee.

1.18 The University's formal quality assurance framework and the comprehensive academic regulations, each overseen by Academic Board and its relevant committees, provide a sound basis for the University to meet this Expectation.

1.19 The review team met staff and students to discuss reference points for academic standards. The team viewed a range of validation/revalidation documents, together with a selection of minutes from Academic Board and Assurance Committee, and sampled programme handbooks. The team paid particular attention in meetings to the use of the LQEH. The University offered the MSc International Business and Management at the Faculty of Organisational Sciences, University of Belgrade, as a case study for its quality assurance of arrangements with overseas partners, providing a range of background documentation. The review team held virtual meetings with staff and students from the programme.

1.20 The terms of reference, constitution and standing orders of Academic Board and its committees are clear and appropriate. The minutes and action plans of the main deliberative bodies make effective use of the structures to safeguard standards and quality.

1.21 Processes are reviewed annually via the LQEH task group, which makes recommendations to Assurance Committee. The LQEH task group is charged with monitoring the effectiveness of the University's academic quality procedures and effectively has ownership of the LQEH, as well as acting as a conduit for dissemination of revisions made to the LQEH elsewhere. Though there is no evidence that the University is operating outside its stated procedures, the review team could not be sure how changes to the LQEH arose and the role of the task group in those changes.

1.22 The review team learnt from the 2010 validation report that the University of Belgrade Faculty of Organisational Sciences also had approval from the Middlesex University Academic Registrar to adopt their own assessment and regulation practices. However, the University was unable to provide the team with detail of the exemption that applied. The University advised the team that, since 2014, the Centre for Academic Partnerships sought annual updates of exemptions from all collaborative partners. The

University was able to demonstrate via a copy of the relevant programme handbook that the collaborative partner staff and students are aware of the broad exemption and the primacy, in such matters as the number of assessment opportunities, of the University of Belgrade regulations. However, it could not demonstrate, beyond an undated translation of partial extracts from the University of Belgrade regulations, that it held a regularly updated record of the details of the exemption granted. The review team therefore **recommends** that the University ensure variations in regulations are routinely recorded and monitored.

1.23 Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation A2.1 is met in design and operation and the associated level of risk is moderate. Although in general the University's internal reference points for securing academic standards are effective and fit for purpose and their implementation is sound, the lack of record-keeping of exemptions to its regulations presents a moderate risk.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.24 The University uses programme specifications as the definitive record of each programme. Programme specifications are written for a student audience, and set out the aims, learning outcomes and expected achievements for the programme of study in question. Programme specifications for all programmes are available online, in part so that prospective students can make informed choices about study. The LQEH stipulates that programme specifications must be considered at validation and review. At sub-programme level each module has a definitive narrative, approved at validation. Guidance on the production of both programme specifications and module narratives is given in the LQEH.

1.25 The University has in place a means for recording the definitive record of each programme, through programme specifications, which would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.26 The review team met students, academic delivery staff and staff with oversight of the quality framework to gain an understanding of the production, maintenance and use of the University's definitive records. It sampled evidence relating to the approval and review of modules and programmes, and viewed examples of programme specifications and programme handbooks.

1.27 The review team noted that significant and appropriate emphasis is placed on programme specifications at validation and review events and that the programme specifications are generally comprehensive, including reference to relevant Subject Benchmark Statements and a curriculum map that shows where each learning outcome is assessed and how these fit within the programme as a whole. However, in places, the language used in framing learning outcomes could be more sophisticated and less generic, and in one case the learning outcomes were not stated. This is despite good advice about writing learning outcomes and all other matters in compiling programme specifications given in the LQEH, and the provision of training, which staff cited as useful.

1.28 Programme specifications are made available to students, including MProf and DProf students, in programme handbooks, along with module narratives. Although students the team met were generally content with the information provided to them about their programme of study, they were largely ignorant of programme specifications.

1.29 Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation A2.2 is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low on the grounds that the University's arrangements for maintaining definitive and updated programme and module records are broadly effective despite a lack of sophistication in some learning outcomes.

**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**

1.30 The Academic Quality and Standards Policy sets out the policy framework for safeguarding academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of students' learning opportunities. The curriculum design policy states the University's expectations in terms of setting standards and curriculum design and assessment, and the University regulations define credit, levels and awards.

1.31 All new course proposals go through a three-stage approval process. The initial discussion and approval is at School level, and draft course documentation, including a draft programme specification, is produced, which defines the level of the modules in terms of the FHEQ. The APAC considers whether new proposals fit within the Strategic Plan and qualification structure and are appropriate in terms of market need and resources. The subsequent validation panel, which has external subject specialists as members, serves to confirm the standards of new proposals and approves the course to be delivered for up to six years. The panel's role includes checking that standards are calibrated appropriately against UK threshold standards for the qualification and that they comply with the University's own frameworks and regulations.

1.32 Approval for provision at partners follows a similar process, with APAC giving approval and the terms and conditions agreed in the partnership agreement and subsequent programme memorandum of cooperation. These structures and frameworks would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.33 The review team tested this by examining policy and process documentation, which govern the approval processes for London-based provision, overseas campuses, and UK and overseas partners. The implementation of the policy and processes was subject to scrutiny by reading approval and validation documentation, validation reports, committee minutes, and by meeting with staff.

1.34 The University has effective common processes working to support the design, development and approval of taught and research degree programmes at its UK and overseas campuses and partners. The learning framework secures standards by explicitly associating each award at the appropriate level of the FHEQ and the higher education credit framework for England. The approval process ensures that learning outcomes are appropriately aligned with relevant qualification descriptors and takes into account the relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. The curriculum policy and guidance documents combined with the approval process effectively ensure modules, programmes and qualifications meet the requirements of the University. The approval process adequately tests whether the assessment scheme satisfactorily tests the intended learning outcomes.

1.35 Overall, the University has established processes for the approval of taught programmes and research degrees which it consistently applies to ensure academic

standards are set at the level to meet UK threshold standards that are in line with its own frameworks. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation A3.1 is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.36 The University's Code of Assessment Practice sets out a robust system, through its explicit minimum requirements, for ensuring that academic standards are met through the achievement of module and programme outcomes. These detailed assessment arrangements ensure that students' achievements of learning outcomes are correctly judged and threshold academic standards are safeguarded. Programme specifications accompanied by module narratives, including detailed assessment criteria, are approved at programme validation, amendment and review. Detailed guidance is provided on the design of module narratives.

1.37 The University states that assessment should be an integral part of the learning process, appropriately matched to learning outcomes, and the relationship between the assessment of programme-level and module learning outcomes should be clear to students. University module-level descriptors offer generic statements describing the characteristics and context of the learning expected. These are explicitly referenced to FHEQ levels and are informed by the England, Wales and Northern Ireland Credit Consortia. The University makes appropriate differentiation of named and generic exit qualifications (intermediate terminating qualifications).

1.38 The University requires that clear and consistent assessment criteria must also be informed by Subject Benchmark Statements and the University's Grade Criteria Guide. Assessed work deemed a fail must be second-marked (and third-marked in the event of disagreement) and arrangements, with due external examiner input, are in place for verification and moderation.

1.39 Assessment boards, under Academic Board's delegated authority, oversee the granting of progression, credit and awards. Progression committees oversee progression. Subject-level assessment boards oversee module results and grades. Programme-level assessment boards oversee awards. The University offers its staff guidance on programme design including assessment in its Diversity in Relation to Validation and its Disability and Dyslexia Services work with academic staff on appropriate reasonable adjustments for student assessment. The award of research degrees is delegated by Academic Board to the Research Degrees Board under recently consolidated Research Degree Regulations. External examiners are appointed for all Level 5 and above provision and for stand-alone Level 4 awards.

1.40 The structures and mechanisms in place would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.41 The review team tested the system in place by reviewing regulatory and guidance documentation in the LQEH, in programme approval, amendment and review documentation and external examiner reports.

1.42 The review team discussed assessment arrangements in a number of staff and student meetings, including meetings with collaborative partners.

1.43 All staff and students whom the team met demonstrated awareness of the University's assessment arrangements. In particular, students clearly understood how, when and why they are to be assessed. The review team sampled assessment-related information from a range of programme handbooks, some through the virtual learning environment (VLE), and found the information on programme specifications and complementary module narratives to be consistent and accurate, with clear curriculum maps and assessment briefs.

1.44 Overall, the review team concludes that credit and qualifications are awarded where achievement of relevant learning outcomes has been demonstrated through assessment. Assessment regulations are clear and understood by staff and students. Expectation A3.2 is therefore met in both design and operation 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**

1.45 The University states that the annual monitoring and programme review processes are designed to verify and ensure the maintenance of standards for taught provision, confirm the effectiveness of programmes in achieving stated aims and intended learning objectives, and to identify issues associated with achieving programme standards.

1.46 Data on standards and student achievement are included in both the annual monitoring and programme review processes, which consider course performance against University-defined indicators including external examiners' reports, assessment outcomes and progression rates. The Achievement Committee has responsibility for the oversight of student achievement based on targets for progression and final outcomes.

1.47 Programme review panels typically follow a six-yearly cycle and consider a full range of data to determine if the design of the programme and assessments continues to enable maintenance of standards and student achievement. These structures and frameworks would allow Expectation A3.3 to be met.

1.48 The review team tested this by reading the University's LQEH and programme review documentation, examining annual monitoring and enhancement documentation for UK and overseas sites and partners, and in meetings with staff.

1.49 In their annual monitoring and enhancement reports, departments suitably reflect on external examiners' reports and a wide range of data comparing their performance against the University benchmarks to ensure that standards are upheld. The data and departmental reports are subject to robust senior management scrutiny in the annual monitoring and enhancement meetings. Although comparison of what was delivered against the programme specifications is not a routine part of annual monitoring, consideration of programme specifications is a requirement for review. The Achievement Committee receives reports and appropriately reviews the evidence on grades, qualifications and progression rates for the London campus, overseas campuses and collaborative provision.

1.50 Overall, the University has established processes for the monitoring and review of taught programmes which it consistently applies to ensure academic standards are set at the level to meet UK threshold standards and are in line with its own frameworks. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation A3.3 is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.51 The University has in place external and independent participation in setting and monitoring academic standards. Institutional oversight is provided by Assurance Committee, which reports to Academic Board. The use of external assessors is monitored by the Academic Quality Service (AQS) and reported in its annual report of validation and review to Assurance Committee. Oversight of the process ensures that no event takes place without external input. The University indicates that it values the input of external experts and assessors in validation and review.

1.52 The use of external assessors is mandatory in the approval process of a new programme or the review of an existing programme and can be drawn both from a higher education or an organisational, practitioner or industry background. One or two external assessors are required to provide subject and national perspective, the number finally determined by guidance. However, there must always be one external assessor conversant with UK higher education academic standards and quality. In the unusual situation of external assessors not being able to attend an event, they are required to submit a written report.

1.53 The LQEH clearly articulates the criteria for the appointment of external assessors and their role both in validation and review. The same process applies for collaborative programmes. However, the University states that in certain circumstances, for example where a programme is to be extended to a University overseas campus, events may take place via the School Committee, with approval by Academic Provision Approval Committee (APAC). The LQEH confirms the requirement for the employment of an external assessor in such circumstances. For collaborative programmes, the School may apply to APAC to hold the validation at the University or, exceptionally, by means of video conferencing.

1.54 The University considers that the knowledge and expertise of the external assessor in relation to external reference points and comparable programmes elsewhere in the sector are key to programme approval. At validation, external assessors examine the aims, outcomes, content and assessment in the context of the relevant Subject Benchmark Statements, *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark* or PRSB national standards, and the FHEQ to ensure the appropriate setting and maintaining of academic standards.

1.55 For the review of existing programmes, external assessors consider statistical data with comparable programmes in other institutions, assess both the academic content and the relevance of the programme to subsequent employment, and judge the adequacy of the equipment and specialist resources and the qualifications and expertise of the staff team. They also ensure that the marketing material provides an accurate description of the programmes under consideration. They review the unconfirmed report and scrutinise and comment upon the response to conditions and recommendations agreed at the event.

1.56 Where the external assessor is from an organisational, practitioner or industrial background, they are required to consider whether the proposal meets the needs of the profession or workplace and addresses current issues and future needs.

1.57 PRSB representatives are required to ensure that the standards of programmes align to professional requirements and if appropriate act as co-chair. External assessors are provided with written guidance about processes and procedures.

1.58 External examiners provide the principal mechanism for assuring the maintenance of academic standards, benchmarking and confirming comparability of standards with other higher education institutions.

1.59 To ensure comparability of standards, the same external examiner is appointed to programmes at the University's overseas campuses and franchised and joint collaborative programmes. In the case of validated collaborative provision, the University appoints a separate and specific external examiner to the validated programme.

1.60 To ensure parity of standards and student achievement across all the centres or programmes of a large multi-site partner, or where a programme is delivered in a language other than English and the bilingual examiner does not have sufficient UK experience, a chief external examiner is appointed. The roles and responsibilities of the chief external examiner are clearly articulated in the LQEH.

1.61 External examiners are appointed to first-tier boards to assure standards at subject and module levels and to second-tier boards to assure standards at qualification level. They are required to attend and this is made clear in their letter of appointment and at induction. External examiners are also called upon to comment on changes to the programme and module changes. External examiner reports make reference to changes in programmes and there is evidence of their involvement in agreeing module changes.

1.62 External examiners report annually and are asked to respond specifically to questions relating to comparability of standards and student achievement. All external examiner reports must receive a formal response.

1.63 Procedures for the appointment and responsibilities for external examiners for research degrees are specified in the Research Degree Regulations. Examiners at partner institutions are appointed by the partner institution but must be approved by the Chair of Research Degree Board. Following the examination, the examiners are required to submit their recommendations, confirming whether the standards of the award have been met. Research Degree Board takes responsibility for the confirmation of awards.

1.64 The processes in place that ensure the use of external and independent expertise would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.65 The review team considered regulations and guidance, validation and review documentation, external examiner reports and University responses to their reports. The team also met academic staff with responsibility for the design and approval of programmes and students who had been involved in the development of new courses.

1.66 The review team found external assessor involvement at validation and at review, and when unable to attend, evidence of external assessors' written reports. However, the Validation Review Overview provided by Academic Standards and Quality indicated that there was a disappointing decline in the number of external assessors drawn from industry, particularly considering the University's strategic objective to ensure that the curriculum is informed by professional practice.

1.67 There was also evidence of PRSB attendance at validation and review events and a register is kept of accreditations and re-accreditations involving PRSBs. There is also evidence of a PRSB accreditation recommendation having been met.

1.68 Overall, the University seeks appropriate external and independent input from a wide range of stakeholders at key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation A3.4 is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

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

## The setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards

1.69 In reaching its judgement about the setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.70 All seven Expectations have been met and the associated level of risk is low for six and moderate for one.

1.71 There is one recommendation, no affirmations and no features of good practice in this area. The recommendation relates to implementing a formal process to ensure variations in regulations are routinely recorded and monitored.

1.72 There is evidence that the University is fully aware of its responsibilities for setting and maintaining the academic standards of awards. Previous responses to external review activities provide confidence that areas of weakness will be addressed promptly and professionally. The review team concludes therefore that the setting and maintenance of the academic standards of the awards at the University **meet** UK expectations.

## 2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.1 Through validation, the University ensures that any proposed programme is academically sound, and discharges its responsibility for setting and maintaining standards, and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities. The process is articulated in the LQEH and is designed to cover in-house, overseas campuses and collaborative provision. The process is supported by an extensive range of guidance notes and templates together with a process checklist to cover all the variations of validation from distance learning, to different types of collaborative provision and overseas campuses.

2.2 While the process is managed centrally by the AQS, the proposals are created by the Schools and the first formal stage in the process is the School Committee, which receives a draft APAC form and discusses the rationale and logistics of the proposed programme. If approved by the School Committee, the form is forwarded to APAC, which ensures, through clear evidence of market potential, how the proposal can be supported within the framework of University resources, and alignment with University regulations and strategic objectives. Any conditions set by APAC need to be met before the course can be validated.

2.3 The third stage is the validation event. Documentation requirements for the different types of events are defined. A panel, with a core membership of a senior member of staff as chair, an independent University representative, and one or two external assessors with subject expertise, is set up and, where deemed relevant, PSRB members may be invited or co-chair. The location of the validation event depends on the nature of the proposal, and exceptionally may be held by videoconferencing. The external assessor's role is to examine the proposal's aims, outcomes, content and assessment in the context of the external reference points, including the Quality Code, FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements, PSRBs and national standards, to ensure that the proposal has taken account of these and to bring a national perspective to the proposal and judge the quality of provision. The panel is provided with guidance on what to consider and discuss. For the two enhanced validation partners, the chair will be appointed by the University and University processes followed, but the administration may be undertaken by the partner.

2.4 All conditions must be signed off by the chair, and the programme fully approved before it can run. Delays in signing off the memorandum of cooperation for collaborative provision are monitored by Assurance Committee. Assurance Committee receives an annual report on the entire validation and review process and an update on PSRB accreditations. Where the proposal is either small or straightforward, it may be validated by the School Committee. The design of these policies and process would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.5 The review team tested the effectiveness of the programme design and approval processes through discussions with academic and support staff, and students. A range of documentary sources was also considered, including policy documents, committee papers

and minutes, programme approval events involving external stakeholders, distance education for UK and overseas campuses, and UK and overseas collaborative provision.

2.6 The University operates an effective and integrated programme approval process for all types of programme approval, which is well documented and fully aligned with the Quality Code and associated reference points. The University's integrated approach to programme approval using, as far as practical, the same processes regardless of location, deliverer or mode of delivery, works well. For example, in addition to the normal processes and documentation requirements, the arrangements for distance education programmes require that at least one module and the production plan is available for scrutiny by the panel, which must contain a distance education expert.

2.7 The comprehensive guidance, templates and support from both the AQS and the Centre for Academic Practice Enhancement (CAPE) provided to programme teams and supplemented by staff development activities, ensure the process is well understood by staff regardless of location. These processes, which include suitable externality, including professional body representation where relevant, ensure the full consideration of academic standards and the appropriateness of learning opportunities. Assurance Committee has robust oversight of the process and alignment with the Quality Code, and receives an annual report summarising the outcomes and common themes.

2.8 Student involvement in the process is more limited, with only some students reporting that their views on new proposals were sought, and students only becoming routine members of panels from March 2015.

2.9 The University operates effective processes for programme design and approval for all types of provision that are underpinned by clear policies and guidance material. Therefore, the review team concludes that the University meets Expectation B1 in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

**Quality Code, Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education**

**Findings**

2.10 Guidelines on admission requirements and procedures for applicants are published on the University's website and prospectus. The prospectus includes detailed information about the available courses and success stories. The University has an outreach strategy which aims to promote awareness among prospective students, in conjunction with the organisational strategy.

2.11 The admission policy includes the general requirements for all University programmes including collaborative programmes, entry qualifications, English language requirements, arrangements available for special and specific needs students, verification of qualifications, and arrangements for requesting feedback from applications, together with the procedures for making complaints and appeals among other relevant requirements.

2.12 The admissions staff work closely with academic staff in making decisions on applications, where the academic staff make decisions on whether an applicant can achieve the required programme outcomes successfully. Interviews or auditions are conducted for most professional practice programmes. The University is in the process of designing an interview briefing guidance via an online training package which is supplemented by School or Department-specific workshops, where there are specific needs.

2.13 To ensure a consistency of process and application of entry criteria, the University has a centralised admissions system. The University reviews admissions and recruitment data for planning purposes and to monitor applicant profiles. With the new technology available, the reporting process is more accessible and immediate for the user. The new technology has facilitated staff to quickly track admissions statistics and outcomes against the criteria throughout the admissions process.

2.14 Once applicants have a confirmed place, the University provides information and guidance and encourages them to enrol early online before they arrive on campus so that they can access their personal timetable, a study skills course and some pre-course reading material. The University offers a range of pre-application and enrolment activities to ensure students settle well into their studies, such as taster sessions, bridging sessions, English language courses and foundation courses.

2.15 Student induction, known as Welcome Month, is run in conjunction with the Students' Union. A specific orientation programme is run for international students arriving at the Hendon campus. Welcome Month includes academic induction as part of which students are given the Student University Guide, an overview of enrolment, induction/orientation, and general information on academic life as a student.

2.16 As part of its Annual Monitoring and Enhancement (AME) process, the University reviews the recruitment process at programme level. The success of the admissions and recruitment process is measured in several different ways, for example via promotional materials and activities and student feedback.



2.17 The University has regulations, policies and procedures in place that would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.18 The review team tested the effectiveness of the arrangements available to meet this Expectation by reviewing the Admissions Policy, admission system, the undergraduate prospectus, outreach strategy and the review process for recruitment, selection and admission. The review team met various student groups and University and partner staff to discuss recruitment, selection and admission practices.

2.19 Overall, students the team met expressed positive opinions about their experience with the recruitment, selection and admission process, although a difference was noted between induction in September and induction for students starting in January. Staff at the University and at partner organisations are clear about their recruitment and admission responsibilities.

2.20 The University's recruitment, selection and admissions practices are transparent and reliable and are underpinned by appropriate and effective policies and procedures. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met in both design and operation 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**

2.21 The University has set itself an ambitious objective to be globally recognised for its excellence in student learning and teaching. Key in realising this strategy is its commitment to making more effective use of management information on student achievement and engagement and the central role of CAPE in supporting academic staff development.

2.22 The University manages learning and teaching, monitoring performance and leading relevant initiatives through its Achievement Committee, which has oversight of learning and teaching on behalf of Academic Board. School committees are responsible for the oversight of local learning and teaching with each drawing on different subgroups to undertake detailed work. Academic Board has had no direct oversight of the School Committees, but from 2015-16 will see minutes and an executive summary of their activities. The University has recently established a Learning and Teaching Development Forum for further discussions on teaching quality. Boards of Study and Campus Forum (for overseas campuses) offer student representatives the opportunity to discuss their academic experience.

2.23 The University's Academic Strategy (2015-16) outlines its vision and objectives including a commitment to developing teaching professionals able to bring together academic, professional and research skills to deliver excellent student outcomes in terms of retention, progression and achievement. The University's Learning Framework sets out the design principles relating to teaching, learning and assessment.

2.24 The People Strategy 2013-17 sets the overarching vision and objectives for the University's workforce. Support and staff development for the academic strategy is coordinated by a refreshed University Staff Development Strategy Group and led by the Organisational and Staff Development (OSD) Unit working with CAPE, the Research and Knowledge Transfer Office, the Centre for Academic Partnerships and other professional services. A range of opportunities are provided to support staff including for supervisors of research degree students, postgraduate students who teach, hourly paid staff and those at partners or on overseas campuses.

2.25 To support the University's strategic objectives to deliver excellent teaching, the University has incrementally reviewed its approach to academic staff appointment, responsibilities and development, creating the useful GAA role, discussed in Expectation B4, bringing in a new academic staffing structure and investing in new staff to improve its staff-student ratio.

2.26 The induction of newly appointed staff, including those who are paid hourly or on overseas campuses, is overseen by heads of department and reviewed by the OSD team. There is an expectation that all staff should have or will gain an appropriate teaching qualification and the University has recently gained approval to offer a Higher Education Academy (HEA)-accredited Professional Teaching Scheme at all levels. There is an annual appraisal scheme for academic staff, recently reviewed and aligned to the University's revised Academic Staffing Structure.

2.27 CAPE organises a range of activities for staff including an annual conference and the teaching fellowship scheme. Students regularly meet CAPE staff to feed their perspective into CAPE's activities. Heads of department in the UK and overseas are responsible for the implementation of a long-standing teaching observation scheme.

2.28 Since the Institutional Audit in 2009, there have been significant campus developments to support the efficient and effective delivery of the learning and teaching strategies, including the consolidation of most UK programme delivery and administration onto one campus at Hendon, together with the development of two additional overseas campuses.

2.29 Quality monitoring and review systems are used to oversee the effectiveness of learning and teaching. These are informed by responses to student surveys and the biannual Boards of Study. The University has in place appropriate policies and procedures that would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.30 In considering this Expectation, the review team examined relevant documentation provided by the University, including academic-related strategies, policies and procedures, as well as minutes of meetings about, and materials used for, staff development. The team tested its findings in meetings with academic and professional staff, and with students.

2.31 The University has mapped the work of the committees to ensure that all teaching-related matters are properly addressed. The recent decision to submit School Board minutes and an executive summary of their activity to Academic Board will usefully further strengthen central oversight of the Schools' responsibilities for learning and teaching.

2.32 The objectives of the academic-related strategies are evaluated in part through the use of key performance indicators (KPIs) presented to Achievement Committee. While there has been good progress in improving National Student Survey (NSS) results in general, all questions in 'the teaching on my course' section remain below sector average. Learning and teaching is evaluated through programme review, annual monitoring and targeted evaluation projects, with increasingly effective use being made of management information, as noted in Expectation B8.

2.33 Middlesex Students' Union (MdxSU) and the University are working in partnership to enhance teaching through proactive initiatives such as the MdxSU teaching awards, and more reactively by responding to issues of concern to the students, such as the quality of teaching in some specific areas. Boards of Study, at both home and partner institutions, effectively discuss learning and teaching. Common issues are identified and fed into the annual monitoring process.

2.34 Staff and MdxSU value the wide range of academic staff development provided by CAPE. Useful staff development is provided for different groups of teaching-related staff including those with leadership responsibilities, hourly paid staff, GAAs, SLAs, postgraduate students who teach, staff on overseas campuses and, where appropriate, partners. HEA recognition is rapidly increasing. There is a staff survey, which the executive use to inform planning. An annual report on staff development evaluates progress with key objectives including engagement with the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education (PGCHE). While some initiatives have been slow to be implemented or have attracted modest engagement, others have had a positive impact on teaching, notably the teaching fellows scheme and the annual conference.

2.35 During a time of significant investment and change to its learning and teaching facilities, the University has taken care to protect the students' learning experience, though issues with timetabling remain and are discussed under Expectation B4. The development

of the last two overseas campuses was carefully managed, building on the experience of their first campus.

2.36 Overall, the University has an effective approach to the review and enhancement of learning and teaching including staff development for new and established staff. Therefore the review team concludes that Expectation B3 is met in both design and operation, 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**

2.37 The University's commitment to meeting the needs of its diverse students in the UK and overseas is realised through a suite of infrastructure and professional support services that is widely valued by the students.

2.38 The University's approach to enabling student development and achievement is articulated in the new Academic Strategy. The University's Strategic Plan has clear targets, which draw on externally benchmarked data, for student progression, achievement and employment. The Achievement Committee is responsible for monitoring progress with student achievement and engagement increasingly drawing on data fed through the new business intelligence system.

2.39 The University has an established learning infrastructure including a student e-platform known as MyUniHub through which students can access a VLE and other personalised information such as their assessment grades. There is a one-stop support service desk, UniHelp with an online presence and a 24/7 library, managed through the LSS which has responsibility for the development and management of learning resources. Students studying remotely have access to online services and overseas campuses have a proportionate but equivalent on-site library. Partner students have access to Middlesex resources and support services as agreed at validation. A working group with student representation oversees timetabling arrangements in the context of a timetable policy.

2.40 Specialist resources and facilities are managed by the Schools with some courses taking advantage of local specialist facilities and resources such as the University's Museum of Design and Architecture or Allianz Park, a professional rugby stadium. The sufficiency and effectiveness of learning resources for both in-house and collaborative provision are monitored through routine University monitoring and review systems

2.41 A new retention steering group is overseeing developments to improve student retention and engagement. Academic staff build on initial induction and aid student transitions through periodic reality checks, programme progress reviews and personal development planning. Academic staff support is supplemented by the Learning Enhancement Team. In the last five years the University has introduced additional roles to help students engage more fully with their academic experience, such as GAAs, SLAs (peer mentoring), Student Achievement Officers and Academic Writing Tutors.

2.42 The Employability Policy, the implementation of which is led by the Employability Service, outlines the service offered to support students develop the graduate skills that the University has identified as needed for their course and future careers. The University deliberately employs both practice-based and academic staff to further this aim. Students on placements are supported locally by the Schools.

2.43 The infrastructure and services in place would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.44 In considering this Expectation, the review team looked at the learning infrastructure, including the website and VLE, and examined relevant documentation including policies and procedures for supporting student engagement during their course, and plans to assist them with their employability. The team tested its findings in meetings with academic and professional staff, and with students.

2.45 The University is making good use of management information through reports to the Achievement Committee and the annual monitoring and enhancement process to oversee progress against its Strategic Plan targets in relation to student development and achievement. Significant progress is being made with student satisfaction scores in the area of student development, support and employment outcomes, though further work has been identified as being needed in the area of non-continuation. While some students had specific concerns, from most students' perspectives the professional support services are effectively enabling students on all modes of study to access the support they need to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.

2.46 The University's information, advice and guidance systems are well established and students generally speak very positively about the support they provide, whether they are studying on campus, at a distance or through a partner. The services regularly review their performance, both online and face-to-face and enhance the provision as a result of feedback.

2.47 The VLE is effectively managed and developed by CAPE in partnership with the Schools and, where relevant, with partners. Students are very positive about its usefulness as a repository of information.

2.48 The library services are valued by students and recent initiatives have been welcomed, including 24/7 opening, the introduction of reading list software, the provision of a free e-book and free printing for each student. Stand-alone and embedded training in digital and learning literacy is provided by the liaison librarians and is supported by the teaching fellows. Programme review, validation, annual monitoring and Boards of Study ensure that the provision of learning resources is fit for purpose and kept under regular review.

2.49 Timetabling arrangements have been identified as problematic over a number of years through the University's annual monitoring and enhancement process and by students who met the review team. The timetabling group continues to actively review and improve systems year-on-year and is making annual progress.

2.50 While there are some specific concerns with specialist facilities, such as laboratories and studios arising from the move to the single Hendon campus, students are generally satisfied with their specialist spaces and facilities. The use of local specialist premises and resources provides a rich learning experience for students on some courses, such as sport and nursing, exposing them to real-work environments, regular contact with industry experts and work experience opportunities.

2.51 The University has a comprehensive system of interventions to meet the support and development needs of its diverse students. The substantial suite of pre-degree courses increases progression to the main suite of courses. While not all students choose to engage with the system of tutorials, reality checks, progression points and personal development planning, the Student Achievement Officers work actively to identify students at risk prior to Programme Progression Committee meetings and to target areas with weaker retention and progression. Doctoral students find the ongoing Doctoral Development Programme helpful as a supplement to their initial induction.

2.52 The GAA and SLA schemes offer a well-developed, distinctive and additional level of learning support. GAAs and Senior GAAs are graduates who provide support for student learning, teaching and assessment with activities such as running practicals or preparing resources. SLAs support lower-level peers by reinforcing what students have been taught and enabling them to practise and develop academic skills. These roles make a positive contribution not only to the students they support, but also to the development of the GAAs and SLAs themselves and to the staff with whom they work. The review team considers the

GAA and SLA schemes which foster student engagement in their academic experience to be **good practice**.

2.53 The Employability Strategic Plan articulates how the Employability Policy is realised in practice and significant progress is reported against its objectives. Communication to students is clear with a schedule outlining key stages and opportunities. Programme validation explicitly examines employability with different opportunities provided according to discipline needs including placements, sandwich years, external accreditation and industry links. Students met by the review team were very positive about the applied nature of their courses and the opportunities to develop employability skills. Positive initiatives have come from the partnership between MdxSU and the Employability Service, and the MDX Award for Volunteering acts as an additional incentive to develop employability awards.

2.54 While many students report a positive experience, support systems for the students on placement have been identified in annual monitoring and by some students as needing strengthening. From this year, there will be greater involvement by the Employability Service and more standardised processes.

2.55 Overall, the University has arrangements and resources in place to enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. These systems are kept under regular review and are well received by students. Therefore the review team concludes that Expectation B4 is met in both design and operation, 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**

2.56 The University provides opportunities for the students to engage with the quality assurance and enhancement of their experience by involving them in various meetings and committees; for example, Boards of Study, student surveys (internal and external), campus forum (overseas campuses only), student membership on committees and on AME panels, as well as student membership of programme validation and review panels. The structure and terms of reference of the committees and forums are defined clearly in the LQEH.

2.57 Engagement opportunities are promoted at the beginning and throughout the student's study period. Details of the opportunities are available for the students in the programme handbook or local campus guide. The University established a set of Student Engagement Performance Indicators which was approved by Assurance Committee.

2.58 The University's student representation scheme is known as the Student Voice Scheme which is run by MdxSU on an operational level, supported by the programme leaders on a programme level and at an institutional level by the Quality Enhancement Manager (Student Engagement). The responsibility of the Student Voice Leader is not only to attend the meetings and raise issues; they are also provided with ample opportunities to be part of policy-making and suggest changes. Students are informed about the nature and importance of the student voice system and the process of elections and responsibilities of Student Voice Leaders through the Student University Guide, Programme Handbook, online or the MdxSU website.

2.59 The University and MdxSU work in partnership to ensure they provide a better student experience for their students. The opportunities provided to students to engage in quality assurance and the mechanisms in place to support these opportunities enable this Expectation to be met.

2.60 The review team tested the arrangements the University has to engage its students in the quality assurance process and enhance their educational experience by considering the LQEH, student engagement KPIs, academic committee and subcommittee membership, Boards of Studies' agenda and minutes, and the students on the validation/review panel. The review team met different student groups from both the University and its partner institutions, as well as senior and academic staff, to discuss the role of student engagement in quality assurance.

2.61 The review team found the University has all the steps in place to ensure that students have the opportunity to engage in their educational quality assurance and enhancement procedures. Every taught programme is required to hold their Boards of Studies twice a year where the student Voice Leaders contribute their views and learning experience. The University also holds Boards of Studies meetings for research students where general issues such as facilities or support are addressed.

2.62 In addition to Boards of Studies meetings, the University's overseas campuses run campus forums to improve student experience and discuss campus-specific issues relating to the operation of administrative and support services. The campus forums hold a similar meeting structure, terms of reference and membership to the Boards of Studies meetings at the Hendon campus.



2.63 The University's MdxSU elected officers are able to attend meetings such as the Board of Governors, Academic Board and its subcommittees and School Quality Committees. The Boards of Studies minutes are circulated to MdxSU. An ongoing working group addresses issues relating to the operation of Boards of Studies, chaired by the Quality Enhancement Manager (Student Engagement) and involving representation from each School. The MdxSU President also meets the Senior Executive fortnightly.

2.64 For in-house programme review events, a student meeting takes place where students can contribute to shaping commendations, conditions and recommendations resulting from a review. A student member is on the review panel for each programme review. Recently, the University also included student panel members on in-house validation panels. This process is monitored by the University's annual reporting process on student engagement.

2.65 The University encourages students to participate in module and programme feedback surveys at relevant points within their period of study. Students complete module questionnaires, Level 5 students participate in the Middlesex Student Survey (MSS), Level 6 students complete the NSS and for postgraduate students the Postgraduate Taught or Research Experience survey is used. The MSS feedback response rate is acceptable and the scores are improving. However, there is no action plan arising from the MSS results. The participation rate in the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) is very low, and the University is taking steps to improve this.

2.66 The University has structures in place to engage students on different levels. It also has mechanisms and measures of success in place to ensure effective student engagement. The recent developments of the Student Voice system, involvement of students in the review and validation panels along with the University's close working relationship with MdxSU demonstrate continuous improvement in student engagement in quality assurance.

2.67 The University provides multiple and varied opportunities for students at all levels to engage in the quality assurance of their academic experience. Therefore, the review team concludes that the University meets Expectation B5 in both design and operation 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**

2.68 The University's policy framework for assessment is articulated in its University Regulations in various sections: D (Regulations for Assessment Boards); E (Assessment and Progression Regulations); F (Academic Misconduct); K (Examination Room Rules for Candidates); L (Invigilation of Examiners); M (Code of Assessment Practice Minimum Requirements, in effect the University's assessment principles); and in the Grade Criteria Guide. Assurance Committee, on behalf of Academic Board, reviews and revises that codification. The last major review took place in 2007-08, but the University undertakes a process of annual review and updating.

2.69 Academic Registry also conducts an annual review of assessment practices and the management of assessment for report to Assurance Committee. Achievement Committee receives a detailed analysis of progression, achievement, grades and the distribution of progression and award decisions. External examiners at both Assessment Board tiers comment on the effectiveness and efficiency of assessment procedures.

2.70 Assessment is considered at programme design and approval, and the details of assessment arrangements for individual programmes, including a curriculum map linking assessment to learning outcomes, programme specifications and module narratives, are set out in programme handbooks. The University takes due consideration of external reference points during programme design and review. Programme handbooks also brief students on academic good practice and academic misconduct. The University uses plagiarism-detection software, both as a developmental aid for students and to deter plagiarism.

2.71 Overall, the policy framework for assessment sets out a consistent and coherent basis for the management of assessment in all aspects including verification of assessment, moderation, pass marks, mitigating circumstances, classification, award of credit, progression and final award. The University regulations are available via the staff intranet and the student portal. This would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.72 The review team scrutinised a wide range of assessment-related documentation and discussed assessment with staff and students, including from collaborative partners. The review team particularly scrutinised the minuting of Progression Committees and single, first and second-tier assessment boards at the full range of taught levels, including the taught element of the Professional Doctorate, and for University campus-based, overseas campus and collaborative partner provision, and found a process of due and accurate recording, usually consistent with a University-issued template, of assessment decisions.

2.73 The students whom the review team met, including from collaborative partners, showed clear awareness of their assessment schedules and criteria and cited programme handbooks and direct briefings by academic staff as a useful source of information on assessment. They expressed the view that the University provides sufficient information on assessment for students to monitor their own academic progress. The University makes available a wide range of staff development opportunities and web-based assessment guidance for staff.

2.74 The University has undertaken two major cross-institutional projects in the development of assessment. The University had made significant progress in moving largely to e-assessment with phasing in of e-submission, e-marking and e-feedback. The Pan-University Review of Assessment project aimed to improve communication on, and understanding of, assessment to improve assessment literacy. The project was taken forward at individual School level with institutional monitoring at Achievement Committee. The impact of this has been on staff and student practice rather than regulatory or significant procedural change.

2.75 The University uses anonymous marking for examinations but not coursework assessments, arguing that equitable treatment of students can be monitored by moderation and analysis of results against diverse student characteristics. The University makes use of a range of practical and procedural reminders and guidance to staff involved in assessment. The University is starting the conversation on the further extension of anonymous marking. The University does not preclude the discretionary use of anonymous marking of coursework assessment and an example was given of its use at a collaborative partner in response to a student cohort complaint.

2.76 The University currently determines classification by grade profiles in the context of a 20-point grading scheme. In response to student concerns that this scheme was not widely understood by students themselves and prospective employers, the University has established a Classifications Review Group, which includes student input, and is considering a gradual move towards a grade point average classification scheme.

2.77 The University uses both formative and summative assessment and commits to summative assessment feedback within 15 days of submission with that deadline clearly expressed, in the context of an overall assessment framework, in programme handbooks and module narratives. The staff and students whom the review team met, including from collaborative partners, were broadly positive about the usefulness and timeliness of assessment feedback and confirmed that the deadline was usually observed.

2.78 The University's procedures for Recognition of Prior Learning and accreditation more broadly are set out in the LQEH. The University regulations identify a maximum amount of credit that may be counted towards an award. Accreditation is overseen by University accreditation boards reporting to Assurance Committee in three distinct areas - external courses, University short courses, and 'learning from work'. Articulation Board is responsible for the approval, monitoring and review of articulation activity. Applications for organisational accreditation are made via a School or the IWBL. University Accreditation Board receives a report and recommendation from an appointed assessor and ongoing support and monitoring is provided by a link tutor. Individual organisational arrangements are secured by a memorandum of accreditation and are monitored by annual reports.

2.79 Mirroring external examiner arrangements for taught programmes, external examiners are appointed by the University, attend University accreditation boards, sample individual accreditation claims at Level 5 and above and report on the correct discharge of the overall assessment process. Similar arrangements also apply at collaborative partners with added oversight by the link tutor. Again, overall arrangements for accreditation are consistent and coherent.

2.80 However, in discussion with staff on external examiner oversight of accreditation, the University reported that programme teams, on the basis of curricular mapping, may make effective accreditation decisions perhaps in response to internal or external programme transfer applications or in response to a student's extracurricular or extra-institutional study, and that these decisions are not subject to external examiner scrutiny. The review team therefore **recommends** that the University ensures external examiner

scrutiny of recognition of prior learning decisions at Level 5 and above if not considered by the accreditation boards.

2.81 The University permits collaborative partners delivering validated programmes to seek exemption from the University regulations allowing scope for variation, for example from standard University assessment arrangements. The University also requires that, for at least the first three years of a validated programme, the University provides the chair of the Assessment Board. With University approval, validated programmes may operate one-tier rather than two-tier assessment boards. The University provides staff development, including bespoke training, on assessment for its collaborative partners.

2.82 The University has in place exceptional Academic Provision Approvals Committee approval arrangements where assessment at a collaborative partner is not in English, still requiring external examiner report and other programme documentation to be in English and, as described under Expectation B7, ensuring the appointment of a Chief External Examiner as necessary. Overall, additional arrangements for assessment at collaborative partners are coherent and appropriate.

2.83 However, in relation to accredited study abroad, the University operates a Grade Conversion Panel, overseen by Assurance Committee to approve international grade conversion scales for the import of marks which could impact on classification. University staff confirmed that the calibration of those scales was determined by internal expertise and experience but without any external scrutiny. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that the University ensures external scrutiny of the grading scales associated with the importation of marks impacting upon classification.

2.84 The review team concludes that, overall, the University operates a valid and reliable assessment process which allows students to demonstrate their level of achievement in relation to learning outcomes. Therefore Expectation B6 is met in both design and operation. However, while procedures are broadly adequate, there are some shortcomings in terms of the rigour with which they are applied, and thus the associated level of risk is moderate.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.85 The University's arrangements for external examiners are set out in the LQEH and are supplemented by specific and detailed guidance notes. They are additionally well summarised in a LQEH flowchart. The University has clear criteria for the nomination, appointment, induction, term of office, responsibilities of and termination arrangements for external examiners. The University's arrangements were specifically mapped against the Quality Code by Assurance Committee.

2.86 External examiners are appointed centrally upon the nomination of a School, upon approval by the School Committee, against Criteria for the Appointment of External Examiners. A letter of appointment is then issued by AQS which also maintains central oversight of potential conflicts of interest, reciprocity and expiry of terms of office. External examiners are appointed to all awards of Level 5 and above and for stand-alone Level 4 awards.

2.87 The University appoints two types of external examiner: external examination assessors who are appointed to first-tier, subject assessment boards which ratify module results, and external examination auditors who are appointed to second-tier, programme assessment boards which determine final awards and their classification. External examiners at programme assessment board level also ensure consistency and fairness of application of the assessment process. The full list of duties and responsibilities is set out in the LQEH and the University's external examiner report templates are structured to mirror those duties and responsibilities with prompts and questions on academic standards, cross-sector comparability and the operation of the assessment process. The report templates also build in comparison, as relevant, with cognate provision at overseas campuses and collaborative partners as well as opportunities to comment on delivery, assessment, marking, examples of good practice and issues to be addressed.

2.88 New external examiners receive a set schedule of information upon appointment and are invited to an induction. If unable to attend, direct briefings are provided by the programme leader or, for collaborative provision, the link tutor. The external examiners' duties include verification, moderation, comment on programme modification, and attendance at assessment boards, with special arrangements put in place in the event of exceptional non-attendance. Communication between the University and external examiners, including external examiner sampling of student work, is mainly electronic in line with the University's move towards e-assessment.

2.89 The review team tested external examiner arrangements by reviewing documentation relating to the LQEH, external examiner induction and guidance, external examiner reports and responses, Assessment Board minutes and oversight by Assurance Committee. The review team discussed the external examiner process and the use of the reports to safeguard academic standards and quality with the staff and students it met, including those at collaborative partners. In particular, the review team considered 28 external examiner reports and responses across a range of levels, modes of attendance and venues of delivery.

2.90 Students are made aware of the role of the external examiner and the availability of the external examiner's report via the programme handbook, with a fuller explanation of the role offered for students in non-UK collaborative partnerships. Overall, the UK and non-UK

students whom the review team met confirmed an awareness of external examiners and their reports but limited other exposure to external examiners or actual reading or sight of any external examiner reports or School responses, even though these were available through the VLE.

2.91 Similar arrangements apply in relation to the appointment of external examiners for collaborative partners, including those delivering validated programmes but with the potential for the University to delegate some detailed functions such as nomination and the provision of induction information, as well as additional safeguards such as the appointment of a Chief External Examiner where otherwise external examiner provision might lack foreign language competence or experience of UK higher education.

2.92 External examiner reports and responses are discussed at Boards of Study and, at School level, programme teams identify actions to be taken in response to external examiner reports for inclusion in their annual monitoring reports. AQSs are copied into all responses to external examiners including for programmes delivered at collaborative partners and compile a quantitative and qualitative overview report for consideration by Assurance Committee, as well as cross-circulating, as appropriate, to Chief External Examiners, PSRBs, and overseas campuses and collaborative partners. Despite deadlines of four weeks after the assessment board for the external examiner to submit their report and of eight weeks for the consequent School response, by the time of the Assurance Committee meeting in November 2014, 44 per cent of responses had yet to be received and the provisional figure at November 2015 was 35 per cent. While this shows some marginal improvement, the review team **recommends** that the University implement and embed a mechanism to ensure the timely completion of the external examiner report and response cycle.

2.93 The review team concludes that the arrangements for external examining are largely secure with some weakness in relation to the timeliness of the report/response cycle. The University has designed effective external examiner report templates and set up appropriate local and central-level response mechanisms. In that sense, the University's use of external examiners is scrupulous but it is not adequate in its timeliness. Therefore, Expectation B7 is met in both design and operation but the associated level of risk is moderate.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.94 AME is a three-stage process. Each department is considered separately except for the Business School, and some departments in the School of Science and Technology, where there is frequent sharing of modules and meetings are therefore held at School or cross-departmental level. Using a standard annual monitoring report template, AQS prepares a briefing paper identifying key outcomes from a predetermined evidence set. Each department and School comments on the data and identifies key actions and enhancements. From 2014, research student data was also included in the process. A draft action plan using a standard template is also required as part of the process.

2.95 Collaborative partners are also required to complete annual monitoring reports (AMRs) on programmes or programme clusters for consideration as part of the process. The briefing papers are prepared by the institution (partner) link tutor and are considered by the University link tutors and School deputy deans. The reports feed into the departmental briefing paper and collaborative partners are provided with feedback. A similar process is followed for overseas campuses, where an AMR is prepared for each programme together with a campus overview, and these are sent to the relevant Hendon-based department heads for consideration and inclusion in the departmental report.

2.96 The composition of departmental review panels is agreed by Assurance Committee. It is chaired by the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic) and includes senior colleagues from across the University and a student representative. The panel and key departmental or School representatives are expected to discuss the departmental or School successes and issues from the previous academic year, and plans for the current and next year. The focus is on performance against defined KPIs and contribution to the University's Strategic Plan. The minutes of the meeting, the briefing paper and a revised action plan constitute the AME report.

2.97 The AME reports, along with external examiners' reports and responses, are considered at School Quality Committees or equivalent to provide oversight and for identification of any themes and trends.

2.98 AQS prepares a summary report for Assurance Committee identifying common themes and issues. Any cross-University professional service issues are identified by AQS and services responses and actions are included in the summary reports.

2.99 The programme review process is undertaken on a six-yearly cycle on cognate subject areas and is based on the same procedure as programme approval. In addition to the standard validation documentation, the review documentation includes a critical commentary, recent AME reports, statistical data and the review panel meeting with current students and where possible alumni. The annual report on validations to Assurance Committee also includes details of reviews. Where programmes are also run on overseas campuses and partners, these are included in the review and contain additional information on resources, staff CVs, and feedback from students and staff by videoconferencing. Franchise partners are also reviewed on their own six-year cycle aligned to the institutional re-approval process.

2.100 School committees can approve minor changes to programmes and modules which do not substantially change the module and will enhance the student experience. Major changes, including course closure, are defined in the LQEH and require the support of the School Committee and Academic Provision Approvals Committee. The design of these policies and processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.101 The review team tested this by reading the University's LQEH, examining annual monitoring and enhancement documentation for UK and overseas sites and partners, programme review documentation, external examiners' reports, committee minutes, and by talking to staff and students.

2.102 The University reviews its course monitoring process regularly and ensures alignment with Expectation B8 of the Quality Code. Assurance Committee reviews monitoring operations annually and updates the process appropriately. The process, while designed to be forward looking with a minimum of historical data, does use a comprehensive range of data, including feedback from students via the NSS and MSS. The introduction of new software has enabled the presentation of data in a more accessible format and in a timely manner, such that results of KPIs like NSS and progression can be considered and actioned well before the formal AMR process and monitored at regular intervals. The review team considers the transparent use of benchmarked targets, based on robust data, which strengthens the annual monitoring process to be **good practice**.

2.103 Student involvement in the formal annual monitoring review process is limited to a Student Union officer sitting on the departmental review panel. Students confirmed they had little involvement or awareness of the process or the outcomes for their courses, but the team saw evidence that the reports are reported and discussed at Boards of Studies.

2.104 The action plans produced are comprehensive and are reviewed regularly by senior management and the School management teams. Partners and overseas campuses use a different reporting format which covers the information relevant to them and receive thorough feedback on their reports. The panel saw clear evidence that partners and overseas campuses are systematically engaged in annual programme monitoring and departmental reviews.

2.105 The University undertakes a six-yearly review of its provision in a timely and systematic manner, using the same processes as validation with additional evidence reflecting on the effectiveness of the provision and rationale for proposed changes. The annual report received by Assurance Committee on validations also includes reviews, which ensures the University maintains effective oversight.

2.106 The University's processes to support the monitoring and review of programmes are clearly defined and implemented. The use of robust benchmarked data provides a clear focus to the processes. Overall, the review team concludes that the University meets Expectation B8 in both design and operation, and the associated level of risk is low.

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



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

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

**Findings**

2.107 The University offers all students the opportunity to raise matters of concern without the risk of being disadvantaged as a result. The academic appeals and student complaints regulations are applicable to all taught students regardless of their programme or study level. However, research students have a different set of regulations which are independent and formal.

2.108 The University's partner institutions can have their own internal complaints process but these procedures must be exhausted before a student on a collaborative programme can appeal to the University. The University reserves the final right of academic appeals for students on collaborative programmes. As standard procedure, all students have the right to appeal to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA). The University does not consider complaints made anonymously; however, students can lodge a complaint as a group.

2.109 The University has clear published appeals and complaints processes that are available to all students, and provide students with appropriate informal channels through which to clarify matters prior to raising complaints and appeals through the formal processes. The University is in the process of implementing guidance from the OIA Good Practice Framework, towards mechanisms that focus on the provision of advice and guidance and secure early resolution. The appeals regulations were changed in 2014-15, and in summer 2015 the complaints regulations were also reviewed.

2.110 The University has detailed policies and regulations in place for their appeals and complaints processes. This would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.111 The review team tested the effectiveness of the arrangements available to meet the Expectation by reviewing the relevant evidence provided by the University and by meeting different stakeholders. The review team met various student groups as well as the University and partner staff to ensure that the University is complying with its regulations.

2.112 The regulations provide detailed information on academic appeals and complaints to both staff and students. The regulations include how both appeals and complaints should be processed and managed, with the University's overseas campuses following the same procedures and regulations as the main campus. However, in the case of appeals, results are considered by assessment boards held at the main campus. In addition to the guidance provided by the University for students, MdxSU also produces detailed guides for students on making appeals and complaints.

2.113 The University is currently in the process of implementing guidance from the OIA Good Practice Framework, aiming towards mechanisms that focus on the provision of advice and guidance and finding early resolutions.

2.114 Students the review team met had some knowledge of the complaints and appeals procedures. Students were also aware that procedures are available on the VLE and in handbooks. Staff understand the process of appeals and complaints. Procedures are different for postgraduate research students. Their complaints are reported to the Research

Degree Board, and Research Degree Support Officers can provide informal advice and support in relation to research student concerns.

2.115 Assurance Committee receives annual reports on appeals and undertakes a regular review. Reports include data on appeals originating from overseas campuses as well as the partner organisations. Statistical data is provided based on School, residence, ethnicity, gender, age and disability. Assurance Committee received its first report on complaints in October 2015. The report acknowledged that, previously, staff have not been required to record and report on complaints and consequently the data was incomplete. The report made a number of recommendations to improve the recording and monitoring of complaints. The review team **affirms** the positive steps being taken to improve the recording and monitoring of complaints.

2.116 The review team concludes that, on balance, the University meets Expectation B9. However, due to not having a structured mechanism in place to monitor, analyse or report on students' complaints, the associated level of risk is moderate.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.117 Managing higher education provision with other providers represents a significant proportion of the University's activity as measured by student numbers: over 9,000 undergraduate, over 4,000 postgraduate taught, and over 700 research students. There are 88 partners and while there is a strategic approach to partner selection, matching ethos and interests, the University does not have any specific deliberative or executive function in relation to the higher education provision it manages with other providers. Instead, this provision is dealt with as part of the usual business of the University's processes for managing its provision and is regarded as an integral, rather than separate, business activity. The centralised approach is set out in a policy statement and shows strong articulation with the University's mission and Strategic Plan. Administratively, the Centre for Academic Partnerships has responsibility for making sure the links are managed effectively.

2.118 At the time of the review, the University was developing an International Strategy, which has the potential to shape activity, including collaborative activity, based on an appraisal of the University's current and projected position.

2.119 The Centre for Academic Partnerships keeps a register of provision, an abstracted version of which is publicly available on the University's website. The Centre for Academic Partnerships, working with Schools, is charged with ensuring that the register is complete and that partnership agreements are in-date.

2.120 The University clearly sets out in the LQEH its classification of its provision delivered in conjunction with other providers. Franchised programmes are designed, assessed and quality assured by the University but delivered at and by a partner institution. Joint programmes are developed, delivered and assessed jointly with a partner institution (or institutions) and quality assured by the University. Validated programmes are developed, assessed and delivered by a partner institution but are quality assured by the University. Some partners were formerly granted accredited status, but this is now known as enhanced validated status and applies to two partners. The change was in response to the publication of *Chapter B10* of the Quality Code, and brought these two partners academically closer to the University. Management arrangements with these two partners are necessarily complex, with one of these partners involving more than one University School, and each is managed in part by a joint body. The University currently has a small number of dual awards and no joint awards, but a useful set of guidance on both these types of award is part of the LQEH.

2.121 The University assures itself of the probity and appropriate standing of a potential partner institution, and that the general educational ethos of the partner is compatible with that of the University, through its institutional approval process. The process normally involves a visit to the potential partner, but this may be waived under circumstances stipulated in the LQEH, and to aid decision a template is completed that gives an indication of the level of risk. Eligible circumstances include where potential partners have a high reputation and their own degree-awarding powers.

2.122 Institutional re-approval is a relatively light-touch process and involves a short report from a Quality Enhancement Manager based on declarations from the partner and

annual monitoring reports, though financial reports are produced annually or biennially, dependent on the level of perceived risk, and are scrutinised by the Director of Finance, or nominee.

2.123 Institutional monitoring occurs via a single annual report to Assurance Committee based on a risk profile for each partner. This enhanced reporting was introduced as a response to the publication of *Chapter B10* of the Quality Code. Where concerns are raised following institutional monitoring, an institutional review may be sanctioned to allow the University to assure itself that the partner follows its quality processes and meets its requirements.

2.124 Videoconferencing has been used for programme validation events but only where there has been a visit to that partner previously, there is a cognate programme already running, and it is deemed low risk.

2.125 The principal agreement between the University and its partners is the memorandum of cooperation (MoC) at programme or module level. The MoC is agreed and signed near the time of validation or review and defines the programme, responsibilities, and administrative, operating and financial details. In addition to MoCs, the University is moving towards partnership agreements, which are agreed and signed following institutional approval or re-approval, define the collaboration at the level of the institution, and stipulate relative responsibilities. At the time of the review, partnership agreements were in place with over half of the University's partners.

2.126 While the Centre for Academic Partnerships is the custodian of MoCs and partnership agreements, overall responsibility lies with Assurance Committee, which receives an annual update from the Centre for Academic Partnerships on the current position.

2.127 Termination of collaborative partnerships is possible, with details in the partner agreements. All programmes are required to have a contingency plan whose intention 'is to put in place arrangements that would allow such students to complete identical or similar University awards elsewhere'. At the time of the review, all franchised overseas programmes had a plan in place, but plans were only present for 90 per cent of validated UK-based programmes (not including for partners whose agreement with the University is being terminated) and 72 per cent of validated overseas programmes. In future, contingency plans will be part of MoCs. The University provided the review team with the Assurance Committee-approved teach-out plan for one partner. The team viewed the plan as fit for purpose.

2.128 The main contact between the University and the collaborative partner institution at the level of programme operation is the link tutor - University link tutor (ULT) at the University and institution link tutor (ILT) at the partner. The ULT is an academic post; the ILT is normally an academic post but exceptionally it may be agreed that staff with a sufficient overview of the organisation may be appointed, for example administrative staff. ULTs have responsibility for standards, delivery and liaison, in particular ensuring that the environment and resources are maintained to facilitate learning. For validated provision the ULT represents the University at assessment boards and in all cases is a member of the relevant Boards of Study. Explicit guidance on the responsibilities of both ULTs and ILTs is given in the LQEH.

2.129 An internal audit of link tutors in 2014 recommended a series of actions, many of which the University has addressed or is addressing. Work-loading was identified as a concern and although the University produced a detailed response listing the arrangements in each School, some of the ULTs the review team met did not have a formal workload allocation for that role.

2.130 The Centre for Academic Partnerships provides support for ULTs. Initial training is run by the Centre for Academic Partnerships, and ULTs are expected to attend. Training is also available for ILTs.

2.131 The University's policies and procedures would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.132 The review team accessed a range of documentation associated with collaborative and placement requirements, including various committee minutes. The team viewed a selection of MoCs and partnership agreements and read validation and revalidation reports from a number of collaborative partners. The team met senior staff, academic staff, professional staff, link tutors, staff at collaborative partners in the UK and overseas, and students undertaking learning through working with others and students from collaborative partners in the UK and overseas.

2.133 The review team regarded the partner approvals and six-yearly re-approvals processes as effective, with appropriate annual overview reporting to Assurance Committee. An approval visit team may be as small as one person plus an officer, and in some cases, where the due diligence process reveals low risk, there may not be a visit.

2.134 The review team regarded the MoCs and partnership agreements as fit for purpose and protecting the needs of students; staff the team met noted these documents as protecting both the University and its students. However, the team also noted that recently some programmes had commenced without an agreement in place. For example, in November 2013, of 571 programmes 25 were not covered by an in-date MoC, including a PhD programme. In November 2014, seven programmes were operating without a MoC and two of those were also not covered by a partnership agreement. This is despite a system being introduced to eliminate delays in signing agreements.

2.135 The team was told that the absence of a MoC was not a risk to the University because technically students only become students of the University and thus the University's concern once the MoCs are in place. However, the team formed the view that the late completion of a MoC, after a programme had been started, meant that students were studying for a University award but without both acknowledgement from the University and the protection that a MoC affords. The MoC indicates that the University regards the course the students are following as one of its own and such acknowledgement cannot be applied retrospectively.

2.136 Although the number of programmes running without a MoC in place has reduced considerably and at the time of the review there were no programmes operating without a signed MoC in place, the team heard that this had not been brought about through any identifiable systematic and directed process, notwithstanding the system noted above. The review team therefore **recommends** that the University implement and embed a system to ensure that its requirements for the establishment of formal agreements with partners are met.

2.137 The LQEH contains useful guidelines on marketing for partners, and each year the Centre for Academic Partnerships audits a selection of material and provides a report to Assurance Committee.

2.138 In 2014-15 there were just over 1,000 students undertaking placement learning. Despite a signed contract between the student and placement provider to confirm the details of the work placement being in place before the placement commences, documentation for the overall management and support of students on placement and systems for evaluating their effectiveness are not well developed. MdxSU has received feedback that indicates students have experienced a lack of support with organising and completing their placements and this has been confirmed as a cross-cutting theme in the annual

enhancement report and the NSS questions for NHS students. Students met by the review team reported generally positive experiences as well as noting that some aspects of preparation and support on placement could be strengthened in specific courses. Building on effective internal practice, the University plans to implement, from 2015-16, standardised procedures for the management of placements (long and short) with stronger oversight by the Employability Service. The Employability Service has recently issued helpful Guidelines for Student Work Placement that set out the responsibilities of the University, its students and placement employers. The review team examined a number of placement module handbooks and regarded them as informative and fit for purpose. For placements in clinical environments, the quality of the placement environment is audited in conjunction with the placement provider to maintain both the safety of, and the quality of the experience for, the student.

2.139 The review team considers that the University has, in the main, effective procedures for managing higher education provision with others. Although this Expectation is met, there is a moderate degree of risk associated with the lack of a functioning system to ensure that the University's requirements for the establishment of formal agreements with partners are met.

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

**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**

2.140 Academic Board delegates responsibility for the quality and standards of research degrees to Assurance Committee. The Research Degree Board (RDB) is responsible for the maintenance of research degree standards, oversees the examination process, and confirms awards and recommendations of the School/IWBL and Progression Boards. It also considers more general matters relating to research degree provision as appropriate. The objectives for research are articulated clearly in the University's Academic Strategy and there is a Research Policy in place, updates of which are approved and endorsed by Academic Board. The Director of Research reports to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic and chairs RDB. Research is discussed at School Boards of Study and partners' Research Committees and Boards of Study.

2.141 The maintenance of academic standards is ensured by common registration, transfer and examination procedures and in relation to partner provision, by the University's rationale for the selection of partners offering research provision.

2.142 Each School and the IWBL ensures that formal structures are in place to monitor research degree provision, based on guidance provided in the LQEH. Academic standards are monitored through annual reporting to Assurance Committee on research degree activity including data on applications, student numbers and completions.

2.143 The University's framework for managing the academic quality and standards of its awards is set out in its Research Degree Regulations, including those for DProf. This is supplemented with Research Degrees, Practice, Policies and Procedures, which set out the University's standards for its research degree programmes and provide a framework for those supporting the research degree lifecycle. There is, in addition, the Research Students and Supervisors' Handbook, Research Student Handbooks for each partner offering doctoral provision, a DProf Programme Handbook published by the IWBL and a Research Degrees Examination Handbook for MA/MSc Research Students.

2.144 The Research Code of Practice sets out the principles and procedures governing research practice, referencing guidance from the Research Councils' Statement on Safeguarding Good Scientific Practice.

2.145 The University ensures that research degrees meet the expectations of the Quality Code. Assurance Committee reports to Academic Board on indicator mapping. School Ethics Committees report to the University Ethics Committee, which monitors and reviews all aspects of ethical issues including resources to embed practice. The Academic Registry provides administrative support for research degrees, together with that for taught degrees. There are also Research Degree Support Officers for each of the Schools. The policies and procedures in place would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.146 The review team considered a range of documentary material relating to the management of research degrees. These included regulations, handbooks, research degree administration forms, training materials for staff and students, committee and board minutes,

online resources and research degree completion data. The review team met staff responsible for the management and delivery of research degrees, current supervisors and current students drawn from a range of research degree programmes.

2.147 The University commissioned an independent review of doctoral provision in 2013 and the responses to the action plan demonstrate that measures have been taken to address the issues identified. A single set of regulations has allowed the University to improve the consistency of application of procedures and the resources to enhance the guidance and support available to staff and students. Assurance Committee and RDB minutes demonstrate that an appropriate range of business is conducted in an effective way.

2.148 Academic Board receives annual reports from Assurance Committee on Doctoral Achievement and on Academic Quality and Standards on Research Degrees and approves changes to Research Degree Regulations and Procedures.

2.149 Information for applicants is available on the web. Initial scrutiny of applications determines whether students meet the necessary entry requirements, reviews the research proposal and ensures that appropriate supervision is available. Schools only recruit to areas of research where there is supervisory capacity. Any individual student needs are identified at enrolment and induction.

2.150 Students are interviewed, over the internet if necessary. Professional experience and current work in an appropriate professional environment is an additional requirement for the M/DProf. Applications for research degrees are reviewed by the chair of RDB, or nominee, and another member of academic staff to ensure consistency in selection and development for staff involved in interviewing is incorporated into the supervisor training provided by the University.

2.151 Selection for admission to collaborative research degrees is undertaken by the collaborative partner, in accordance with the admissions criteria agreed by the University and as defined in the MoC.

2.152 Induction is in two parts, the first being provided centrally and incorporating general information and the second held in Schools. Distance learning students attend induction on campus or in the case of M/DProf can be inducted through MyUniHub and their academic advisers.

2.153 All students receive a handbook, either in hard copy or available on the VLE, which also supports the handbooks with active learning resources and other relevant information. The Research Degree Regulations, available to prospective and current students, provide details on regulations surrounding admission, enrolment, registration, supervision, progress monitoring, examination, complaints and appeals, and were commended by students. Students attested both to the quality of inductions and the usefulness of the range of information available in handbooks and through MyUniHub.

2.154 All students are assigned a Director of Studies and a second supervisor, and in the case of the M/DProf a programme adviser and a consultant; their responsibilities are articulated in handbooks. All supervisors must attend staff development provided by the University. DProf students and distance learning students may have external supervisors in addition to a Director of Studies/Adviser to provide ongoing support. Students spoke very positively about the high quality of supervision and overall support.

2.155 Collaborative partners provide in-house training and the University link tutor works closely with the partners to share good practice and maintains an overview of these activities. All students from partner institutions are eligible to attend the RDP and staff and students may participate in research seminar programmes.



2.156 Research progress is reviewed at least twice a year by School progression boards and by panels at the transition points of registration and transfer. These progression boards were introduced as a result of the University's 2013 review and are proving beneficial in identifying students in difficulty.

2.157 Progress and review arrangements also pertain to students on collaborative doctorates and the University is directly involved in key progression points. For the Specialist Validated Pathways, review of progress is at an individual level and is supplemented by annual monitoring of programmes in line with all collaborative annual monitoring. Research students undertaking the two research training and development modules are subject to the taught programme regulations.

2.158 Assessment is centralised and the process is outlined in the regulations and handbooks. RDB approves examination teams. All examinations have an independent chair and a minimum of two examiners, of which at least one must be external; proposed research degree viva arrangements and examiners must be approved by RDB which confirms the award. Panels of enquiry look at failure and the award of a different degree. Suitably qualified staff from partner institutions may be appointed as chairs, at the discretion of the University, but are required to undertake the appropriate training.

2.159 The same arrangements apply at collaborative partner institutions. Oral examinations take place at the partner institutions and internal examiners are, where possible, from that institution to allow for staff development.

2.160 Complaints and appeals processes are available to students. Complaints are reported to RDB and documented in the annual report. Complaints in partner institutions are submitted to the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic) and managed according to the regulations and general complaints procedure. Appeals are also reported to RDB.

2.161 Student feedback is facilitated by the standard institutional mechanism of the Board of Study conducted at School level, and the results are posted on the VLE. Relevant School/IWBL staff attend Boards of Study. The School student support officer in Academic Registry provides a first point of contact or students can contact the Director of Research, or Head of Department, Deputy Dean or Dean directly as well as raising issues with their supervisor or Adviser/Consultant. The modular M/DProf enables module feedback and in 2014-15 the PRES survey was undertaken. The University acknowledged that response rates were low but effort is being made to increase student engagement with the survey.

2.162 Students are supported at central and local levels by the student support team in Academic Registry and all research students have access to computers, printers, telephones, and hot desking and laboratory and studio spaces. Many research students are now housed in the refurbished Town Hall. Students expressed some concern over finance support and administration.

2.163 Resources for collaborative provision are ensured through validation and students have access to the University's library facilities, the researcher development programme and other events. The staff reported that research partners all have active research environments.

2.164 The IWBL assumes responsibility to support the M/DProf and shares good practice with all DProfs through the Professional Doctorate Development Group, which meets three times a year. Its staff development workshops were cited as good practice in the QAA 2009 Institutional Audit and are open to all supervisory staff.

2.165 The University encourages students' integration into an effective research environment, both on campus in London and at partner institutions. The review team heard

from research staff and students that this was achieved in a variety of ways, for example School-led subject-specific research training, research seminars and the annual research student conference, which allows students to present their research. The students spoke very positively about the research culture. Student attendance at conferences is supported across the Schools. The move to one campus at Hendon has encouraged additional inter-School collaboration.

2.166 The Researcher Development Programme (RDP) has been reviewed recently to provide a wider range of formal development opportunities for students with online support and concentrates on preparing new researchers. These sessions are compulsory for new MPhil/PhD doctoral students, and are open to all doctoral students. M/DProf students follow a parallel, compulsory programme tailored to their specific needs. The University has institutional membership of Vitae to provide students with online self-help career planning and guidance. Students spoke very positively about the RDP.

2.167 Doctoral students may teach between four and six hours per week and there is a policy in place for Preparing Research Students for Effective Teaching. The Doctoral Development Programme is a short course in Learning, Teaching and Assessment provided by CAPE and led by the Head of CAPE and academic developers. Students attested to the value of this programme.

2.168 In conclusion, the University has put in place an appropriate and effective framework for managing the academic quality and standards of research degrees. The evidence considered by the review team demonstrates that Expectation B11 is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

2.170 Of the 11 Expectations in this area, all are met. Seven have a low associated level of risk and four have a moderate associated level of risk. There are four recommendations, one affirmation and two features of good practice in this area.

2.171 Recommendations relate to the University's need to improve its record-keeping, monitoring and reporting in some areas. For example, timely completion of the external examiner report and response cycle, monitoring, analysing and reporting student complaints, and tracking variations in regulations. Two distinct recommendations are made in assessment, one relating to the importation of marks and the other to recognition of prior learning decisions. Finally, the team recommends that the University implement and embed a system to ensure that its requirements for the establishment of formal agreements with partners are met.

2.172 The review team finds that the University's GAA and SLA schemes foster student engagement in their academic experience (Expectation B4). The team particularly notes the University's transparent use of benchmarked targets, based on robust data, which strengthens the annual monitoring process (Expectation B8).

2.173 There is evidence that the University is aware of its responsibilities for assuring quality. The recommendations generally relate to omissions or oversights with one recommendation highlighting the need for a system to ensure formal agreements with partners are in place so students are not put at risk. Any actions will not require or result in a major structural, operational or procedural change. There is activity already underway in a small number of areas that, once completed, will enable the University to meet the Expectations more fully.

2.174 Therefore, the review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the University **meets** UK expectations.

### **3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities**

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

#### **Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision**

##### **Findings**

- 3.1 The University's main public interface is its website and especially the About Us section, which covers all aspects of the University including its programmes, governance, research and international activity. The website also has a self-explanatory Strategies and Policies section. The University evidenced internal checking and external confirmation of compliance with key information set and wider information set requirements.
- 3.2 The University maintains a full schedule of policy publication, review and responsibility for institutional-level committee sign-off of major policies as well as a more operational schedule of review and sign-off of the range of University promotional material, including an annual audit of collaborative promotional material and an annual audit of collaborative partners' promotional material for oversight by Assurance Committee.
- 3.3 The LQEH sets out information of the University's academic quality assurance arrangements. The LQEH is updated annually via Assurance Committee and is the University's main internal reference point when considering possible regulatory changes in the light of external factors such as the Quality Code. The consolidated Research Degrees Regulations, Research Degrees Practice, Policies and Procedures and the doctoral programme handbooks provide the research equivalent.
- 3.4 The University publishes an undergraduate prospectus and a postgraduate prospectus, in hard copy and online. The University's outreach strategy combines both student recruitment and preparation for study at higher education level. The Life at Middlesex section of its website covers the full range of information, academic and pastoral, for prospective students. The Courses section of its website, including a course finder function, fully covers the application process for a diverse potential student clientele including embedded links to programme specifications.
- 3.5 The University's Student Guide, Go For It, forms an attractive and comprehensive resource for new students. A range of student information is provided in relation to student representation and student feedback including explanations of student surveys, MdxSU sabbatical officers, Boards of Study and Student Voice Leaders. A key point of the University's approach to student feedback is its publication of You Said, We Did, an electronic bulletin.
- 3.6 The University and the MdxSU have jointly developed a Student Charter which sets out the expectations the respective parties have of each other. It is published on the student portal, UniHub, and the staff intranet.
- 3.7 MyUniHub also hosts programme handbooks, cited by the University as the principal source of information for students. AQS maintains the definitive version of programme specifications and module narratives and is working with Schools on their greater customisation of the information in programme handbooks, while maintaining a minimum institutional standard, to better meet local and disciplinary needs.

3.8 The University retains final approval of the wording and format for award certification and produces diploma supplements (transcripts) for all but validated collaborative partners where monitoring is carried out by the Centre for Academic Partnerships. Although the University has a system which permits such an eventuality in exceptional circumstances, the University reported that there are no instances where the collaborative partner's details do not appear on at least the diploma supplement.

3.9 The University maintains a Collaborative Provision Register, via the Centre for Academic Partnerships, and publishes this as 'Our Current Partners' on its website. It is improving version control arrangements by lodging the information on a University-level database directly linking to the University website. AQSs also reports annually to Assurance Committee on PSRB accreditations and Ofsted inspections, and maintains an internal PSRB register.

3.10 The review team tested the University's information provision by extensive sampling and by discussion in meetings with staff, students and collaborative partners. The students whom the review team met reported University information overall to be broadly accurate and accessible. The review team also accessed UniHub and the VLE to sample programme and module-level student information.

3.11 Both in the student submission submitted for this review and in meetings with the review team, students raised the issue of a lack of systematisation of arrangements for the communication of matters of an immediate nature, such as an unscheduled lecture cancellation or postponement. Staff reported local initiatives to improve such communication, such as increased use of social media to supplement email and other notification mechanisms, but argued that such highly infrequent and sudden occurrences, though displeasing to individual students, were by their nature difficult to manage.

3.12 Expectation B8 in this report comments on the University's current use of statistical data to improve the effective management of teaching and learning. The University intends to optimise and maximise the further development of this software and to integrate its information systems and extend use to all levels of staff and also to students.

3.13 Overall, the University has effective structures in place to ensure that the information it provides to students, staff and a wider external audience is fit for purpose, trustworthy and accessible. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation C is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

3.15 The Expectation in this area is met and the associated level of risk is low. There are no recommendations, affirmations or features of good practice. There are limited examples of student engagement in the management of this area.

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

## 4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

### Findings

4.1 The University's approach to enhancement is articulated in its Academic Standards and Quality Policy as being 'the explicit processes put in place to improve the student experience over time'. These processes operate at both institutional and local levels. They are embedded through quality assurance mechanisms that promote enhancement; through initiatives to promote and share best practice; and through specific initiatives that drive incremental improvements to the student experience.

4.2 The University describes a key element of the enhancement process as the identification and adoption of good practice, and the Strategic Plan identifies enhancing student achievement and satisfaction as one of its two strategic priorities. The Interim Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2012-15 articulates three objectives for enhancing learning, progression and achievement.

4.3 The Achievement Committee oversees enhancement, and CAPE is identified by the University as being the principal central resource not only responsible for the provision of a series of developmental activities but also for the scrutiny of the effectiveness of central and local interventions to promote enhancement. CAPE develops targeted interventions and working with AQS also ensures the correct balance between enhancement and quality assurance.

4.4 The University's strategic and operational approaches to enhancement would allow the Expectation to be met.

4.5 The review team tested the operation of the University's approach, and the progress being made, by meeting with a range of staff, senior managers, professional services and students and by reading a range of documentation and committee minutes.

4.6 AQS scrutinises annual reports on validation and review, external examining, assessment results, student engagement, student feedback and attainment data, quality monitoring, and attendant data produced by the various quality assurance mechanisms. This information is drawn together in the AME process, which identifies good practice for wider dissemination.

4.7 The University identifies AME as the principal means of identifying good practice and AQS works with CAPE to disseminate particular examples across the University. Staff spoke positively about the involvement of colleagues from other departments, and AQS in AME as a means of disseminating identified good practice.

4.8 The Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic chairs all AME meetings, allowing him an overview of developments. The themes and issues identified from the process are drawn together in an annual report to Assurance Committee, which in turn identifies themes of institutional significance relating to quantitative and qualitative information on the following areas such as recruitment, progression, achievement, performance against external benchmarks, student feedback, collaborative provision, overseas campus provision, employability, good practice and a general commentary by the School or Department. The report also includes an action plan. Good practice is shared as a result of staff involvement in AME meetings in other Schools. The University sets particular store by

its annual monitoring processes and offers a range of opportunities for the dissemination of the good practice identified.

4.9 The LQEH is reviewed and enhanced annually. This has resulted in improvements to quality assurance processes, for example the changes to major/minor modification criteria, which reduced procedural barriers to innovation.

4.10 The University seeks to embed enhancement by aligning the pedagogies of different subjects, allowing good practice and innovations to transfer across subject communities. Exemplars of good practice are drawn from the HEA, and the close relationship between CAPE and the Schools fosters advances in pedagogic practice.

4.11 At institutional level, good practice is shared through the Academic Excellence Exchange hosted by CAPE. This includes a keynote session in November followed by regular meetings and webinars, including a session on good practice arising from the AME; Teaching Fellows linked to the National Teaching Fellowship scheme support cross-University development in teaching practice and support responses to AME issues; 'Inspire', the electronic newsletter to disseminate the work of the National Teaching Fellows; mini conferences; and the academic practice forum.

4.12 Other initiatives include developing academic practice, offering staff development for continuing professional development, which includes the PGCHE; Doctoral Students Development Programme: short course in Learning, Teaching and Assessment; and workshops on Technology Enhanced Learning and Curriculum Design and Development. There are also wide-ranging resources available on the staff intranet. Staff spoke positively about the University Annual Learning and Teaching Conference, which adopts an annual focus and includes external and internal contributions.

4.13 The strategic priority for enhancement contextualises projects such as the Pan University Review of Assessment Project which is operated on a School-by-School basis and the outcomes reported to Achievement Committee. The Health and Education Assessment Literacy Project and the Art and Design development created to produce a visual composition guide and build a portfolio system are both direct outcomes of this initiative. The online reading list project represents a fundamental shift in the way reading lists are generated. Other initiatives include the digital literacy project, which has the central aim of reviewing current practice and identifying staff development needs to realise the potential of digital literacy as a graduate attribute and the updating of the VLE platform. A range of LSS initiatives were prompted by poor NSS scores and include the 24/7 library access, free printing and personal e-books. The e-assessment project enables students to submit and receive feedback electronically.

4.14 The Middlesex Student Satisfaction Survey mirrors the NSS and, as such, provides valuable data. Following the NSS outcomes, Schools prepare action plans, and programme teams and CAPE conduct focus groups with students. There has been some improvement in NSS scores.

4.15 The University has worked closely with MdxSU over the past three years through the MdxSU project, supported by the University Executive and the Director for Learning, Teaching and the Student Experience. The SU was restructured and has seen significant work. This has followed a traditional route of partnership working, with changes in the academic societies' portfolio and a Christmas Market.

4.16 A framework for partnership is now being developed, the values and protocols of which are to be measured against project work in employability, innovative pedagogy and student engagement. This work is at an early stage, but staff and students spoke positively about progress achieved to date.



4.17 The review team found evidence that staff were well acquainted with individual and local enhancement initiatives, but less conversant with institutional priorities in any given year.

4.18 In summary, the review team concludes that the University has a range of deliberate steps in place at institutional and local level to ensure the enhancement of student learning opportunities. Therefore the Enhancement Expectation is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

4.20 The Expectation in this area is met and the associated level of risk is low. There are no recommendations, affirmations or features of good practice in this area.

4.21 The University takes a strategic approach to the enhancement of learning opportunities. There is evidence of growing awareness of, and involvement in, various projects and initiatives that illustrate the commitment to enhancement. There is an ethos that expects and encourages enhancement and there are mechanisms for the identification and dissemination of good practice. Quality assurance mechanisms are used to identify opportunities for enhancement.

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

## 5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

### Findings

#### **Innovations in promoting the employability and entrepreneurial skills of students**

5.1 The University's Employability Policy makes a commitment to enabling students to plan a route to employment or further study, gain employability skills, secure a graduate-level job, plan ongoing professional development and enhance career progression once in work.

5.2 The University's approach to employability has resulted in a significant rise in employability outcomes reported through the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey. The University's MdxSU is strongly committed to working in partnership with the University on student employability and directly supports volunteering and paid employment opportunities for its students.

5.3 Working with its Schools, the University's Employability Service is a key team in the collaborative and pan-University approach to employability, and is leading on the implementation of the new Employability Strategy. The team offers support to students developing the employability skills needed for their programme and their career including an Employability Centre for face-to-face support, a range of technology-supported advice, assistance with sourcing work experience, a job vacancy database for paid work and placement/internships, a dedicated recruitment service for final-year students, assistance for international students gaining work in their home country, a range of events, a range of resources and an online employability self-assessment tool. While these activities and resources continue to be available, a recent review has simplified the presentation and focus of their offer to two strands of activity - one-to-one employment and enterprise support for students, and employability business partner support for Schools. The University also continues to promote and support student work experience activities. An employability model for undergraduate students articulates what support and activities the University offers and what students need to do at each level of study.

5.4 The Director of Employability and the deans are working together on a range of initiatives to make better use of the DLHE data and improve employability through a range of projects. Professional support teams, beyond the Employability Service, also contribute to the development of student employability skills by offering work experience (Human Resources facilitated internships across the University); specialist training (Financial Markets Lab); volunteering opportunities (Sport and Recreation); paid work (for example as an Ambassador or SLA); and the Student Exchange Service (Erasmus+). There are well-developed plans to improve the speed, scope and granularity of data reports relating to employability and embed the new Employability Portal and Employability Service.

5.5 Through a network of University staff, external practitioners and volunteers, the Business School's Enterprise Development Hub offers a range of individual and group interventions to support students wishing to set up their own businesses or further develop their entrepreneurial skills. A design and innovation centre run by the School of Science and Technology, known as redLoop, offers opportunities to work on commercial design and technology projects. The University's PG Connect series of external speakers gives staff and students access to inspirational talks by leading entrepreneurs.

5.6 The University has no plans to offer students individual higher education achievement reports, but continues to offer the diploma supplement. The MdxSU offers a Middlesex award for student volunteering.

**How employers are involved in the delivery and development of the curriculum**

5.7 Schools draw on employers during programme design and validation to ensure they facilitate the development of students' employability skills. Programmes are accredited, recognised or kite-marked by professional bodies wherever appropriate in subjects such as Law, Psychology, Human Resources, Television Production and Nursing and these events all involve professional experts on the panels. Working in partnership with employers across the UK and internationally, programmes are also developed to offer opportunities for work experience including work-based learning, industry-endorsed projects, placements and internships. All Schools provided a range of examples of how they have achieved this including Art and Design's London Fashion Week placement; Law's provision of work experience in chambers, law clinics and non-governmental organisations; and Health and Education which has extensive partnership working at all levels as part of meeting their PSRB requirements. The University plans to increase the number of credit-bearing work experience, internship and placement opportunities. A consistent approach to the effective management of placements is being rolled out across the University in 2015-16, building on effective internal practice.

5.8 The IWBL is internationally recognised for its expertise in this field, undertaking research and professional development and supporting the career development of postgraduate research students. Other Schools offer professional development for the existing workforce in their area of expertise.

5.9 There are a range of links with employers at programme and University level including employer forums, which connect students with employers; employer panels where employers offer feedback to students on their assessment; professional development opportunities where students can become members of professional bodies; networking such as Media and Performing Art's engagement with the FutureRising community of practice; and external assessors for validation and review panels. The University has appointed senior industry figures as professors directly to support students' understanding of sector practice and has made fractional or joint appointments with practising professionals able to teach and mentor students. In addition, University staff hold key positions in professional bodies.

## 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 30 to 33 of the [Higher Education Review handbook](#).

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

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

### Academic standards

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

### Award

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

### Blended learning

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

### Credit(s)

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

### Degree-awarding body

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

### Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

### Dual award or double award

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

### e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning

### **Enhancement**

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

### **Expectations**

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

### **Flexible and distributed learning**

A programme or module that does not require the student to attend classes or events at particular times and locations.

See also **distance learning**.

### **Framework**

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

### **Framework for higher education qualifications**

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

### **Good practice**

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

### **Learning opportunities**

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

### **Learning outcomes**

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

### **Multiple awards**

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

### **Operational definition**

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

### **Programme (of study)**

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

**Programme specifications**

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

**Public information**

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

**Quality Code**

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

**Reference points**

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

**Subject Benchmark Statement**

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

**Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)**

Learning that is delivered or supported through the use of technology.

**Threshold academic standard**

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

**Virtual learning environment (VLE)**

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

**Widening participation**

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

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