Higher Education Review (Plus) of The Prince's Foundation for Building Community

June 2015

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Plus) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at The Prince's Foundation for Building Community. The review took place from 29 to 30 June 2015 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Christopher Mabika
- Miss Claire Morgan.

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

In Higher Education Review (Plus) the QAA review team:

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

A check is also made on the provider's financial sustainability, management and governance (FSMG) with the aim of giving students reasonable confidence that they should not be at risk of being unable to complete their course as a result of financial failure.

In reviewing The Prince's Foundation for Building Community the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland. The selected theme for this review is Student Employability.

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 4. The QAA website gives more information about QAA and its mission.[2] A dedicated section explains the method for Higher Education Review (Plus).[3] For an explanation of terms see the glossary at the end of this report.

---

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

Key findings

QAA's judgements about The Prince's Foundation for Building Community

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at The Prince's Foundation for Building Community:

- The maintenance of the academic standards of award offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at The Prince's Foundation for Building Community.

- The Foundation's holistic approach to learning and teaching, which enables and encourages students to integrate different theories with the demands of progressive professional practice (Expectation B3).
- The Foundation's continuing review of its curriculum, with the aim of achieving a steady development and enhancement of student learning opportunities (Enhancement).

Affirmations of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms** the following actions that The Prince's Foundation for Building Community is already taking to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to its students.

- The current review of the Foundation's deliberative structure, designed to secure appropriate formal internal debate and discussion on academic policy and practice (Expectation A2.1).
- The steps being taken to ensure that the Student Handbook 2015-17 is comprehensive, current and accurate (Expectation C).

Theme: Student Employability

Employability is a central theme in the MA Sustainable Urbanism: all students undertake a substantial placement, which is carefully tailored to meet both the learning objectives of the programme and the individual needs or expectations of the student concerned. Placements are carefully and successfully integrated with academic teaching, and normally lead directly to employment on graduation.

Financial sustainability, management and governance

There were no material issues identified at The Prince's Foundation for Building Community during the financial sustainability, management and governance check.

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

About The Prince's Foundation for Building Community

The Prince's Foundation for Building Community (the Foundation) is one of a group of charities founded by His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales and of which the Prince is President. Its mission and function are to demonstrate, research and teach sustainable development, putting community engagement at its heart. Originally founded in 1992 as The Prince of Wales's Institute of Architecture, the Foundation went through several changes of designation until 2012, when it took its present title. It occupies one floor of an elegantly converted warehouse in Shoreditch, where it also shares a library, and other working and public space, with the three other charitable foundations housed in the same building.

The Foundation consists of Education, Enabling, and Championing Principles Teams with, in all, 18.8 full-time equivalent staff. Although for both practical and professional reasons the boundaries among the three teams are permeable, this review, the Foundation's first engagement with QAA, focuses mainly on the activities of the Education Team. This Team comprises two full-time equivalent staff, supported by teaching resources from within the Foundation, and by academics and professionals from elsewhere. Its higher education provision consist of an MA Sustainable Urbanism, leading to an award of the University of Wales Trinity Saint David (the University), and (out of scope for this review) a contribution to the University of Oxford's MSc Sustainable Urban Development. The latter involves the two staff members concerned being designated senior tutors of that university's Department of Continuing Education and visiting research associates of Kellogg College, roles which offer developmental opportunities that impact positively on their research and teaching.

The withdrawal of the Foundation's former awarding body, the University of Wales, from its validation activities meant that the Foundation underwent a major revalidation exercise in 2013. At the time of the review the MA Sustainable Urbanism had three part-time students, registered in 2013 but who transferred their registrations to the new awarding body: they are currently completing their dissertations. There was no intake in 2014, but one is planned for 2015.

The Education Team is currently addressing the challenges associated with its engagement with QAA as well as those common to the sector as a whole, including international recruitment. It is working to sustain and develop its industrial liaison with external provider networks, which it describes as critical to the continued provision of the sound and creative placements, the enhancement of learning opportunities, and employability. In addition, maintaining the distinctiveness of its programme, which, while initially unique, now faces both possible competition from, and opportunities for collaboration with, comparable programmes in the UK and overseas, remains an institutional priority.

Explanation of the findings about The Prince's Foundation for Building Community

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

Terms that may be unfamiliar have been included in a brief glossary at the end of this report. A fuller glossary of terms is available on the QAA website, where formal definitions of certain terms may also be found.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

1.1 Following the University of Wales' withdrawal from validation activity, in July 2013 the University assumed responsibility for the academic standards for the awards of the programme falling within the ambit of this review. Accordingly, the Foundation's MA Sustainable Urbanism was revalidated in a procedure that made appropriate reference to external reference points, including *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*; the *Master's Degree Characteristics*; and the Quality Code. Under the terms of the Memorandum of Agreement the Foundation writes the programme and the University sets threshold academic standards, and approves and awards the qualification. The conditions stipulate that learning outcomes reference the appropriate benchmark statements.

1.2 In the absence of a specific Subject Benchmark Statement the Foundation used appropriate undergraduate characteristics statements as a reference point for programme development: it described this process in detail in its self-evaluation document submitted as part of this review, and the review team confirms, from documentation including a small sample of external examiner reports, that the Foundation used the benchmark statements appropriately to steer its development of a master's level programme.

1.3   The review team confirms that appropriate procedures (including an Academic Board and an Examination Board) are in place. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.4   The Foundation is not a degree-awarding body, and all assessment and examining arrangements are the responsibility of the University, to which the Foundation submits an annual monitoring report. The University exercises close oversight of the activities of its academic partners: for example, it appoints external examiners, the reports of which it forwards to the contact point at the Foundation, requiring the Foundation's responses to be submitted to it, not to the examiners themselves.

1.5   The Foundation's contribution to maintaining academic standards is explicit in its Memorandum of Agreement with the University, which maps the respective responsibilities of the two institutions against the Quality Code. The review team confirms, on the basis of meetings with managers and teaching staff of the Foundation and with senior representatives of the University, that, while the presence of only three students makes evaluation difficult, the Foundation has engaged fully and professionally with the University's requirements.

1.6   The Foundation's Academic Board currently constitutes a vehicle for debate about academic issues before they are passed to the Board of Trustees, and for day-to-day decision-making. The Academic Board is a predominantly operational body; sign-off responsibility rests with the Board of Trustees. Both the University and the Foundation agree that the Academic Board should be replaced by another body offering internal oversight, possibly with external membership appropriate to a very small institution. The nature of this replacement is currently under review, with proposals to be submitted to Trustees later in 2015. The review team **affirms** the current review of the Foundation's deliberative structure, designed to secure appropriate formal internal debate and discussion on academic policy and practice.

1.7   The Foundation fulfils its obligations in respect of reference points for academic standards. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.8   The Memorandum of Agreement between the awarding body and the Foundation requires the latter to ensure that all programme details are forwarded in an agreed format within a specified time period, along with all documentation necessary for student progression and award to be reliably recorded. The review team confirms that the Foundation has discharged this obligation for the three students involved. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.9   The degree programme within the scope of this review, an existing one that had been otherwise validated, was reapproved through the University's normal procedures. The Foundation engaged fully with the revalidation, which it described as a collaborative activity. It addressed the recommendations from the reapproval in full and in a timely manner.

1.10   The operating framework between the Foundation and the University has the aim of achieving effective programme design and approval. The MA was described to the review team as having been co-developed in a process that involved the University, an external adviser and alumni/alumnae. All relevant external reference points are incorporated in University requirements. Procedures for programme modification, monitoring and review are clearly stated and well understood within the Foundation. The Foundation considers the curriculum of the revalidated programme superior to that of its predecessor, and the review team noted the meticulous manner in which the Foundation both engaged with the revalidation process and, subsequently, continues to monitor, review and develop its approach to teaching and supporting learning. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.11 Responsibility for the oversight of the conduct of assessment and maintenance of academic standards remains with the University, the Foundation having operational responsibility for assessment. Accordingly, the Foundation devises assessment tasks and submits them to the University for approval, and is responsible for first-marking, subject to University second-marking and moderation.

1.12 The University is similarly responsible for the two-tier examining board system and, as noted in paragraph 1.4, all aspects of external examining. The review team's scrutiny of assignment briefs and discussions with students confirmed that accurate information is provided on assessment weightings, methodology, criteria and learning outcomes, and that assessment regulations, policies and guidance are aligned with all relevant external expectations. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.13   The procedures by which the University ensures that academic standards are appropriately set and maintained are detailed in the Collaborative Partner Operations Manual and the Academic Quality Handbook. Procedures for annual programme review, partnership review, periodic review and revalidation are also specified in the Collaborative Partner Operations Manual and Academic Quality Handbook. The Partnership Responsibility Protocol sets out the different responsibilities for the University and the Foundation, and procedures are in place for minor modification to programmes and withdrawal of modules.

1.14   The review team found that Foundation staff are aware of their responsibilities and competent to discharge them. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.15   As noted in paragraph 1.4, external examiners' responsibilities are specified by the University and understood within the Foundation. External examiner reports scrutinised by the review team indicate that standards are maintained at appropriate levels.

1.16   The Foundation considers engagement with practitioners pivotal to its academic activities, and the review team accordingly explored the nature of its engagement with both placement providers and employers. The team found examples of the external delivery of masterclasses, strong links with employers and the sector for placement provisions, and of the Foundation's consistent and enthusiastic engagement with advice on academic and curriculum development, including the delivery of a curriculum that meets the interdisciplinary needs of best professional practice.

1.17   The Foundation, which considers the Academic Board's two external academic advisers (one being from the University of Oxford) 'invaluable at key moments', gave examples of how their expertise is used to advantage. In part in a reflection of this expertise the Foundation is now implementing its ambition to build four strategic partnerships for future educational collaboration.

1.18   Overall the Foundation, while not a degree-awarding body, makes sound use of external advice in the development, operation and monitoring of its programmes. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

1.19 The Foundation delivers one programme, the MA Sustainable Urbanism, for the University. This programme, formerly offered on behalf of the University of Wales, was revalidated in 2013 and the three students admitted in that year registered with the new awarding body.

1.20 The Foundation discharges its responsibilities to its awarding body assiduously and professionally, having engaged with an extensive revalidation in a positive manner. The MA encompasses both theoretical study and a significant practical element, and the Foundation takes justifiable pride in the integration of the two, in the nature and extent of its industrial links, and in the support it provides for students on work placements.

1.21 The Foundation is aware of its responsibilities in respect of the programme it offers on behalf of its awarding body, and is competent to meet them. Therefore, the review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of the awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations at the Foundation **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1   As noted in paragraph 1.13, clearly defined arrangements are in place for programme design, development and approval: the Foundation submits detailed proposals to the University based on the work of well-qualified senior members of staff supported by experienced academics and practitioners.

2.2   While at the time of the review the Foundation had completed only one cycle of the revalidated programme, the review team explored, by documentary study and meetings with staff, the manner in which relevant staff had engaged both with the requirements of the former awarding body and with the revalidation exercise. On the basis of these enquiries the team found such staff aware of annual and periodic review procedures and of their responsibilities within them.

2.3   The University's Partnership Team Leader is responsible for helping maintain and enhance the quality of provision on collaborative programmes: the most recent Partnership Team Leader report confirms the positive nature of the Foundation's engagement with the University's processes. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.4   Subject to the University's Admissions Policy, which is detailed in the Validation Documentation and publicly available, the Foundation is responsible for the conduct of admissions and recruitment, including mailshots. It discharges its admissions responsibilities, including interviewing, through the Senior Lecturer, the Education Manager and the Communications and Marketing Manager, whose respective roles are clear, and who report to the Head of School. Details of successful candidates are submitted to the University for registration.

2.5   New students attend a summer school (submitting an essay on their experience), an orientation event and an induction week. They confirmed, from their experience, the satisfactory nature of admissions, and expressed satisfaction with the support and information they had received when deciding whether to apply. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.6   The Foundation recruits students from a variety of backgrounds, and, to cater for this diversity, according to its Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, it offers different methods and styles of delivery (didactic, inductive, emulative, practical, problem-based, reflective, tutorial, cognitive apprenticeships) across different modules. It evaluates the availability and quality of teaching resources in annual monitoring and student-staff meetings, where there is scope for reflection on the quality of learning opportunities and for feedback to be provided and responded to with appropriate action taken. The review team confirms, from documentary study and meetings, the effectiveness of these procedures, but also that, in such a small community, they may, inevitably and understandably, be supplemented or supplanted by informal and more timely forms of engagement.

2.7   The review team discussed the Foundation's approach to teaching with staff and students, examining to what extent it enables the latter to develop as independent learners, undertake study in depth, and enhance their capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking. The team found that students were more than satisfied with their experience, which in most cases exceeded expectations: they particularly valued the holistic nature of the Foundation's approach to teaching and learning, with an inbuilt flexibility that permits teaching to be shaped to their own nexus of interests (intellectual as well as career-focused). They noted with appreciation that teaching methods integrate forms of knowledge from disciplines that include history, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, psychology, archaeology and architecture, all delivered by well qualified internal or visiting staff.

2.8   The review team particularly noted that placement providers demonstrated not only an appreciation, but also an understanding and application, of this holistic approach, reiterating the benefit of learning by working alongside experts on real projects, and demonstrating in the meeting a high level of both intellectual and presentational skills and of strong personal commitment to the programme. This appears to derive from the fact that the Foundation, by working alongside current building projects, exposes students to contemporary design, social, structural and environmental debates and trends. The review team considers the Foundation's holistic approach to learning and teaching, which enables and encourages students to integrate different theories with the demands of progressive professional practice, to be **good practice**. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.9   The Foundation has no intention of significantly expanding student numbers or of changing its culture or academic approach, and no economic imperative to do so exists. In the context of a highly selective institution with high-achieving and motivated students, its learning approach is stretching and potentially intense, but also very supportive. By definition, there neither is nor is there planned to be any large-group teaching.

2.10   The Foundation meets its responsibility for establishing and maintaining a learning and pastoral support structure in part by delineating clear lines of responsibility for teaching and supporting students from application through to curriculum vitae preparation and transition to work; pastoral care is the responsibility of the Education Manager. Equal opportunities policies are in place for staff and students: both groups reported these arrangements as functioning satisfactorily.

2.11   Conscious of the restrictions that its small size imposes on its capacity to provide direct support for students (for example, it has no bespoke careers service), the Foundation compensates for any omissions by measures that include: publicising external facilities, such as external lectures; the availability of British Library and University student cards; and joining summer schools and learning trips. Library facilities, managed by a full-time librarian, and online learning resources are available, and students spoke particularly well of the focused and relevant nature of the library stock, which, supplemented by informal borrowing from staff, meets most of their requirements. Staff are invited to attend University staff development programmes, and have been discussing their nature and accessibility with senior University personnel. From both the University's and the Foundation's perspectives, however, this is currently work in progress.

2.12   Completing students are provided with information about employment prospects; they also have, and value, the opportunity to continue for an extra year to upgrade their dissertation to a publication. On completion some students have found employment within the Foundation, others have done so with their placement providers: for some (if not most) of which, providing such placements is an excellent recruitment strategy. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B5: Student Engagement*

Findings

2.13   Given the small size of the student cohort it is understandable that opportunities for student engagement predominantly involve direct discussion and local resolution: for example, students are encouraged to raise concerns about placements directly and immediately with the Foundation. More formal mechanisms include student-staff meetings, normally held biannually, the notes of which are submitted to the Academic Board and lead to action plans, progress against which is communicated to all students. The review team noted in particular that the Foundation ensures that its graduates contribute to the programme changes agreed at revalidation.

2.14   In discussion with students it was confirmed that a student representative system is in place; students are represented on the Academic Board and have access to its minutes, which include discussion of their course evaluations, and to the Foundation's annual programme review. They normally meet HRH the Prince of Wales, as President of the Foundation, both during the programme and at graduation, and have the opportunity to meet periodically with the University's Partnership Team Leader.

2.15   The review team explored these opportunities with the students, who confirmed their availability and utility. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.16   Oversight of the conduct of assessment remains with the University, and the Foundation discharges its responsibilities in alignment with University regulations. Validation and quality assurance documentation provides guidelines on assessment (including staff training) and the recognition of prior learning, and the Foundation produces an assessment specification for each module at the start of the academic year. The lead marker completes the mark sheet and provides formative and summative feedback, and the external examiner comments on assessments (normally in very positive terms) at the Examination Board. These arrangements are understood and implemented.

2.17   The Student Handbook offers an overview of the balance between formative and summative assessment for each module, and a detailed assessment schedule with an overview of the criteria: that this is satisfactory was confirmed by students. Placement providers, though not involved directly in student assessment (which is of placement-derived written work not performance) offer informal commentaries on their student's progress. Students drew attention to some variability in the time taken for assessed work to be returned, but the review team learned that the University's new feedback policy, which specifies a 20-day turnaround with monitoring procedures in place (30 days for master's dissertations), will be operational from the next academic year.

2.18   The Foundation's systems, procedures and policies for assessment are well-established and aligned with the University's regulatory framework. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External Examining*

Findings

2.19   External examiners' duties include approving assignment briefs, overseeing marking, attending Examination Boards, and providing annual written reports to the University. The University retained its predecessor's external examiners for the sake of continuity.

2.20   The Foundation has a robust procedure for considering external examiner reports, drafting responses, and sharing both with staff. Information about external examiners is available to students online, the reports themselves are available to them in annual monitoring, and they have an opportunity to meet external examiners. Those who met the review team were largely unaware of the reports and displayed little curiosity about them, but the review team noted that the University is currently developing a centralised system for ensuring and publicising their availability.

2.21   From discussions with staff and students, and from scrutiny of the Academic Board's minutes, the review team found evidence of effective mechanisms for responding to feedback from external examiners. There is clear monitoring of external examiner reports specifically, and, more generally, scrupulous use of external examiners in the quality system. The Foundation will implement the new University procedure for ensuring that students are aware of their access to external examiner reports on publication. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.22   The Foundation follows the University's regulations for annual programme review, partnership review, major review and revalidation, major and minor programme modifications and module withdrawal. These regulations are specified in the University's Partnership Responsibility Protocol.

2.23   For example, annual programme review requires the Foundation to prepare a self-evaluation document, which includes a statistical analysis of module and programme performance and an audit of student records. In this context the review team noted that while, according to the terms of its Memorandum of Agreement with the University, the Foundation is required to follow the latter's annual monitoring process, it intends to supplement this with its own review, to cover relevant areas of particular relevance.

2.24   The review team discussed these proposed arrangements with staff and students to ensure that those directly concerned had a clear understanding of their responsibilities. The team found staff fully aware of the processes of annual and periodic review and of their responsibilities relating to them, and of the processes for making changes to programmes. Discussion with staff and scrutiny of the report of the Partnership Team Leader confirmed engagement with the review process to date. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met 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

2.25   Responsibility for the initial consideration and management of academic appeals lies with the University, which requires the Foundation to direct students to the appropriate procedure. This is explained in the Collaborative Partner Operations Manual and the Academic Quality Handbook, which details the permitted grounds for academic appeals. The review team noted, however, that the Foundation's most recent (2013) Student Handbook makes an outdated reference to the former Education Committee of its Trustees as the final appeals body.

2.26   Responsibility for handling the first stage of complaints is delegated to the Foundation, which is required to establish a procedure that meets University criteria. A complainant dissatisfied with the outcome of a first stage complaint may be referred to the University as the body of last resort. The procedure is accurately described in the Student Handbook, which also encourages students to report complaints in a swift and informal manner, with a view to early resolution.

2.27   The review team explored the complaints and appeals procedures with students and staff, finding both aware of the different procedures for complaints and appeal. Staff confirmed that there had never been an appeal and only one complaint, which had been dealt with under the appropriate procedure. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.28   The absence of degree awarding powers means that the Foundation has no responsibilities of the kind described in this section to devolve. It does, however, maintain a relationship with placement providers, and the review team explored with senior staff and placement providers the manner in which it implements and manages them.

2.29   Placement providers confirmed that the support and information provided are appropriate to their responsibilities. The information includes an initial briefing designed to ensure that a potential placement is viable and desirable. A plan for the student's activities is then drawn up, on the basis of which Foundation staff determine whether compatibility exists between the placement and the student's academic work. The placement contract, though broadly defined, specifies the baseline work necessary for the experience to meet both the learning objectives of the programme and the individual learning needs of the student. The Foundation offers formal and informal support, as appropriate throughout the placement, at the end of which placement providers submit a critical appraisal of the student's performance for developmental purposes: they have no role in summative assessment. Staff, students and employers attested to the beneficial nature of the relationship.

2.30   From documentary study and discussions the review team found placements integral to the programme, and that the Foundation's supportive and academic activities in relation to them engage fully with all relevant external expectations. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Findings

2.31   The Foundation has no research degree students, therefore this Expectation does not apply.

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.32   The Foundation is a small organisation operating, for the purposes of this review, a single MA programme, which has recently undergone a full revalidation exercise by a new awarding body. The programme, which has three graduating part-time students, had no intake in the current academic year. Hence, while the Foundation has put in place the quality procedures required by the awarding body (it has been scrupulous in discharging its contractual responsibilities) the procedures themselves are largely untested, and issues of interest or concern to students are characteristically resolved speedily and informally.

2.33   To the extent that this evidence base justifies a conclusion it can be said that the Foundation is assiduous in meeting its formal responsibilities; its student-facing activities (in particular, teaching, learning and pastoral support, and placement support) are professionally and sensitively discharged; the intellectual and professional basis of its teaching is holistic, flexible, creative, integrative and intellectually challenging; and its professional dimension is central to both its andragogy and its epistemology.

2.34   The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the Foundation **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 Foundation, like all the University's collaborative partners, is required to submit marketing and publicity materials for approval before publication. Student Handbooks, which are similarly subject to approval, are developed on a University template from which agreed variations are permitted. The University confirmed that the Foundation complies with this requirement.

3.2   The Foundation's website contains information about its higher education provision, including the Foundation itself and its research and other activities. This information may be targeted at the general public, prospective applicants, or current students. Students expressed satisfaction with the information provided, and the review team found the website to be well designed and fit for purpose.

3.3   Completing students receive helpful employment-related information. All students receive briefs for each assignment and a Student Handbook, both in searchable format and as hard copy. The Handbook contains, among other things, full course outlines, module descriptors, reading lists, details about the Foundation, and the Academic Calendar. The most recent Handbook was published in 2013 (there having been no intake in 2014), and, as noted in paragraph 2.25, it is not comprehensive or wholly reflective of the policy changes introduced following the change of awarding body. The review team **affirms** the steps being taken to ensure that the Student Handbook 2015-17 is comprehensive, current and accurate.

3.4   Overall, the review team found the information provided by the Foundation fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

3.5   The Foundation's website contains information about the institution and its range of activities. Most information, including that about the MA, is subject to awarding body approval. Information about the programme, its component modules and placement provision, is provided to students, and information and advice appropriate to students' location on their journey from application to graduation are provided. While some inaccuracies were detected in the most recent Student Handbook, these are rectifiable and procedures are in place to avoid repetition. Overall, the information provided by the Foundation is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

3.6   The review team therefore concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the Foundation **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 Foundation is a higher education institution, recently revalidated by a newly established university, and with (for the purpose of this review) three students, two full-time academic staff and one programme. It is in this context that the review team has addressed the question of whether deliberate steps are being taken at provider level to enhance the quality of students' learning opportunities.

4.2 The Foundation's Strategy Plan 2014-16 specifies a desire to transform lives by building harmonious and enduring communities: this requires an academically interdisciplinary approach, which also conjoins theory and practice. Behind it lies the aim of creating, from the necessary interdependence of the professions contributing to community building, a notion of project conception, design, planning, communication, delivery and evaluation, which meets the stated or implicit personal, social, aesthetic and spiritual, as well as practical needs, of future community members.

4.3 The review team, as well as studying a wide range of documentation and engaging in complex discussion, benefited from meeting higher education managers and staff of the Foundation, placement providers, external tutors, alumni/alumnae and students, as well as senior representatives of the University, who confirmed their satisfaction with the Foundation's approach to enhancement, which they described as 'excellent' though yet to be fully strategised. These meetings generated a wealth of examples of the alignment of the Foundation's approaches to education and urban design. Involving students in live projects under the supervision of carefully selected placement providers is fundamental to its approach in that it creates an enhancement structure that ensures the programme remains innovative. The programme becomes a vehicle for the transmission and development of knowledge accumulated from previous projects and explorations.

4.4 A significant challenge for the Foundation has been to align these values and orientation with the awarding body's regulatory framework. In this regard, the review team noted the Foundation's diagrammatic representation of enhancement procedures for the previous and current degree-awarding bodies. In addition, the team's documentary study of external examiners' comments and reports, Examination Board minutes, performance management frameworks, annual monitoring reports and assignment specifications confirms that the Foundation approaches its higher education responsibilities with the same meticulous and deliberate care it gives to commissioned projects.

4.5 The Foundation makes particular efforts to seek advice, and used early student and moderator feedback to influence course design: a range of procedural improvements was supplied to the review team. It also addresses themes (for example, estate regeneration), which are systematically stored and built on, but seldom repeated for any student: these are designed to ensure that students connect their academic learning to themes of professional interest and importance. The process is formalised in annual reporting, which requires the identification of enhancement opportunities.

4.6 Internally, the Foundation's model of enhancement is based on a form of shared discovery, which builds deliberately on knowledge and understanding deriving from previous such discovery, as well as on formal learning. The review team considers this to be a legitimate approach for an institution of this size and character. Within the Foundation

good practice is shared on a daily basis: between staff, some of whom are teaching, some of whom are engaged in practice; between staff and practitioners (in particular placement supervisors); between staff and students; and between students themselves.
The Foundation successfully integrates the formal requirements of higher education validation with the ethos of creativity and discovery that permeates its culture. The review team considers the Foundation's continuing review of its curriculum, with the aim of achieving a steady development and enhancement of student learning opportunities, to be **good practice**.

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

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.8   Quality enhancement is at the core of the Foundation's educational and professional philosophy, albeit that, as an institution with one in-scope programme and three students, while assiduous in addressing the demands of its degree-awarding body, it does not express this philosophy in a conventionally organisational or bureaucratic manner. Its commitment to a form of learning that integrates theory and practice by deploying students in live projects, and which systematically introduces into its teaching learning deriving from previous live professional experiences as well as from academic study, is by definition building systematically on, and further developing, prior learning in a manner designed to make what is good better and to remediate or eliminate what is not.

4.9   While scope remains for these procedures to be more formally recorded and used, the Foundation's continuing review of its curriculum, aimed as it is at achieving the steady enhancement of student learning, is good practice.

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

5   Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1   The Foundation assists students in securing (paid) work placements, and both the placements themselves and the reflective report on them that students are required to submit are critical elements of learning and assessment. Some completing students are employed either within the Foundation or in companies within the Foundation's network of local and international partners, often including their placement location.

5.2   The employers who met the review team all had longstanding relationships with the Foundation and spoke enthusiastically about these relationships, explaining in detail and with sophistication the reasons for their enthusiasm. Some were also engaged with the Foundation's activities, such as giving masterclasses or undertaking academic teaching, and all saw themselves not as simply providing a service but as imparting skills and knowledge integral to students' learning. They shared the view that placement arrangements are effectively planned, delivered, supported and assessed, and described their own relationships with the Foundation as based on a shared commitment to encouraging the acquisition of a variety of skills and a holistic understanding of professional practice. Several members compared students of the Foundation's MA Sustainable Urbanism favourably with those from the specialised programmes characteristic of some overseas countries.

Glossary

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

e-learning
See technology enhanced or enabled learning

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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