



Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of SAE Education Ltd (t/a SAE Institute)

June 2016

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About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at SAE Education Ltd. The review took place from 21 to 23 June 2016 and was conducted by a team of four reviewers, as follows:

- Mrs Catherine Fairhurst
- Ms Gill Butler
- Mr Clive Turner
- Miss Sarah Bennett (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
 - the setting and maintenance of threshold 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 SAE Education Ltd the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland. The [themes](#) for the academic year 2015-16 are Student Employability, and Digital Literacy,² and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Key findings

QAA's judgements about SAE Education Ltd

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at SAE Education Ltd.

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

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at SAE Education Ltd.

- The development and use of the information management system, which provides a highly effective tool for the delivery, assessment, monitoring and review of programmes and provision of records for students and alumni (Expectations A2.2, B2, B3, B6 and B8).
- The effective resourcing and support for staff development, which promotes learning and teaching practice that is informed by reflection, scholarship and industry needs (Expectation B3).
- The effective integration of professional and academic support, which enables students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential (Expectation B4 and Enhancement).
- The inclusive, accessible and clear assessment guidelines, which comprehensively support student understanding of the assessment objectives, criteria and process (Expectation B6).
- The effective moderation of assessment and standardised marking, which ensures consistency in the award of credit and qualifications across campuses (Expectations B6 and A3.2).
- The strategic approach to the development of the Alumni Network, which provides extensive opportunities for students to share practice, and enhances their personal development and progression into creative media professions (Enhancement).
- The integrated multi-functional online platform, which provides a wide range of accessible information to all stakeholders and enhances the learning environment (Enhancement and C).

Theme: Student Employability

SAE Education Ltd regards graduate destinations as a key measure of success, therefore significant emphasis is placed on student employment outcomes and the continued expansion of the global Alumni Network.

The Alumni Association is a global community of SAE graduates and students; its mission is to facilitate employment opportunities and improve the skills and employment prospects of its members. The Association gives access-to-industry information, careers advice, industry talks and continued access to the creative industry network information, about employment opportunities and current vacancies through the SAE job portal, newsletters and emails. Students are also supported and encouraged to participate in the annual SAE Alumni Convention and the SAE Alumni Awards Ceremony.

Many academic staff are active practitioners within the industry and draw upon their industry experience and current practice to engage students in their learning, by exposing them to industry practice and expectations, and building the skills and knowledge needed to be successful in the industry. Programmes place considerable emphasis on practical learning and this is supported by supervisors, who provide practical, technical and student support, with access to industry standard equipment.

The process of review and revalidation has enabled SAE to refocus the curriculum to provide clear pathways to support the development of student employability both personally and professionally. Industry experts are involved in programme review and validation processes, and programmes have been revised to provide more flexibility and more effective, overt embedding of employability skills. In addition, greater emphasis is placed upon the development of entrepreneurship, as there is a recognition that the nature of employment opportunities has changed. Common modules focus on career development through personal development planning and there is encouragement of early consideration of career trajectories. Content also includes business planning and securing funding. At level 6 there are industry engagement elective modules that will provide students with the opportunity to undertake learning within various industry-based contexts. The modules will be available to students studying in the 2015 validated programmes from January 2017.

Employers contribute to programmes by providing opportunities for students to gain work experience and participate in guest lectures and master classes. In addition, students are advised of industry engagement opportunities that may include workplace opportunities, industry meet-ups, events, conventions and other networking opportunities.

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

About SAE Education Ltd

SAE Education Ltd (SAE), trading as SAE Institute, is a private provider of higher education programmes within the creative media sector. The global headquarters for SAE's 54 campuses is in Littlemore Park, Oxford.

SAE's mission is to provide specialist vocational and higher education courses worldwide to inspire and develop graduates; provide courses that emphasize practical experience, the needs of students and industry credibility; ensure students access the latest knowledge and facilities to enhance their skills; and provide excellence in academic and student services. This is underpinned by SAE's global network as a professional community in creative media.

The Sound and Audio Engineering Institute was founded in Sydney, Australia in 1976, and opened its first overseas campus in London in 1985. From 1997 the company offered degree programmes validated by Middlesex University (the University). Following a shift in strategic focus between 2007 and 2009 SAE decided to make higher education a core part of the business and it now offers programmes within the creative industry sector up to postgraduate level. Campuses in Oxford and Glasgow were opened in 2009 and followed by Liverpool in 2011. In the same year SAE was acquired by Navitas Ltd, an Australian global education provider, which allowed SAE to retain its brand identity and focus on creative media education, while benefiting from the global links and expertise afforded by the parent company.

Academic governance is delegated by the Navitas Board of Directors to the UK-owned company SAE Education Ltd (SAE). The directors of SAE subsequently assign academic governance to the UK Academic Board, which consists of independent members who

have experience in higher education academic practice at a senior level within the UK; a representative from the University; and a UK Dean. The UK Academic Manager attends all meetings of the Academic Board, and student and staff representatives are invited to participate. A number of committees report and provide specialist advice to the Academic Board and these include: the Learning and Teaching Committee; the Academic Standards and Quality Assurance Committee; and boards of studies. Programme committees, as subcommittees of the Academic Board, are organised by discipline and chaired by a programme leader. All programme leaders sit on the Learning and Teaching Committee, with responsibility to oversee and recommend enhancements and revisions to the Academic Board. An industry advisory council provides formal feedback and advice on industry trends and graduate attributes to SAE and the Learning and Teaching Committee, which then feeds through to Academic Board.

SAE has 894 students, of which 847 study at four campuses in London, Oxford, Glasgow and Liverpool, and 47 are enrolled on the postgraduate distance education programme. There are 84.4 full-time equivalent staff employed, of whom 37.1 are academic staff. Campuses have a total staff to student ratio of 1:11.6 and a faculty to student ratio of 1:21. The campuses are directed by an executive management group, which is headed by a managing director. Staff operate within a campus staffing model, which consists of leadership, faculty and support staff, with each campus led by a campus manager and supported by an academic coordinator.

Since the Review for Educational Oversight in 2012 carried out by QAA, SAE has experienced year-on-year growth in student numbers, increasing from 694 in 2013 to 894 in 2016. Following a review of accredited status for collaborative partners in 2013, the University agreed with SAE that its status would change from accredited partner to one with enhanced validated status. The main outcomes of this change were that a nominee from the University would chair the Assessment Board; SAE policies would be reviewed during revalidation to ensure continued alignment with the revised University regulations; the University would manage all programme validations and revalidations; and enhanced student data would be sent to the University, commencing in 2016. In 2014 a Programmes Revalidation and Review was undertaken with the University, which led to all undergraduate provision being revalidated until 2021 and the validation of three new undergraduate programmes. The postgraduate programme is due for revalidation in 2016. In 2014, following stakeholder feedback, SAE aligned study periods across all UK campuses and adopted a 14-week trimester calendar. SAE also commenced using UCAS for all new applications, which has resulted in new enrolments and diminished attention on the direct entry application process.

The key challenges faced by SAE include the changing regulatory demands for alternative providers within the higher education sector, which necessitate increased levels of audit, information and data return. This includes Higher Education Statistical Agency returns, annual course designation submission, Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education and National Student Survey data collection; compliance with Competition and Markets Authority and Office of the Independent Adjudicator requirements, PREVENT duty, and in future the Teaching Excellence Framework. In response to these requirements SAE implemented a new student management information system (SMIS), which is designed to meet current and future demands for data and information. SAE recognised the need for a higher level of technology-supported learning and teaching, and therefore implemented a new version of its virtual learning environment (VLE), which is synchronised with the SMIS. Other challenges are increasing student retention, which is being addressed through enhancing student support and addressing student needs; recruiting and retaining suitably qualified and experienced staff within a rapidly changing and technologically innovative sector; addressing increased competition within the sector; and the processes of development, deployment and review required to validate new programmes.

SAE and the University have had a continuous and productive relationship since 1997 and the University validates all SAE's undergraduate and postgraduate provision. Undergraduate programmes currently delivered include: Audio Production; Digital Film Making; Web Development; Interactive Animation; Games Programming and Music Business. There is one postgraduate programme delivered online by distance learning, which is a MA/MSc Professional Practice (Creative Media Industries).

SAE was subject to a Review for Educational Oversight by QAA in June 2012. The review resulted in six areas of good practice pertaining to:

- the strong, collegial relationship with the University
- procedures for programme monitoring, validation and review
- assessment guidelines
- teaching observation and student feedback
- support for work placements
- the use of electronic communication mediums.

SAE continues to build upon the good practice identified and has developed further good practice, in particular, by enhancing the relationship with the University through regular meetings to discuss operational and strategic matters; setting up the Academic Advisory Committee to enhance programme monitoring and report on progress against key performance indicators; the monitoring of student feedback on assessment matters through the boards of studies; and the integration of peer observation to support and enhance teaching practice. There were two areas of advisable practice. The first related to the need for an accessible and user-friendly quality handbook, which contained all policies and procedures. The quality manual is available online and is updated annually with policies integrated into the document when required. The second required improvements to the SMIS to be implemented. A new SMIS was introduced, which links the student portal with the VLE and has additional functionality that improves the staff and student experience. This is undergoing continual review. There was one area of desirable practice, which highlighted the need for rigorous recruitment of academic staff. SAE has enhanced its recruitment and selection processes and put in place relevant human resource procedures to support this. The company recognises the challenges in recruiting and retaining suitably qualified and experienced teaching staff in a sector that is defined by rapid change and innovation, and keeps this matter under review.

Explanation of the findings about SAE Education Ltd

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

1.1 SAE has a partnership agreement and Memoranda of Cooperation with Middlesex University (the University), which was renegotiated in 2014-15 and gives SAE 'enhanced validated status'. All postgraduate and undergraduate programmes delivered by SAE are validated through collaborative arrangements with the University as its awarding body. Threshold academic standards of all collaborative provision are secured through the University's regulations, policies and procedures. The regulations are aligned with the Quality Code and *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ).

1.2 SAE programmes undergo close scrutiny at validation and review, undertaken by the University, to ensure that threshold academic standards for each award are met. Reference is made to qualification descriptors, Subject Benchmark Statements and alignment of learning outcomes to the appropriate FHEQ levels. Attention is also paid to the assessment strategy and ensuring credit allocated is appropriate.

1.3 SAE follows the University's guidance in developing programme specifications that demonstrate how each programme takes into account the positioning of the qualification, title, level descriptors and industry feedback. Programme and module specifications set out the learning outcomes to be addressed.

1.4 SAE procedures require programmes to make use of external points of reference, including: the FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements, the Higher Education Academy, and formal and informal consultation with the Industry Experts Panel.

1.5 The University and SAE have established regular review and reporting cycles. Programme leaders and academic coordinators provide module, programme and annual evaluation and monitoring reports. These are reviewed and endorsed by the Academic Board and its subcommittees as well as the Learning and Teaching Committee. Annual monitoring reports are provided to the University, and twice-yearly steering meetings overview all aspects of the partnership, including formal agreements and collaborative projects.

1.6 The review team found that the policies and procedures in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.7 The review team examined the Memoranda of Cooperation with the University, SAE's academic standards and quality assurance policy, the quality manual and the relevant sections of the University's regulations, policies and procedures. The team also read the report of programme approvals, documentation from the University Academic Provision Approval Committee and programme documentation. The review team tested its findings through meetings with senior and academic staff.

1.8 The review team found that while SAE does not document its own internal procedures, it fully adheres to all the regulatory requirements of the University. The recent report of the review and validation of programmes demonstrated rigour and close scrutiny by the Review and Validation Panel. The resulting documentation demonstrates that the design and content of programmes is at an appropriate level and that credit is awarded in accordance with the FHEQ. Programme specifications refer to Subject Benchmark Statements, and programme learning outcomes are informed by the requirements and expectations of industry.

1.9 Annual monitoring reports show careful consideration of the appropriateness of the curriculum. Where external examiners have made proposals to enhance the provision, there is evidence of appropriate action. In meetings with the review team, staff were clear about the use of external reference points within programme design and development.

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

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.11 The Partnership Agreement and Memoranda of Cooperation with the University provide SAE with delegated authority to operate within the University regulations, which form the overarching academic framework for the award of credit and qualifications.

1.12 The arrangements for the exercise of authority are set out in the SAE quality manual, which contains the regulations, policies and key procedures that form the framework for academic quality and standards, which underpin all provision of validated programmes delivered by SAE in the UK.

1.13 The Academic Board, which has recently replaced the Academic Advisory Committee, is responsible for strategic oversight, monitoring and evaluation of the maintenance of academic standards and quality enhancement within SAE. The work of the Academic Board is supported by the Academic Standards and Quality Assurance Committee (ASQA), the Learning and Teaching Committee, and programme committees. Academic regulations are made available to all staff and students through the VLE.

1.14 The design and operation of the University's academic regulations, and the adherence of SAE in applying the regulations and developing appropriate governance structures, would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.15 The review team tested the effectiveness of the framework and operation of the regulations by examining the documentation presented, including the minutes and terms of reference of relevant committees and the report of the recent review and revalidation of academic provision. The review team also viewed information on the VLE and held discussions with undergraduate and postgraduate students and staff from the various UK campuses. Discussions included a meeting in which a representative from the partner university was present.

1.16 The SAE quality manual refers stakeholders to the University regulations for programme approval, modifications and review. SAE has however developed its own policies for assessment, including: the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Policy; the Academic Honesty Policy; the Academic Credit and Recognition of Prior Learning Policy; and the Academic Grievance Policy. This is supported by codes of practice on setting assessment, assignment feedback and assessment practice including moderation.

1.17 Final award and assessment outcomes are processed through a tiered panel and board system, in accordance with University regulations. Student results are confirmed by the second tier Finalist Assessment Board (FAB), having passed through internal and external verification, through the first-tier Content Specialist Panel, regional assessment panels, and campus assessment panels. The FAB is chaired by the University and attended by the chief external examiner.

1.18 Staff whom the review team met were knowledgeable about regulations, policies and procedures relevant to their respective roles. Information about assessment regulations

is available on the VLE and in hard copy. Students whom the review team met knew where to find information that they needed.

1.19 The approach to quality processes and oversight ensure that academic standards are appropriately set and maintained. The review team considers that SAE, as a partner of the University, adheres closely to University regulations. SAE has recently revised and enhanced its internal academic governance structure, which now provides a transparent and comprehensive framework supporting the implementation of the regulations governing the award of academic credit. The review team concludes that 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

1.20 SAE programmes are validated by the University under the terms of the Memoranda of Cooperation for undergraduate and postgraduate provision. Under the terms of these arrangements definitive records of programmes, amendments thereof, the arrangements for monitoring and review, and the records of study of students and alumni, are maintained by the University.

1.21 SAE is responsible for production of programme handbooks, module guides and narratives using templates provided by the University. SAE has produced a registry manual and maintains its own SMIS. The registry manual deals with matters such as the issuing of graduate documentation, assessment board processes and procedures, and registration of students. SAE maintains a quality manual, which contains policies, procedures and codes of conduct, which govern all aspects of its operations in delivering its validated programmes. The registry manual and relevant policies are designed to ensure that all programme documentation, including handbooks, module narratives and associated papers are kept up to date and that all updated documents are forwarded to the University. Annual updates to programmes and modules are provided to SAE by the University.

1.22 These procedures and arrangements would allow for the Expectation to be met.

1.23 The review team read the SAE quality manual and its associated policies, procedures and codes of conduct as they relate to programme design and approval; published programme specifications; the current programme handbooks; and module narratives. The team also considered the registry manual and policy documents. The team reviewed assessment board and panel minutes, and student transcripts, and was given a demonstration of the VLE and SMIS. The team explored the operation of these systems and arrangements in meetings with SAE's senior, academic and professional support staff and the Head of Academic Quality from the University.

1.24 SAE collaborates with the University's Academic Partnerships Office in providing data and information. This is thoroughly checked before transmission to the University to ensure that the validating body maintains an accurate record of all programmes, student and alumni records and qualifications. Included in this are: module narratives; programme specifications; programme handbooks; campus guides; samples of marketing materials; registration data for all students studying for a validated award; active student listings; alumni listings; and minutes from assessment board decisions and award outcomes. The systems in place are comprehensive, thorough and robust, and staff are well-versed in their operation.

1.25 The embedded links between the components of the system and its outputs, for example the website, prospectus and programme handbooks, ensure that that information is available to all stakeholders, including prospective students as reflected in Expectation B2. This provides valuable information to both staff and students, which ensures and enhances the quality of learning opportunities as discussed in Expectation B3 and in the conduct of assessment as discussed in Expectation B6.

1.26 The system is continuously maintained and is accessible to users. It can be manipulated to give useful and up-to-date data and information to support decision-making and the underpinning data for programme monitoring and review as discussed under Expectation B8.

1.27 The development and use of the information management system, which provides a highly effective tool for the delivery, assessment, monitoring and review of programmes and provision of records for students and alumni is **good practice**.

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

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.29 SAE programmes are validated on a six-yearly cycle by the University under the terms of its Memoranda of Cooperation for undergraduate and postgraduate provision. The arrangements between the University and SAE are managed by the Academic Partnerships Office, and programme approvals are dealt with by the University Academic Provision Approval Committee.

1.30 The procedures for the design and development of programmes, which include use of external reference points, academic expertise, and the procedures and processes for the approval and assessment of learning outcomes, are set out in the extensive regulations and guidance published by the University in its Learning and Quality Enhancement Handbook (LQEH). Undergraduate provision was successfully revalidated in 2015 and the postgraduate provision is scheduled for revalidation later in 2016. SAE maintains a quality manual, which contains policies, procedures and codes of conduct that govern all aspects of SAE's operations in delivering its validated programmes. SAE has recently strengthened its academic quality framework by replacing the Academic Advisory Committee with an Academic Board, and the introduction of the Learning and Teaching Committee. The latter has responsibility for enhancing the quality of learning opportunities through the regular and systematic monitoring and review of provision, while a new ASQA is charged with monitoring quality and standards.

1.31 These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.32 The review team considered all of the documentary evidence provided by SAE, including the quality manual and policies, which have particular relevance to this Expectation. The review team also read the report of programme revalidations, the annual monitoring reports for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, and the minutes of partnership meetings. The team examined a sample of programme specifications and module narratives, the first set of minutes of the ASQA, and a Learning, Teaching and Assessment meeting. These were the first meetings of these committees at which terms of reference, membership and operational processes were considered. The team accessed the University's LQEH online. The team discussed these procedures and arrangements in meetings with the head of provider, senior staff, academic staff and professional support staff. These matters also featured in meetings with students and employers.

1.33 SAE makes good use of external reference points when assuring that the programmes meet UK threshold standards, for example the FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements and the Quality Code. SAE staff are fully conversant with the content and significance of the reference points. Employers stated that while they have no formal role in the design and development of new programmes or the review of existing ones, they have close informal relationships with SAE staff, which enable them to make constructive contributions to the review and development processes. Academic staff confirmed the high value placed on the views expressed by employers in the continuous review of existing programmes and the development of modifications and revisions to the content and delivery of modules.

1.34 SAE does not currently have in place a formalised internal procedure for the design and development of new programmes, although this is to be developed to progress its long term development plans. Currently, SAE operates in line with the Academic Review Policy, which identifies the criteria that need to be met before presenting a proposal to the University. The programme committee is the principal gatekeeper for this process. SAE engages in continuous dialogue with the University's Academic Partnerships Office in the preparation of proposals for new programmes or major modifications to existing programmes. SAE encourages a 'bottom-up' approach to proposals for new course development so as to allow for innovation and responsiveness to the needs of the media industry in a fast changing environment.

1.35 In examining the documentary evidence relating to the implementation of these arrangements, and in meetings with senior managers, academic and professional support staff, the review team found that the arrangements and procedures in place at SAE are operated effectively and satisfy the requirements of the University. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.36 SAE is responsible for securing academic standards by judging student performance through assessment. SAE undertakes assessment according to the University's requirements and regulations for each programme, which are set through the programme approval process. The University's validation procedures consider learning outcomes and their assessment to ensure alignment with threshold standards. Programme specifications identify programme learning outcomes, which are mapped against each module. Module narratives specify module learning outcomes in detail, which are then related directly to summative assessment criteria. SAE is responsible for the setting, marking, moderation and feedback of all assessment of undergraduate degrees.

1.37 The SAE European Union Learning, Teaching and Curriculum Committee (LTCC) has responsibility for monitoring the consistency of academic quality and comparability of standards across all regions and campuses. The LTCC has delegated authority from the Navitas Board through the SAE Chief Academic Officer for content and delivery threshold standards of SAE's University-validated programmes and SAE programmes that have credit recognition towards the validated programmes. The LTCC provides reports to the regional academic governing bodies in the three European regions. The Assessment Board Policy approved by the University describes the tiered panel and board system to ensure the award of credit is subject to due process. All of these policies and regulations would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.38 To test the Expectation the review team considered a range of evidence, including programme specifications, module narratives, handbooks, module assessment guides, external examiners' reports and revalidation documents. The team also met staff responsible for assessment and oversight, and met students.

1.39 The external examiners confirm that assessment is robust with rigorous academic standards, which are appropriate for the qualification. Students are able to demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes through varied modes of assessment. Assessment briefs in the module assessment guides clearly define learning outcomes and grading criteria.

1.40 Programme handbooks and module narratives clearly describe academic regulations, and students are also made aware of these by their lecturers and through the VLE. Formally constituted assessment boards, chaired by a senior member of the University and attended by the chief external examiner, decide the award or academic credit. This ensures that credit and qualifications are awarded only where both UK threshold standards and the University's academic standards have been satisfied through SAE's adherence to the assessment requirements and regulations. The external examiners' reports confirm that decisions to award credit or qualifications are based on robust evidence and

that the module learning outcomes have been achieved. The attendance of University link tutors at the assessment boards adds further consistency to student assessment.

1.41 The statistical information presented enables the FAB to compare the achievements of student cohorts, degree programmes and SAE centres, which further secures academic standards. The effective moderation of assessment and standardised marking, which ensures consistency in the award of credit and qualifications across the campuses, is linked to the good practice identified under Expectation B6.

1.42 Reasonable adjustments to assessment modes, such as extra time, are made where required to avoid the risk of disadvantage to students with protected characteristics. Extenuating circumstances are dealt with prior to the FAB according to University regulations.

1.43 The review team found that programme assessment is well-defined and carefully verified, moderated and monitored. Students are able to demonstrate that they have achieved the relevant learning outcomes through fair and consistent assessment procedures. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.44 SAE's quality manual and the University's LQEH describe the framework within which monitoring and review of programmes is undertaken to ensure appropriate academic standards are being maintained. SAE monitors its programmes to check that UK threshold standards are being met through annual monitoring and periodic review. Monitoring and review involves the campus, SAE and the University. External examiners' reports on standards feed into annual reports. SAE has recently enhanced boards and committees of the Academic Board. The ASQA, reporting to the Academic Board, is responsible for monitoring quality and standards. Details of the processes in place for monitoring and review of provision are under Expectation B8 of this report.

1.45 The review team found that the organisation structures and policies for programme monitoring and review are designed to check whether UK threshold standards are achieved and the academic standards of the awarding body are being maintained. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.46 In order to assess the effectiveness of SAE's procedures for programme monitoring and review, the review team examined policy documents, templates and manuals, committee minutes, external examiners' reports, annual monitoring reports, and the report of the recent Programme Revalidation and Review.

1.47 Each annual module and programme monitoring report (PEMR) analyses performance and achievement statistical data. External examiners comment on the appropriateness of the standards of assessments set in relation to UK threshold standards, as well as on student performance. Link tutors appointed by the University are responsible for monitoring that programmes are delivered in accordance with the approval conditions. SAE maintains oversight of monitoring and review, and any issues that arise relating to standards, through the ASQA. Necessary action is incorporated into the programme action plans. Academic staff at SAE are aware of the FHEQ and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements and see their relevance to their teaching.

1.48 The Programme Revalidation and Review conducted by the University of 28 SAE centres in 2014, explicitly addressed academic standards. The Programme Revalidation and Review considered the currency and validity of provision, the design of curricula and assessment, student achievements, and the extent to which there is a shared understanding of outcomes. The Programme Revalidation and Review panel chaired by the University included three independent external assessors and met senior staff from SAE. It made conditions of approval, recommendations for improvement and areas of commendation.

1.49 The documentary evidence and discussion with SAE staff enabled the review team to recognise that SAE works collaboratively with the University to ensure that there is a rigorous system of monitoring and review across the provision that ensures threshold academic standards are maintained.

1.50 The review team found that SAE, with the oversight of the University, operates effective monitoring and review processes that demonstrate that UK threshold standards are achieved and the academic standards of the awarding body are maintained. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.51 In accordance with the Memoranda of Cooperation with the University all SAE validated programmes remain the responsibility of the University, and SAE is required to follow the procedures set out in the University's LQEH. SAE therefore uses independent, external expertise in the development and review of all programmes validated by the University. The University review panel employs external academics from the UK higher education sector as panel members for validation events. These panel members enable benchmarking of academic standards against those of their respective institutions. SAE also engages with external advice through the Industry Experts Panel.

1.52 With respect to the oversight of assessment standards, SAE adheres to the University regulations that require the involvement of external examiners for all provision at level 5 and above. Their role is to act as independent moderators, ensure comparability of standards across the provision and to consider student attainment overall. External examiners provide one of the principal means for the maintenance of nationally and internationally comparable standards.

1.53 The induction of external examiners is organised by the University and detailed guidance is available on the University website, including the pro formas for external examiner reports. The pro formas require external examiners to comment on alignment with UK threshold standards. Additionally, SAE has appointed a chief external examiner responsible for maintaining an overview of local and regional external examiner operations and acting in a moderating capacity.

1.54 The partnership with the University and the academic framework and procedures developed by SAE would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.55 The review team tested the Expectation by considering the University guidance in the LQEH, and guidance, and pro formas in the SAE quality manual relating to validation, review and external examining. The team viewed reports and minutes of meetings, including validation and review, annual monitoring, boards of studies and external examiners reports. Additionally, the review team discussed arrangements for the involvement of external examiners in meetings with staff and students.

1.56 Evidence of the effective engagement of external advisers in the process of six-yearly review and validation is provided by the report from the 2014 review of all SAE provision, where three external academic advisers were appointed. This report also provides evidence that demonstrates that the comments of external examiners and experts from industry were taken into account when reviewing the existing programmes and developing the new programmes.

1.57 Similarly, the minutes of boards of studies and annual monitoring reviews at undergraduate and postgraduate level reveal that external examiner reports are considered

routinely, and due attention is paid to their content. Staff whom the review team met were able to provide examples of changes in the curriculum arising from comments made by external examiners, with regard to encouraging a greater emphasis on practical projects. Similarly, students whom the review team met were aware of the role of external examiners and knew that their reports were available.

1.58 External examiners have access to programme specifications, programme handbooks, relevant assignment guidelines and all grading sheets for each sample, including second assessors and moderator's comments. External examiner reports confirm the availability of all information and comment on quality and standards in assessment and feedback to students. Minutes of the FAB confirm the attendance and involvement of the chief external examiner, who has prior access to the website, where sample assignments from all campuses are uploaded. The chief external examiner sees the forms completed by all local and regional external examiners, confirming that they have had adequate access to student work, academic standards are appropriate and they agree the module grades proposed at their assessment panels. The University also provides oversight of standards, by reviewing all external examiner reports and requiring a response to them. Where concerns are raised this can trigger a major review of the programme.

1.59 Appropriate policies and procedures are implemented effectively in relation to ensuring that external and independent advice is used to set, deliver, achieve and maintain academic standards. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

1.61 All Expectations in this area are met and the level of risk is considered low in all cases. The review team identified one area of good practice under Expectation A2.2. There are no recommendations or affirmations in this area.

1.62 The approach to maintaining academic standards at SAE is defined by the degree-awarding body. SAE uses the established University academic frameworks, regulations and procedures. Staff are familiar with the responsibilities that are assigned to SAE with regards to academic standards, and there is significant external engagement and oversight of standards through the awarding body and through the use of external examiners.

1.63 The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of the degree-awarding body at SAE **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 SAE operates a suite of undergraduate and distance learning postgraduate programmes, which are validated by the University under the terms of their Memoranda of Cooperation. SAE has enhanced validated status with the University, which means that the University no longer devolves authority to SAE for the approval of its programmes. SAE is responsible under the Memoranda of Cooperation for operational regulations and procedures, which are subject to approval by the University and are required to align with University regulations as and when they are revised. These arrangements are managed by the University's Academic Partnerships Office and operational implementation is assured through the joint University/SAE Partnership Committee.

2.2 The procedures for the design and development of programmes and the procedures and processes for the approval and assessment of learning outcomes are set out in the University's LQEH. Due reference to external reference points is evident in University regulations governing programme design and approval. The SAE Academic Review Policy is aligned with University regulations. SAE undertakes analysis of new proposed programme development, which involves assessment of market demands, scope, alignment with existing programmes offered by SAE, staffing needs and resourcing requirements. Once reviewed internally, SAE consults the University's Academic Partnerships Office and then submits its proposal to the Accreditation and Provision Approval Committee.

2.3 Undergraduate programmes were subject to a Programme Revalidation and Review in 2014. The review team read both the action plans produced by SAE in response to the initial report, which identified a limited number of conditions that needed to be met. The team noted the subsequent confirmation from the University that all conditions had been met and that the processes of programme design, development and approval are effective.

2.4 These arrangements for programme design and approval would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.5 The review team examined meeting minutes, partnership agreements and documentation relating to academic standards and quality published by the University, and relevant sections of the LQEH, and paid particular attention to the Programme Review Report, the SAE quality manual, the SAE Academic Review Policy, programme specifications and external examiner reports. Documentary evidence was tested in meetings with senior managers, academic and professional support staff, and during demonstrations of the VLE and SMIS systems.

2.6 The 2012 Review for Educational Oversight recognised the long and fruitful relationship with the University in the support of managing academic standards as representing good practice; the review team considers that SAE has continued to build on this foundation. This is reflected in the good practice judgement identified under Expectation

A2.2 where SAE's information management system is shown to provide all stakeholders including the University with accurate and reliable information and data. The report of the review of undergraduate programmes, and the associated confirmation that its conditions have been met, demonstrates that the University is satisfied that SAE's processes and involvement in the design and approval of new and revised programmes meet its requirements. Staff confirm that the SAE policy on academic review informs and assists in the implementation of University regulations and ensures that the responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards are clearly defined. External examiner reports consistently confirm that academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities are met.

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

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.8 SAE's recruitment, selection and admissions processes are underpinned by its recruitment plan strategy. Recruitment policies and procedures are outlined in the Student Selection and Admissions Policy and staff admissions manual, thus facilitating fairness, consistency and regulation of the admissions process, from initial enquiry through to enrolment. These provisions would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.9 The review team examined the effectiveness of policies and procedures to recruit learners by accessing the SAE website, reading the Student Selection and Admissions Policy and recruitment plan. The team met staff and students and viewed a demonstration of admissions and recruitment-related activities on the student information management system.

2.10 Student Recruitment Officers are responsible for leading regional and campus-based recruitment activities at each campus. Student Recruitment Officer activity includes follow-up telephone calls, email communications, organising campus tours, open days and helping students to organise application documents. Recruitment and admissions staff are employed, trained and managed by the Director of Student Recruitment and External Relations and the SAE national admissions team based at the Oxford campus. Admissions staff are supported to undertake continuing professional development activities, including national recruitment events, UCAS seminars, and training regarding the Quality Code. Prospective students receive communications from the recruitment and admissions teams throughout their application process. Staff described how effective email communication using the student information management system had been used to successfully support a student to enrolment. The development and use of the information management system as a highly effective tool for the delivery, assessment, monitoring and review of programmes and provision of records for students and alumni is recognised as good practice under Expectation A2.2, and is linked to this Expectation, in addition to Expectations B3, B6 and B8.

2.11 Information for prospective students can be found on the SAE website, where pages clearly detail: the programmes offered, entry requirements, recognition of prior learning, English language requirements, and the programmes offered by each campus. Entry requirements for each programme are also specified in each respective programme handbook and in SAE's prospectus. Prospective students are provided with information through the prospectus, website, taster days, offer packs, open days and on social media. The majority of students apply through UCAS. Decisions are communicated to applicants in writing, with effective and efficient arrangements in place to provide feedback to all applicants regarding the status of their application.

2.12 Policies for the recruitment of international students are detailed in SAE's Strategic Plan and International Student Policy. Education agents who recruit students for programmes must have a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the UK education industry. Agents enter into a formal agreement with SAE to comply with government legislation and training. Both SAE and Navitas routinely monitor education

agents through meetings, teleconferences, spot checks and surveys of recruited students. In the event of dishonesty or unethical promotion of SAE, the agent will have their contract terminated.

2.13 English language requirements are clearly stated on the SAE website and in programme handbooks, along with information on approved UKVI test centres. Students confirmed that they were supported to disclose any disability or special educational need at the earliest opportunity. They also described how they are encouraged to alert support staff if concerned about a fellow student's progress.

2.14 The marketing department confirm the uniformity and quality of all materials for potential applicants, including those taken into schools and colleges. These practices are overseen by the Director of Student Recruitment and External Relations. In the event of a complaint during the recruitment and admissions process, applicants can use the Non-Academic Grievance Policy, which is publicly accessible on the SAE website. The Policy clearly details the timescale for formal and informal complaints. SAE will inform prospective students of any changes to the information that they have been provided with, or of any potential changes to their course after acceptance of the offer, as soon as possible. Staff confirmed that these changes are clearly outlined in writing to ensure that prospective students are able to make an informed decision.

2.15 On enrolment and commencement of studies, students are provided with the student handbook, programme handbook, access to the VLE and multifunctional student platform as part of their induction. It is made clear what SAE expects of students in terms of rules, regulations and policies, and in turn what students can expect of SAE. Students confirmed information and joining materials they had received from SAE to be accurate.

2.16 The Admissions Manager and the Academic Review Manager appraise student recruitment and selection processes and procedures each year to promote enhancement and ensure alignment with the Navitas Strategic Plan. The Achievement Committee considers recruitment and student profiles, progression and achievement data on an annual basis.

2.17 Overall, the review team found that the recruitment, selection and admissions processes at SAE are transparent, accessible and fair. The admissions process is well managed by suitably trained staff and underpinned by an efficient and effective student information management system. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.18 The Learning and Teaching Plan is aligned with the institutional Strategic Plan and sets out the goals and objectives for enhancing the quality of learning and teaching at SAE; it is underpinned by the Quality of Learning, Teaching and Assessment Policy.

2.19 SAE adopts staff recruitment and selection policies and procedures that are designed to ensure that staff with appropriate qualifications and experience are employed. It is the responsibility of the Learning and Teaching Committee to advise the Academic Board on the professional development of all staff who support student learning, and there is a comprehensive staff development policy that promotes academic, professional and pedagogic staff development.

2.20 Information for students detailing the learning opportunities and support available is provided in campus guides and programme handbooks, available online and in hard copy.

2.21 The policies and procedures in place provide a basis for effective learning and teaching, which would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.22 The review team tested the effectiveness of the policies and procedures by reviewing the documentation provided, including the Learning and Teaching Plan, the Staff Development Plan and external examiner reports; and by reviewing the VLE and holding discussions with staff, students and employers.

2.23 All new staff participate in an 'onboarding' induction programme designed to enable them to assimilate into SAE quickly and smoothly. This process includes a performance review for academic staff and observation of their teaching after two months in post. Staff mentors may be used to provide additional support to staff as needed.

2.24 Staff development activity takes place within a robust staff appraisal system, implemented and overseen on each campus by the campus manager, which also feeds into workforce planning and monitoring.

2.25 The effectiveness of the staff development policy was evidenced in staff curriculum vitae and by staff whom the review team met, who provided numerous examples of support for their participation in staff development. This included enrolment on higher degrees and participation in the Postgraduate Learning and Teaching Certificate at the University; as well as in-house staff development organised by campus managers. Support included time allocation, finance and a salary sacrifice scheme. Teaching staff were able to provide examples of the way in which they used what they were learning, in their own teaching and when providing support for students. They considered that the support for staff development was one of the strengths of the organisation.

2.26 Peer observation is used for all teaching staff to ensure staff are supported in reflecting on and enhancing their practice through peer feedback and support. Staff whom the review team met confirmed that peer observation takes place on a regular basis and saw

this as performing a valuable role in providing an opportunity for reflection and in developing their practice.

2.27 The effective resourcing and support for staff development, which promotes learning and teaching practice that is informed by reflection, scholarship and industry needs, is **good practice**.

2.28 SAE demonstrated ways in which the information system could be used as an effective tool for sharing resources, sharing good practice, and delivering and monitoring learning opportunities. This provides a further illustration of the highly effective use of the information management system, which is identified as a feature of good practice under Expectation A2.2.

2.29 Students whom the review team met were positive about the value and accessibility of the VLE in contributing to their learning. They confirmed the ready availability of information about learning opportunities and support.

2.30 There is a systematic approach to monitoring and evaluating information about the effectiveness of the enhancement of learning opportunities. This is gathered through the end-of-module evaluations, feedback in boards of studies, and through external examiner reports, which informs the programme evaluation and monitoring reports. The student submission to this report, and students whom the review team met, confirmed that there are good opportunities to provide feedback and that action is taken to address issues that they raise.

2.31 SAE has effective mechanisms in place to monitor and ensure that the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices are appropriate. Staff are well-qualified, observed regularly and participate in a range of relevant and effective staff development activities. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement

Findings

2.32 The Learning and Teaching Plan and Quality of Learning, Teaching and Assessment Policy underpin SAE's commitment to a high quality student learning experience. The action plan sets out roles and responsibilities for enabling student development, accompanied by time scales for implementation.

2.33 At each campus a campus academic coordinator has responsibility for monitoring the overall progress of students on courses at the relevant campus. Programme coordinators monitor the progress of students on the programmes of study that they are responsible for and lecturers monitor the progress of students on modules they teach. This support is complemented by that provided through the library and learning centres (LLCs), which are headed by a Student Support Officer and Library and Learning Support Coordinator. The end-of-trimester processes and assessment board regulations also ensure formal monitoring and review of individual and group progression and achievement.

2.34 There is an integrated SMIS and VLE, which support the delivery of undergraduate programmes, while postgraduate programmes are delivered exclusively through distance education using a VLE that integrates with the campus administration system. The LLCs provide access to essential and recommended reading materials for each module, while access to digital databases is provided through the student portal.

2.35 SAE also provide students with a range of technical resources and learning spaces, which are supported by supervisors who are responsible for providing technical and tutorial support to students using equipment.

2.36 The support mechanisms in place for students and the availability of resources would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.37 The review team tested the effectiveness of the support arrangements and resources by examining the documentation provided, including the student submission to this report, minutes of boards of studies, and programme evaluation and monitoring reports. The team also reviewed a range of information provided on the VLE and held discussions with students and staff, including those responsible for student support.

2.38 Campus academic managers and programme leaders confirmed that student engagement, development and achievement is monitored throughout each study period, and attendance is recorded following the attendance monitoring procedure. Staff placed a positive emphasis on early intervention and the provision of support, with a pilot currently being undertaken designed to address poor progression in some areas. As part of this process, students and alumni have been involved in the induction of new students. The impact of this is currently being evaluated. Examples were also provided of the way in which the policy regarding students requiring reasonable adjustments is implemented to support students with additional needs who may require individual support plans.

2.39 Students whom the review team met were mostly very positive about the support provided for them. They confirmed that tutors operated an open-door policy and found the availability of the LLC support extremely helpful, including support with academic writing, which is timed to support students as they are completing coursework. Staff described a

range of workshops that students can attend covering academic skills, including referencing and citation, and curriculum vitae preparation. Additionally, supervisors are available to provide support during all campus opening hours.

2.40 Students expressed mixed views about the VLE, resources, software and equipment, which were similarly reflected in the minutes of the boards of studies. However, students considered that SAE is responsive, and identified examples of issues that were addressed in response to their requests.

2.41 All students take common modules that incorporate personal development planning and they are encouraged to consider their career path from the outset of their studies. Students confirmed the availability of careers information and advice through a range of mechanisms, including consultation with staff who have industry experience, the careers adviser, alumni events, seminars and links in the student portal. Students have opportunities throughout their studies to attend guest seminars and masterclass workshops delivered by industry guests, and SAE promotes a variety of industry engagement opportunities that students can access.

2.42 The effective integration of professional and academic support, which enables students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential, is **good practice**. This is also linked to the good practice identified under Enhancement.

2.43 SAE provides, monitors and evaluates a range of integrated resources, support services and opportunities that enable students to develop their potential. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student Engagement

Findings

2.44 SAE takes steps to collaborate with students in the enhancement of their educational experience and in the quality assurance process. This commitment is outlined both in the Student Engagement Policy and the relevant campus guide. Each campus guide details the various opportunities students have to engage in the enhancement of their learning, such as student induction seminars.

2.45 These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.46 The review team examined the student submission to this report, minutes from meetings where students had been invited to participate, and information available to staff and students. The team also met staff and students with responsibility for student engagement.

2.47 Student representatives are elected to represent every class within each programme, and SAE provides information seminars and training to newly elected student representatives to ensure continued support and guidance. The review team was provided with examples of student representative training detailing benefits, key responsibilities and the role of representatives as an intermediary between students and staff. Once elected, each student representative is allocated an existing student representative as his or her mentor. Student representatives attend an orientation seminar and induction seminar, which explain and outline the commitments, skills and benefits of representation. A guide and dedicated online portal are also available to assist representatives in their role.

2.48 Two student representative meetings are held each trimester and are programme specific. This allows the programme coordinator who chairs the meeting to consult and gather feedback from students at all levels of each programme, with any formal actions followed up at the board of studies. Meeting minutes from student representative meetings are made available to students via the AXIS portal. In recognition of their contributions, student representatives are awarded a certificate and reference letter outlining their contribution to SAE.

2.49 Board of studies meetings are used to gather staff and student feedback and inform programme development. These meetings are held mid-trimester of each study period across all sites and are chaired by the Academic Coordinator. Annual monitoring reports, external examiner reports and student survey data are discussed, with the meeting minutes made available to staff and students through the AXIS portal.

2.50 The student experience is monitored by means of student surveys conducted at the end of each teaching period. This allows students the opportunity to provide anonymous feedback regarding individual teaching modules and the overall student experience. SAE has developed its own survey for the academic year 2015-16 featuring a net promoter score indicator, with the aim to align progress and feedback across all campuses.

2.51 Students are represented at strategic levels of SAE and representatives are invited to observe and contribute to Academic Board meetings, where strategic, operational and academic matters are discussed by staff. Students are also represented as members of the Learning and Teaching Committee, and the ASQA. Meeting minutes confirm that students are involved regularly in the learning process. Feedback from students is routinely acted

upon for the improvement of future classes; the student submission to this report confirms this. Students in the written student submission and student submission podcast praised the alterations to their programmes based on student feedback and SAE's openness to student ideas.

2.52 Feedback from student surveys is used to inform annual monitoring reports, to monitor and evaluate programmes and inform reviews. The results are also discussed at boards of studies and student representative meetings. Staff confirmed that the effectiveness of student engagement is monitored and reviewed by monitoring and reviewing attendance tracking, records of students' work, support and profiles. This is supported by the academic policy, which deals with student progression, graduation and transfer.

2.53 SAE takes considered steps to engage with students both individually and collectively. Students report feeling involved in SAE's processes and gave numerous examples of feedback being acted upon for the enrichment of their educational experience. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.54 SAE's assessment regulations and policy are aligned with the University and any variations are agreed during the validation process. The quality manual contains current policies for assessment, including: the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Policy; the Academic Honesty Policy; the Academic Credit and Recognition of Prior Learning Policy; and the Academic Grievance Policy. This is supported by codes of practice on setting assessment, assignment feedback and assessment practice, including moderation.

2.55 Final award and assessment outcomes are processed through a tiered panel and board system, according to University regulations. Student results are confirmed by the second-tier FAB, having first passed through internal and external verification, then through the first-tier campus assessment panels, regional assessment panels and content specialist panels. The FAB is chaired by the University and attended by the chief external examiner.

2.56 The University's academic rules, regulations and procedures followed by SAE would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.57 The review team scrutinised relevant regulations, policy and strategy documents, minutes of meetings, assessment boards, and external examiner comments and reports. The team met staff and students and viewed an example of assessment-related information for students in assessment guides and on the VLE.

2.58 SAE operates effective processes for the assessment of students to enable them to demonstrate that they have achieved the learning outcomes. The teaching staff follow the procedures for marking, double-marking, internal verification, and moderation agreed with the University. The external examiners and link tutors confirm that the assessment regulations are applied fairly, equitably and consistently, and the assessment boards operate effectively. Assessment boards verify assessment and moderation standards and confirm cross-centre moderation and standardised marking across centres. The effective moderation of assessment and standardised marking, which ensures consistency in the award of credit and qualifications across campuses, is **good practice**. This area of good practice is also linked to Expectation A3.2.

2.59 SAE has developed the good practice from previous QAA monitoring visits of issuing clear concise assessment guidelines, which are designed to support students to understand the objectives of the assignments. Students receive assessment information during induction, from the module narrative and assessment guidelines on the VLE. Students state that they understand the regulations and know where to find the details. Student surveys reflect that guidelines are very clear. The inclusive, accessible and clear assessment guidelines, which comprehensively support student understanding of the assessment objectives, criteria and process, is **good practice**. Students say they understand how to avoid unacceptable academic practices and the penalties. They confirm they are continuously reminded about the referencing and formatting of assessments, which they submit electronically using plagiarism-detection software.

2.60 Academic staff provide widespread formative feedback to support the students' summative assessments. Students confirm that feedback on their assessed work is constructive, developmental and usually timely. SAE aims to provide feedback from coursework within two weeks but there have been challenges in meeting this objective. In order to provide feedback consistently to students across all campuses within a specified timeframe SAE is implementing an End of Trimester Policy and Procedure, which clearly defines the tasks, processes, timelines and accountabilities for providing and processing assessment, feedback and assessment board data. The operation of this Policy will be reviewed in December 2017.

2.61 The recently developed information system has an important role in assessment. Students submit their assignments electronically and the system interfaces with plagiarism-detection software. The teaching staff provide feedback through this VLE. The external examiners have access to students' assessed work through the system, which also provides data for all the assessment boards. The development and use of the information management system, which provides a highly effective tool for the delivery, assessment, monitoring and review of programmes and provision of records for students and alumni, is recognised as good practice under Expectation A2.2 and is linked to this Expectation and Expectations B2, B3 and B8.

2.62 The Academic Coordinator assesses applications for credit or recognition of prior learning in accordance with the SAE academic credit and recognition of prior learning procedure, and the review team was provided with examples of recognised credits.

2.63 SAE uses robust assessment procedures, which are fully aligned to the University's regulations. These enable students to demonstrate they have achieved intended learning outcomes through equitable, valid and reliable processes. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining

Findings

2.64 SAE's policy and procedures for the use of external examiners are described in its quality manual. The policy and procedures sit within the overarching framework provided by the University's academic regulations relating to the use and appointment of external examiners.

2.65 In addition to external examiners appointed for cognate areas, a chief external examiner delivers a summative report at each assessment board. Where required, external examiners are required to be bilingual to ensure that all languages of instruction are covered. The policy and procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.66 The review team tested the application of the policy and procedures by scrutinising the SAE quality manual and policy for external examining; external examiner reports and comments; and SAE's responses to the comments and reports, evidenced in the minutes of assessment boards, boards of study, annual monitoring, programme evaluation and monitoring reports and six-yearly review. The team also scrutinised the VLE and discussed the sharing of external examiner reports with staff and students.

2.67 SAE puts forward nominations for possible external examiners to the University. They are considered by the latter against its published criteria and against the register of external examiners to ensure there is no risk of reciprocity. SAE recognises that it may also be useful for them to develop a register of staff external responsibilities and examining commitments, as their staff begin to undertake external examining responsibilities in other institutions.

2.68 In each assessment cycle external examiners review samples of student work across levels 5 and 6 (for undergraduate) and level 7 (postgraduate), including all first class and fail outcomes and a representative spread of results across the remaining award (classification) bands. The samples cover the various programme areas and languages of instruction. External examiner feedback is considered at assessment boards and the chief external examiner attends final assessment boards.

2.69 The review team found that the external examiner reports were fit for purpose; all were completed appropriately and in almost all cases confirmed the helpful and facilitative approach of SAE staff to providing information. Standards overall were consistently confirmed by external examiners. Exceptionally, where concerns were highlighted regarding particular modules, there is good evidence of careful consideration and constructive responses to the issues in the programme evaluation and monitoring reports.

2.70 Additionally, SAE also makes good use of external examiner reports to make improvements and disseminate good practice, which is facilitated by the role of the chief external examiner, who draws cross-campus and cross-regional comparisons. A good example of this process in action is provided by the identification of very helpful feedback sheets at one campus, which all campuses are now aware of and able to use.

2.71 SAE also considers the external examiner reports in annual monitoring and integrates associated actions into the actions table. The staff and students whom the review team met were aware of the external examiner reports, which are discussed in the boards of study, as well as being available on the VLE. Staff were able to discuss particular issues raised by external examiners and explain how they were addressing them.

2.72 SAE has procedures in place that allow effective and scrupulous consideration of external examiner reports. SAE uses the reports to ensure comparability of the student learning experience and to identify and address any issues in provision, which forms part of the cyclical system of programme evaluation, monitoring and review. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

Expectation (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

2.73 The University's regulations and procedures provide the framework for programme monitoring and review to enable strategic oversight of processes and to ensure these processes are applied systematically and consistently.

2.74 Programme leaders produce annual PEMRs at each campus. SAE has recently established a new structure for academic governance, with the ASQA responsible for monitoring quality and standards. At campus level the PEMRs are considered by the Learning and Teaching Committee and then the ASQA. The Regional Academic Manager consolidates campus reports, which then feed into the SAE institutional Annual Monitoring Report. The SAE Academic Board and the University consider and sign off this report. Staff and students have access to the PEMRs at the boards of studies.

2.75 The quality review cycle includes both minor reviews (level) and major review (whole programme) in preparation for the University periodic review, which takes place every six years.

2.76 The review team found that SAE has appropriate policies in place for the monitoring and review of its programmes in order to maintain standards and enhance the quality of learning opportunities. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.77 In order to test the effectiveness of the monitoring and review procedures the review team examined policy documents and templates, and read monitoring and review reports, action plans and committee minutes. The team also met those responsible for, and involved in, annual monitoring and periodic review.

2.78 SAE adheres to the University's procedures and policy for approval, monitoring and review of programmes. SAE underwent a complex Programme Revalidation and Review by the University in 2014; the outcome of this was that the partnership continued with SAE as an enhanced validated partner. This periodic review process is augmented by annual University, institutional, programme, and module monitoring.

2.79 The Learning and Teaching Committee is responsible for enhancing the quality of learning opportunities through regular and systematic monitoring of the provision. It is too soon to establish the effectiveness of the new academic governance structure, as this was only formed in 2015. However, the documentation demonstrates that the focused annual programme monitoring processes are thorough, wide ranging, and applied systematically and consistently. The annual PEMRs report on retention, progression and achievement data, resources, staff and student feedback, responses to external examiners' reports and an action plan. Students are members of the board of studies, which together with student representative meetings enable students to be involved in programme monitoring and review processes.

2.80 The SAE Academic Board reviews and endorses the postgraduate and undergraduate SAE annual monitoring reports and the completion of actions. These are completed on a University template and include external examiners reports, board of studies and Assessment Board minutes, admissions data, programme and achievement data,

student feedback, leaver surveys, first destination, achievement and progression data, aspects of good practice, and an action plan. The review team recognises that these processes are facilitated through the development and use of the information management system, which provides a highly effective tool for the delivery, assessment, monitoring and review of programmes and provision of records for students and alumni. This has been identified as good practice under Expectation A2.2 and is also linked to this Expectation.

2.81 In its meeting with senior staff and a representative of the University, the review team confirmed that SAE maintains regular clear and extensive communications with the University, and that there is a clear distinction between day-to-day monitoring through programme leaders and strategic formal quality assurance, which is managed through SAE and University reporting structures.

2.82 SAE operates focused, regular and systematic processes for the effective monitoring and review of its provision. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met with the associated level of risk 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

2.83 SAE's Academic and Non-Academic Grievance Policies are available to staff, students and stakeholders on the SAE website, and details are given within each programme handbook. These policies clearly detail the timescales and opportunities for informal and formal resolution of appeals and complaints. The need for impartiality is emphasised and all records are kept confidentially in accordance with the SAE Institute Information Privacy Policy, in case a student is treated less favourably as a result of making an appeal or complaint.

2.84 These policies and procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.85 In testing the evidence, the review team considered documentation relevant to appeals and complaints processes provided by SAE, and met staff and students.

2.86 When making a complaint, students are advised to discuss and resolve concerns informally with the relevant person concerned. If informal measures do not lead to a satisfactory conclusion, students are encouraged to discuss the issue with the Academic Coordinator or a Student Support Officer. This staff member can then advise whether the complaint is best addressed through the board of studies, meetings with those concerned, or escalation to a formal complaint. The second informal stage involves the complaint being referred to the relevant campus manager. The timescale for informal complaint resolution is 10 days.

2.87 Formal complaints must be stated in writing to the campus officer, who must acknowledge the receipt of the grievance in writing within five working days, and hold discussions with the complainant and any other relevant parties. The investigating officer makes a decision as to whether the complaint is justified or not and can either dismiss or recommend actions to address the issue within 10 working days. Grievance appeal panels must have no conflict of interest.

2.88 A written report of formal complaint resolution is produced for the Managing Director. If the student is unhappy with the decision, they can appeal the decision in writing to the Chief Operating Officer. If enrolled in a programme validated by the University the complainant may refer the complaint to the University, or the Office of the Independent Adjudicator after the formal process is concluded.

2.89 Academic appeal procedures are set out in SAE's Academic Grievance Policy. This also lists options for formal and informal academic appeal resolution, as well as penalties for academic misconduct. SAE keeps records of all academic dishonesty investigations and a profile of outcomes, which are also included in its annual report to the University. Analysis of the type and nature of complaints and appeals is reviewed via the annual monitoring process and routinely analysed for enhancement purposes.

2.90 Students during the review visit confirmed their awareness of both appeals and complaints procedures. Although many reported choosing to resolve complaints informally, all were aware of how to locate the forms required on the SAE intranet.

2.91 The Academic Honesty Policy sets out expectations for students and staff with regards to referencing citations and plagiarism. This is further supported by the Code of Practice on Research Ethics, which outlines SAE's expectations with regard to research-related activities. SAE uses plagiarism-detection software. Students questioned during the review visit were fully aware of the consequences of academic misconduct.

2.92 SAE has fair, appropriate and freely available procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints. The outcomes of academic appeals and complaints are regularly reviewed for enhancement purposes by the annual monitoring review process. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (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

2.93 SAE operates its undergraduate and postgraduate provision with the University under the terms of two Memoranda of Cooperation. The University is the sole validating partner. SAE has no arrangements for shared delivery with any other provider; has no formal arrangements for work placement or work-based learning in place; and manages its operational arrangements and procedures under a single Governance Structure with an Academic Board and subsidiary committees.

2.94 SAE owns and controls subsidiary organisations in other countries so as to operate in those places. These arrangements are operationally facilitative only and have no impact on the academic content or operation of the programmes. SAE maintains complete and exclusive academic management and control of these programmes under the validated approval arrangements defined by the Memoranda of Cooperation with the University, which are discussed elsewhere in this report.

2.95 As there are no arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with any other organisations, and as all academic matters are governed by the validating partner's approved regulations, this Expectation does not apply.

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Findings

2.96 SAE has no research degree provision, therefore this Expectation is not applicable.

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.97 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.

2.98 All Expectations in this area are met and the associated level of risk is low in all Expectations. The review team identified four areas of good practice in total. These are under Expectations B3 and B4, with two features of good practice under Expectation B6. There are no affirmations or recommendations in this area.

2.99 SAE has a comprehensive and effective staff development policy, which promotes academic, professional and pedagogic staff development. This is supported by a range of mechanisms that ensure that the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices are appropriate. Staff are well-qualified, observed regularly and participate in a range of relevant and effective staff development activities. The review team considers as good practice the effective resourcing and support for staff development, which promotes learning and teaching practice that is informed by reflection, scholarship and industry needs.

2.100 SAE provides, monitors and evaluates a range of integrated resources, support services and opportunities that enable students to develop their potential. Academic staff monitor and support the progress of students at each campus and this is complemented by support provided through the library and learning centres, which have dedicated student support officers. Student engagement, development and achievement is monitored throughout each study period, and end of trimester processes also ensure formal monitoring and review of individual and group progression and achievement. The review team found that the complementary roles of SAE staff provide for the effective integration of professional and academic support, which enables students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential, is a feature of good practice.

2.101 SAE operates effective processes for the assessment of students to enable them to demonstrate that they have achieved the learning outcomes. Academic staff follow the procedures for marking, double-marking, internal verification and moderation agreed with the University. External examiners and link tutors confirm that the assessment regulations are applied fairly, equitably and consistently. Assessment boards operate effectively in verifying assessment and moderation standards and confirming cross-centre moderation and standardised marking across centres. The review team notes as good practice the effective moderation of assessment and standardised marking, which ensures consistency in the award of credit and qualifications across campuses.

2.102 SAE has developed the good practice from previous QAA monitoring visits of issuing clear concise assessment guidelines, which are designed to support students to understand the objectives of the assignments. Students receive assessment information from the module narrative and assessment guidelines on the VLE and confirm that they understand the regulations and that guidelines are very clear. The review team considers as good practice the inclusive, accessible and clear assessment guidelines, which comprehensively support student understanding of the assessment objectives, criteria and process.

2.103 SAE has plans to enhance the quality of student learning opportunities further. Managing the needs of students is a clear focus of strategies and policies, and student engagement in the management of this area is widespread and supported.

2.104 The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at SAE is **commended**.

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 Details of SAE's mission, overall strategy and values are detailed in the SAE Strategic Plan and on its website. Their vision is to be the world's leading educator for the creative media industries. The provision of information about SAE programmes is governed by its Public Information Policy and approval procedures. The prospectus and associated brochures for prospective students are produced under the control of the Managing Director, who devolves authority to approve information for publication to the Director of Marketing, Brand and Communication. The prospectus contains information about SAE, campus information, programme information, applicant information and details regarding fees and funding.

3.2 All public information relating to SAE, including details of its programmes, the campuses at which the programmes are offered, application and entry requirements, and its quality manual, are published on its website. Programme specifications are approved by the University and are linked to SAE's VLE and management information system, which provides a single source of information with which to ensure accuracy and consistency.

3.3 SAE places considerable reliance on the website for the provision of information to prospective applicants; in addition, it produces a downloadable prospectus, which is also available in hard copy. Its content is also linked to the same data sources as the website. SAE publishes information about its programmes on the UCAS website. Internal information for students is provided first by an induction programme, by the AXIS portal (which links to the VLE), VLE and in student handbooks. Students are provided with a campus guide for the campus at which they are on programme. Information for all staff, including those responsible for quality and standards, is published in the quality manual and by reference to the website of the University.

3.4 The Public Information Policy is designed to ensure that all public information provided by SAE is accurate, fair, reasonable and timely, and audiences are able to form an accurate impression of SAE and meet applicable legal obligations. The VLE Coordinator liaises regularly with the UK Academic Manager and heads of department to ensure that materials available are kept up to date. The marketing team also undertakes an annual review of publicly available information. The University reviews annually the materials published by SAE to ensure that they meet the expectations of their publicity and marketing guidelines.

3.5 These procedures and arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

3.6 The review team read the Public Information Policy and approval procedure, explored the SAE website, downloaded the SAE prospectus, and read programme specifications, module narratives and master's level module guides, programme handbooks, and details of the induction programme. The student campus guides provide information about organisational structure, the different modes of study supported by SAE, such as lectures, seminars, coursework and online learning. The team accessed links to the

University website and noted the ease by which information was accessible to a range of users. The team conducted meetings with the head of provider, senior managers and academic and professional support staff (which included the marketing team) and students. The review team was also given thorough demonstrations of the VLE from both a student's and lecturer's viewpoint to establish the reliability, accuracy accessibility and usefulness of these arrangements.

3.7 The review team found that the website was accessible and contained all the information necessary for a prospective applicant to make an informed choice. Publication of SAE's mission and Strategic Plan allows SAE's intended audiences to develop an understanding of its profile. Links to various subsidiary information sources worked well; on the whole, the team found that it was reliable, accurate and accessible. Initially, it appeared that some programmes were being advertised via the website for recruitment, when in fact they had been superseded by the newly validated provision but these concerns were allayed and the reasons for the apparent lack of clarity explained. Students raised some concerns about the impressions given about the availability of some resources at different campuses, but agreed that SAE had or was in the process of rectifying these deficiencies and appreciated that sometimes only a representative view of a multi-site campus was possible.

3.8 The prospectus, which was found to be accurate and accessible, and the external information published by SAE would allow the Expectation to be met.

3.9 Examination of internal published information for both staff and students as hard copy documentation, and in particular the information published via the VLE and the online management information systems, was of a very high standard. This integrated and multi-functional online platform, which provides a wide range of accessible information to all stakeholders and enhances the learning environment, therefore links to the good practice identified under Enhancement in this report, which in turn provides support for student learning and achievement, assessment and the information available to prospective students. The importance of data and information in supporting both strategic and operational decision-making; the quality of the internal information made possible by this platform contributes strongly to the judgement for the Enhancement Expectation.

3.10 Students were universally complimentary about the accessible and comprehensive range of information available and the VLE was almost always cited as the 'go to' source for any information they needed. Students can access information regarding each campus, a variety of documents, timetables, module results, attendance details and news, and are provided with a transcript of their achievements on completion of their studies. Staff were equally enthusiastic about the availability of information and the ease with which it could be accessed and where necessary downloaded for analysis or updated.

3.11 SAE has continued to develop its systems and arrangements for its published information since the Review for Educational Oversight concluded that reliance could be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the provider is responsible for publishing about itself and the programmes it delivers. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

3.14 SAE produces information through a range of mechanisms and media that is accessible, fit for purpose and trustworthy. Accuracy of information is facilitated by a clear and detailed policy, which is understood by staff. SAE's website is accessible and the information contained within it is comprehensive, thus aiding prospective students to make informed choices. The VLE enables students to access a range of resources and detailed information about their programmes of study and is linked to an effective student management and information system.

3.15 The review team concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at SAE **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 SAE's strategic approach to enhancing the student learning experience is embedded in the culture of continuous improvement within several areas, including student induction, student engagement, admissions, and learning and teaching through enhancement of the VLE. This is supported by SAE's Strategic Plan and the Learning and Teaching Plan, which identifies the company's intention to enhance students' learning opportunities.

4.2 The review team identified SAE's enhancement approach through the meetings it held with staff, students and senior managers. These provided the team with information that supported SAE's policies, committee structures and practices for enhancement, and this is sustained by a dedicated quality assurance and enhancement process. This process is underpinned by the company's intention to embed a continuous improvement ethos in curriculum delivery and management and the learning environment.

4.3 Enhancement strategies are guided by the current Strategic Plan; the Learning and Teaching Plan; and the LLC Plan, which include specific campus-based action plans involving academic coordinators meetings. The UK Alumni Action Plan provides additional opportunities for past and present students to share current sector information and career opportunities to support progression into the creative media professions.

4.4 These arrangements, policies and procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

4.5 To test the Expectation the review team examined documentary evidence provided in the SAE Strategic Plan and policies, including the Learning and Teaching Policy, planning documents and meeting notes. The team also raised questions in meetings, focusing on how enhancement initiatives were managed to form a strategic approach at company and campus level.

4.6 SAE demonstrates a strong commitment to the enhancement of students' learning opportunities through deliberate, systematic and sustained quality enhancement and continuous improvement activities. SAE confirmed in meetings that a number of initiatives are underway with the aim of enhancing student learning opportunities. Examples of strategy-led enhancements include the Alumni Association. This is the global community of all graduates with a range of services that also extends to current students. SAE funds students to attend the annual SAE Alumni Convention, participate in workshops and take part in competitions. The SAE Alumni Network provides a platform to connect lecturers, fellow students and the industry; and to maintain and develop social and professional relationships. The current students, graduates, staff and employers confirm the benefits of this enhancement. This effective integration of professional and academic support enables students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential, and is recognised as good practice under Expectation B4. The strategic approach to the development of the Alumni Network, which provides extensive opportunities for students to share practice, and enhances their personal development and progression into creative media professions, is **good practice**.

4.7 SAE has implemented an enhanced VLE to support learning and teaching. This integrates with the students' portals and the SMIS. It provides students with access to all course materials, learning resources and information relating to their programmes. Coursework is predominantly submitted digitally through the VLE, which includes plagiarism screening of written work, and students can access feedback on assessment directly from the portal. The VLE is logically structured and the students say it has helpful portals. In addition to its utility as a learning resource, the integrated system is accessed by external examiners for sampling marked and moderated assessments. The student recruitment team and academic staff also access the system to support student admission and subsequent learning. This integrated multi-functional online platform, which provides a wide range of accessible information to all stakeholders and enhances the learning environment, is **good practice**.

4.8 SAE takes deliberate steps to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities through strategic approaches and management at campus level. There are specific initiatives at SAE and an ethos that expects and encourages enhancement of student learning opportunities. 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

4.9 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.

4.10 The Expectation in this area is met and the associated level of risk is low. The review team identified two areas of good practice in this area and there are no recommendations or affirmations.

4.11 SAE has a clearly articulated enhancement strategy, which is embedded in a culture of continuous improvement and deliberate, systematic quality enhancement activities. An example of this is the Alumni Network, which provides a platform to connect lecturers, fellow students and the industry, and to maintain and develop social and professional relationships. The review team considers the strategic approach to the development of the Alumni Network, which provides extensive opportunities for students to share practice, and enhances their personal development and progression into creative media professions, to be feature of good practice.

4.12 SAE has an enhanced VLE that supports learning and teaching, and integrates with students' portals and the SMIS. It provides students with access to all course materials, learning resources and information relating to their programmes; enables digital submission of coursework and plagiarism screening; and allows students to access feedback on assessment directly from the portal. The integrated system is accessed by external examiners for sampling marked and moderated work; academic and support staff access the system to support student admission and subsequent learning. This integrated multi-functional online platform, which provides a wide range of accessible information to all stakeholders and enhances the learning environment, is recognised as a feature of good practice by the review team.

4.13 The review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at SAE is **commended**.

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1 SAE regards graduate destinations as a key measure of success; accordingly, great emphasis is placed on student employment outcomes and the continued expansion of the global Alumni Network.

5.2 The SAE Alumni Association is a global community of all graduates and its core mission is to support all of its members in discovering employment opportunities and improving their skills and employment prospects. The SAE Alumni Association gives access to industry information, careers advice, industry talks and continued access to the creative industry network information, about employment opportunities and current vacancies through the SAE job portal, newsletters and emails. Career pathways and employment opportunities are communicated to students via the website and as part of open day presentations. SAE encourages new students to consider possible career pathways that may be suited to their talents and chosen area of study.

5.3 The Alumni Association is open to current students and graduates. It provides a platform to connect with lecturers, fellow students and the industry, and to maintain and develop social and professional relationships. Students are supported and encouraged to participate in the SAE Alumni Convention and the SAE Alumni Awards Ceremony.

5.4 The review team finds that the strategic approach to the development of the Alumni Network, which provides extensive opportunities for students to share practice and enhances their personal development and progression into creative media professions, is identified as a feature of good practice under the Enhancement Expectation.

5.5 Many lecturers are active practitioners within the industry, so draw on their industry experience and current practice to engage students in their learning, in ways that expose them to industry practice and expectations, building the skills and knowledge needed to be successful in the industry.

5.6 During their studies, students are provided with careers and employability sessions through seminars, workshops, guest lectures, master classes and self-directed learning. Students are advised of industry engagement opportunities that may include workplace opportunities, industry meet-ups, events, conventions and other networking opportunities.

5.7 Students are also involved in a range of industry settings that complement their experience on their course. These include live projects, industry promotions, film and theatre productions and festivals, which also provide students with the basis of a network of contacts.

5.8 Programmes place considerable emphasis on practical learning; within SAE this is supported by supervisors, who provide practical, technical and student support, working within professional level environments, with access to industry standard equipment.

5.9 Throughout the recent programme review and revalidation process industry experts were closely involved. Employers currently involved with SAE consider that suggestions that they make are taken seriously. They described a range of ways in which they contribute to programmes, in particular by providing opportunities for students to gain work experience. They identified the development of problem solving skills as a noticeable strength of SAE students. The revised programmes are designed to provide more flexibility and more effective, overt embedding of employability skills. Graduate skills have been mapped across the new programmes. Additionally, greater emphasis is now placed on the development

of entrepreneurship, as there is recognition that the nature of employment opportunities has changed.

5.10 The revised programmes also include common modules that focus on career development through personal development planning and the encouragement of early consideration of career trajectories. Content includes business planning and securing funding. At level 6 there are industry engagement elective modules that will provide students with the opportunity to undertake learning within various industry based contexts. The modules will be available to students studying in the 2015 validated programmes from January 2017.

5.11 In summary, through the process of review and revalidation, SAE has refocused the curriculum of its programmes to provide very clear pathways to support the development of student's employability both personally and professionally. This development is located within a rich environment of opportunities and networks provided by the close links with industry and the Alumni Network.

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 22-25 of the [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\) handbook](#).

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

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

Academic standards

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

Award

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

Awarding organisation

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

Blended learning

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

Credit(s)

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

Degree-awarding body

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

Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

Dual award or double award

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

e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning

Enhancement

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

Expectations

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

Flexible and distributed learning

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

See also **distance learning**.

Framework

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

Framework for higher education qualifications

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

Good practice

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

Learning opportunities

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

Learning outcomes

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

Multiple awards

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

Operational definition

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

Programme (of study)

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

Programme specifications

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

Quality Code

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

Reference points

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

Self-evaluation document

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

Subject Benchmark Statement

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

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)

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

Threshold academic standard

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

Virtual learning environment (VLE)

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

Widening participation

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

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