Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of the University of Buckingham

October 2017

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at the University of Buckingham. The review took place from 9 to 12 October 2017 and was conducted by a team of four reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Susan Blake
- Professor John Deane
- Dr Peter Rae
- Mr Craig Best (student reviewer).

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

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

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

The QAA website gives more information about QAA[2] and explains the method for Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers).[3] For an explanation of terms see the glossary at the end of this report.

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[1] The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code.
[2] QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk.
[3] Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers):
www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education.

Key findings

Judgements

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

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

Good practice

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

- The comprehensive and sustained approach to personalised support for learning, including the systematic operation of small-sized tutorial groups across all aspects of provision (Expectations B3 and B4).
- The embedding of innovative pathways into higher education provided by the Foundation Department, which enables a range of students to complete degree- level study (Expectation B4 and Enhancement).
- The coherent and systematic development of the Positive University initiative that promotes and supports the welfare of students and staff through a wide range of inter-related activities (Enhancement; Expectations B3 and B4).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations**.

By March 2018:

- formalise processes and procedures for the oversight of public information in order to ensure accuracy and completeness (Expectations C and A2.2).

By July 2018:

- ensure that the University maintains a definitive record of each programme as an accurate and complete reference point (Expectations A2.2 and C).

Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms** the following actions already being taken to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to students:

- the steps being taken to enhance the quality and accuracy of management data through the development of programme data dashboards (Expectations B8 and C)
- the identification of a systematic approach to providing equitable teaching skills development opportunities for research students (Expectations B11 and B3).

About the provider

The University College at Buckingham was founded in 1973, and incorporated 10 years later as The University of Buckingham. It is a registered charity, with the declared principles (based on continual dialogue with the Institute of Economic Affairs) of Classical Liberalism for the development of free thought and independent academia.

The University has pioneered a distinctive two-year undergraduate honours degree through restructuring the academic year to provide an additional term each summer. There are flexible entry points for students, allowing them to enrol in January, April, July or September/October. Six academic schools offer undergraduate and postgraduate programmes for Business, Humanities, Law, Science, Medicine and Education, in addition to the cross-institutional pre-degree Foundation programme. The University secured a Gold outcome in the 2017 Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), indicating that students from all backgrounds achieve consistently outstanding outcomes across all metrics. Very high proportions progress to employment or further study, notably exceeding benchmarks. The metrics indicate outstanding levels of satisfaction with academic support that are also significantly above benchmark.

The University has 328 staff and 2,603 enrolled students, most of whom are full-time. Approximately one third of all students are international, including from Nigeria, China, Indonesia, the USA, Canada, Pakistan, Germany, Iraq and Japan. Collaborative student numbers currently stand at 1,314. The overall student population has doubled since 2007, with much of the growth in the newer schools of Education and Medicine. The University's 10-year plan sets a target of 5,000 students by the year 2026.

The University appointed a new Vice-Chancellor in 2015 and a new Chair of Council in 2017. This new leadership has led to a review of governance with two strategic objectives: alignment with the Higher Education Code of Governance external regulatory frameworks, and supporting the achievement of the University's strategic goals over the next decade. A range of UK and international collaborative partnerships have emerged, including higher education providers in Jersey, Sarajevo, Budapest and Mexico. The University recognises the close relationship between research and a vibrant learning environment for students and is working towards participating in the Research Excellence Framework (REF) for the first time in 2021. It has also extended its main campus provision within Buckingham to other locations including Milton Keynes, and a postgraduate centre in London.

The University sees increased competition for the recruitment of students from a decreasing pool of applicants as one of its main challenges, in addition to the possible impact of Brexit in terms of applications from European states and any changes to fees policy. The University also recognises the importance of being continually responsive to student satisfaction, progression, achievement and employability metrics as used within TEF.

The University was first reviewed by QAA in 2001, with all subsequent reviews confirming that expectations for quality and standards have been consistently met. The most recent review was in 2016, when the Specific Course Designation annual monitoring visit concluded that the University of Buckingham was making acceptable progress in implementing the action plan from the August 2012 Institutional Review. The University has strengthened oversight and reporting for collaborative provision, as recommended within the 2012 review report and a Concerns investigation in 2016. In accordance with other recommendations, the University has also aligned all awards with *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), reviewed its programme approval degree classification procedures, and developed a more systematic approach to the enhancement of learning opportunities.

Explanation of findings

This section explains the review findings in greater detail.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

1.1   The University's taught and research awards are fully aligned with the FHEQ, qualification descriptors, the academic credit framework and Subject Benchmark Statements. The University's taught programme, module and unit specifications templates require the applicable FHEQ level and Subject Benchmark Statements to be explicitly recorded and programme outcomes mapped to qualification descriptor. University awards are named in accordance with the titling conventions specified in the FHEQ. The design of the systems and procedures to secure threshold academic standards allows Expectation A1 to be met.

1.2   In its review of evidence, the review team sampled annual monitoring and periodic review reports, and examined the minutes of committees where reports were received and considered. Academic threshold standards and monitoring and review processes were explored through discussions with academic managers, staff and students.

1.3   The review team noted the action plan for the University for three recommendations raised in the 2012 QAA Institutional Review. They referred to aspects of the FHEQ, exit awards and programme approval, and resulted in subsequent changes to documentation

and procedures. The April 2016 QAA Specific Course Designation report concluded that the 2012 action plan be monitored and updated annually by the University, and procedures developed to tie annual course monitoring processes to a University-wide action plan.

1.4   The University takes account of appropriate guidance on qualification characteristics in the design and approval of its awards and requires consideration of the requirements of any relevant professional bodies. In addition, there is a requirement that account is taken of relevant Subject Benchmark Statements for new or significantly revised programmes, with the provision of helpful guidance on their use. The relevant statement is specifically recorded in the approval documentation. The University secures academic threshold standards through oversight by the School Learning and Teaching Committees (SLTCs), School Boards of Study, University Learning and Teaching Committee (ULTC), University Collaborations Committee (UCC), University Research Committee (URC) and Senate.

1.5   The team concludes that the University has in place appropriate systems and procedures to secure threshold academic standards. The new programme and modules approval procedure outlines the process for programme module approval including minor and major changes. The Expectation is therefore met with a low level of risk.

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

1.6   The University's academic framework is set out in General Regulations for First Degrees, the General Regulations for the MBChB, the General Regulations for Higher Degrees and the Research Degrees Regulations. These regulations are supplemented by procedures for Academic Misconduct, Mitigating Circumstances Academic Appeals, Student Complaints, and General Regulations for Students of the University. There are school or special level regulations relating to Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) approved by ULTC and URC. Decisions relating to academic credit, Board of takes progression and awards Examiners. The Senate ratifies exam board decisions and approves any changes to regulations, which are communicated to staff and students via the University Handbook, which is published on the website, and a quarterly Regulations Bulletin.
The design of the systems and procedures to secure threshold academic standards through transparent academic frameworks and regulations to govern the award of academic credit and qualifications would allow Expectation A2.1 to be met.

1.7   In its review of evidence, the team sampled annual monitoring and periodic review reports and examined the minutes of relevant committees. Details relating to standards and regulations for the awarding of academic credit and qualifications were explored through discussions with academic managers, staff and students.

1.8   The review team noted the actions taken by the University in dealing with two recommendations raised in the 2012 Institutional Review related to exit awards and programme approval to ensure effective scrutiny of all regulatory matters. They include ensuring that awards comply with University regulations and subsequent changes to documentation and procedures. The team further noted that the QAA Specific Course Designation report for 2016 recognised that the action plan is monitored and updated annually by the University, with procedures being developed for linking annual course monitoring with the University-wide action plan.

1.9   Relevant committees have appropriate terms of reference and the papers and minutes confirmed that these are being discharged. The University keeps its regulations and academic frameworks under review through the work of its Regulations Working Party, which reports to the UTLC and the URC as appropriate. Revisions to regulations require the approval of the Senate and there are clear processes for dissemination to staff and students.

1.10   When new programmes and modules are brought forward for approval, the University requires confirmation that awards are permitted by its regulations. Variations to regulations, or the approval of special programme regulations (often relating to requirements of PSRBs), require consultation with the Quality Assurance Manager and the Registrar before being considered for approval by the Senate.

1.11   The award of academic credit, academic awards of the University and decisions relating to progression are taken by Boards of Examiners at the school level, with ratification by Senate. Boards of Examiners are subcommittees of School Boards of Study, the conduct of which is monitored by a senior member of the Registry or staff in Quality Assurance to ensure consistency and adherence to the regulations. Consideration of sample minutes of

examination boards confirms that the University's regulations are applied consistently. External examiners are required to be present at second-stage examination boards, which, along with confirmation in external examiners' written reports, provide additional assurance that standards are met.

1.12   The review team found the University's academic frameworks and regulations enable it to discharge its responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards. The team concludes that the University has in place appropriate systems and procedures to govern the awarding of academic credit and qualifications. New programme and module approval procedures include details for minor and major changes that are approved through the governance framework. The Expectation for securing academic threshold standards in relation to the FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements, QAA qualification characteristics and alignment with academic credit frameworks is therefore met with a low level of risk.

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

1.13   The University maintains a central register of programmes and awards and a central repository of programme specifications. Programme and module specifications are the authoritative reference points. Programme specifications are published in the University Handbook which is on the University website. Updates to programme and module specifications are authorised through processes and policy for New Programme and Module Approval policy and approved by Senate. Changes to programmes specifications are made by administrators in the School Office, and the Quality Assurance Office is responsible for uploading programme specifications to the Handbook and for maintaining the programme specification repository. Updates to regulations and any other changes to programme and module specifications are communicated to staff and students via the minutes for the ULTC.

1.14   The design of these systems and procedures would allow Expectation A2.2 to be met.

1.15   In considering the evidence, the review team sampled annual monitoring and periodic review reports and examined the minutes of committees. Programme specifications as definitive documents were explored through discussions with academic managers, staff and students. The team also viewed the University's central repository for programme specifications, as demonstrated by University staff from the Quality Office.

1.16   The team noted that a system is in place for keeping a central programme register and a repository for all programme specifications, with schools providing information that is uploaded to the repository by the Quality Office. There is also a central register of undergraduate modules, and postgraduate modules will be added during the 2018-19 academic session. Staff confirmed that the repository is the key information source for the University Handbook regarding programme specification content.

1.17   The review team identified examples in both the University Handbook and the evidence base of programme specifications that contained incomplete details, an observation that is also explored in Expectation C. This evidence indicates that the majority of programme specifications sampled by the team did not have the date of approval by the respective SLTCs and the ULTC. The team also noted that a significant number of programme specifications on the spreadsheet provided as additional evidence during the review visit did not specify the FHEQ level. Furthermore, the team identified within the University Handbook other gaps in programme information where outdated Subject Benchmark Statements had been referenced, including the Master's and Diploma in Business Administration that use 2007 Subject Benchmark Statements rather than the more recently published 2015 versions.

1.18   Discussions with senior, academic, and professional support staff confirmed that the annual monitoring process and quinquennial review process are designed to ensure programme specifications are up to date. The Chair of ULTC recognised that an extra quality assurance step is required to ensure that all programme specifications are complete and up

to date. The review team **recommends** therefore that the University ensures that it maintains a definitive record of each programme as an accurate and complete reference point.

1.19   The team noted that there are examples of incomplete documentation for a range of programme specifications that point to difficulties with systems and procedures associated with the operation of a central repository that houses necessary definitive documentation. The team concludes that the Expectation is not met based on there being no reliable definitive reference point for the delivery and assessment of programmes. The team recognised, however, that while a system is in place for processing and locating programme documentation, no actual difficulties have been experienced or reported by students and staff, and the University has noted the need to improve relevant monitoring and amendment procedures. For these reasons the team decided that the risk level is moderate rather than serious.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

1.20   Processes for the approval of new taught provision are clearly laid out in the New Programmes and Modules Approval Procedure. The multi-stage process sets clear expectations for engagement with internal stakeholders, and external academic and professional reference points. Following outline permission from the relevant Dean, a consultation phase is undertaken, and a Rationale and Business Case developed. For collaborative programmes, where a validation event takes place, a recommendation for approval is then made to the applicable SLTC. For University-based awards, the approval process is normally paper-based, with the programme director engaging with and responding to the external reviewers' comments. Following this, the new programme is taken to the relevant SLTC, which in turn makes a recommendation to the School Board of Study followed by ULTC, and then Senate for final approval. For Research Degrees, approval follows a similar process, but proposals are considered by School Research Committees and the University Research Committee prior to consideration by the Senate.

1.21   The programme design stage includes consultation with at least one external subject specialist, employers and, where appropriate, the relevant PSRB. The external reviewers, appointed by the Quality Assurance Office, make comments anonymously, to which the school must respond. Discussions are coordinated by the Quality Assurance office to protect the anonymity of the external reviewers.

1.22   The design of these systems and procedures would enable Expectation A3.1 to be met.

1.23   The review team considered guidance documentation and handbooks, records of external reviews, programme approval reports, and minutes from relevant deliberative committees. The team also met a range of academic managers and staff who have been involved in proposing a new programme and those who have been part of an approval panel.

1.24   The team noted that the University operates effective processes for programme design and approval. The criteria for approving a new programme make explicit the requirement to meet both internal and external reference points. The ULTC is required to satisfy itself that academic standards are set at the appropriate FHEQ level, and that they reflect Subject Benchmark Statements and the University's framework and regulations. A review of definitive documentation submitted to ULTC confirms that there is appropriate mapping to relevant external reference points. Documentation completed by external reviewers and reports of validation events provide assurance that there is thorough scrutiny of the academic standards of new programmes. There is also evidence that conditions for approval are consistently addressed and reviewed.

1.25   Approval of awards at collaborative institutions mirrors the process at work in the University, with new programmes being considered and approved by the appropriate linked School Learning and Teaching Committee (SLTC). In this case, however, reviewers are appointed by the Collaborations Department, rather than by the Quality Assurance Office,

and the proposal is approved by the Collaborations Department following a validation event, prior to consideration by the school SLTC.

1.26 Clear guidance is available to all stakeholders involved in the approval of new provision. Staff were clear about the role of programme approval in ensuring academic standards are set at the appropriate level and align with national expectations. Staff confirmed that discussions around the alignment of learning outcomes to the FHEQ are a key part of the approval process.

1.27 The team concludes that the Expectation has been met with a low level of risk.

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

1.28   The University sets its academic standards through General Regulations for its degrees, with the approach that the award of credit and qualifications be based on the demonstration of the achievement of learning outcomes. A part of the approval process for new or significantly revised programmes and modules specifies learning outcomes, using templates that note the relationship with assessment mechanisms. Since 2014 this has included a Module Mapping template and an Assessment Matrix Template, with guidance available from the Quality Assurance Office. External subject specialists are asked to confirm the level and the alignment of learning outcomes with programme aims and objectives and assessment criteria. Relevant school or university committees will only give approval when satisfied that assessments and criteria are consistent with the level of the award, and will enable students to demonstrate their achievement of the learning outcomes.

1.29   External examiners are involved in approving assessment tasks at Levels 5, 6 and 7 that count towards a University award, including all examinations as well as coursework counting for more than 30 per cent of the final mark. All assessments that count towards an award must be double marked or moderated internally. Decisions relating to academic credit, progression and awards are taken by Boards of Examiners in accordance with the relevant University regulations, and are approved by Senate. The external examiners' Report template asks for comments on alignment with the FHEQ, the rigour of the assessment process, and the performance of the examined cohort in relation to peers in the University and nationally. There is institutional oversight through the submission to Senate of an Annual Overview Report of external examiners' reports.

1.30   The design of these policies and procedures allow Expectation A3.2 to be met.

1.31   In its review of evidence, the team scrutinised programme and module specifications, external examiner reports, assignment briefs, and assessment guidelines, policies, and procedures. Details were discussed in meetings with senior, academic and professional staff, and with students.

1.32   The review team noted that documents relating to programme and module approval demonstrated the effective setting of learning outcomes and assessment patterns, with external input taken into account. Since 2014 module maps and assessment matrices have been put in place for all new programmes, demonstrating how modules contribute to learning outcomes. This procedure will not be extended to all existing programmes until 2018.

External examiners' reports confirm the appropriateness of learning outcomes and the reliability of assessment, and in recent years all reports have confirmed level and standards.

1.33   The team concludes that the Expectation is met with a low level of risk.

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

1.34　　The academic monitoring process comprises annual review at module, programme, school and university levels, and five-yearly periodic reviews at school level. These processes inform action planning for continuous improvement including proposals for any changes to academic provision.

1.35　　The University's programme review processes are designed to ensure that academic quality and standards of provision meet institutional and external reference points. The annual monitoring of programmes and modules is explicitly linked to the Quality Code, and sets out the processes, documentation requirements, and roles and responsibilities for academic review. These procedures ensure that assessment strategies and criteria remain consistent with the level of the award and continue to enable students to demonstrate their achievement of independent learning outcomes. Oversight of the monitoring and review of the University's academic provision is exercised by the ULTC. The University's Quinquennial Review procedure provides confirmation that incremental changes to programmes over the intervening period have not adversely affected their alignment with UK threshold standards. Monitoring and review processes at collaborative partners are designed to reflect the University's internal processes, but are overseen by the Collaborations Department, rather than the relevant SLTC.

1.36　　The design of these systems and procedures would enable Expectation A3.3 to be met.

1.37　　The review team tested the effectiveness of processes for programme review through consideration of a sample of annual monitoring reports, school self-evaluation documents, quinquennial review panel reports, and minutes of school and university committees. Details were discussed with academic and administrative staff and students involved in the review of programmes.

1.38　　The team noted that the annual monitoring process, though focused on enhancement, also provides adequate assurance that academic standards are being maintained. Annual monitoring draws on a wide range of information, including assessment and student achievement data, which is available as a module data dashboard. Programme level dashboards are still under development, with staff recognising that their creation will allow greater comparability across the institution. As discussed further in Expectation B7, external examiners are required to comment annually on the arrangements in place for the maintenance of academic standards, alignment to the FHEQ, assessment, and the overall management of the programme. Their reports are considered in detail as part of the annual monitoring process and provide the main basis for the assurance of academic standards.

1.39　　Quinquennial review processes are also thorough in their evaluation of the academic standards of awards. Documents submitted by schools and panel reports provide evidence that consideration is given to the alignment of programmes with both internal and external reference points. Review panels, including at least two external members and a student representative, prepare a report for Senate. Each school responds verbally to

discussions of review reports at Senate and produces a written action plan, progress against which is verified by the SLTC through the annual monitoring process.

1.40   The review team concludes that the Expectation is met with a low level of risk.

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

1.41   The University's Quality Assurance Office appoints external subject specialists to provide independent views on each proposal for a new programme, or significant revisions to current programmes. These reviewers are asked to confirm appropriate FHEQ levels, and comment on the alignment of learning outcomes, programme aims, and assessment criteria. The external's comments are considered by the relevant SLTC with final documentation then being forwarded to the ULTC for approval. A similar process is followed in relation to collaborative provision. The design and development of a research degree also requires external peer comment that is taken into account prior to approval by the School Board of Studies, the University Research Committee (URC) and Senate.

1.42   External examiners are used to check regularly that standards are properly set and maintained, with any comments being taken into account in annual monitoring. Provisions for the use of external examiners in relation to research degrees are stipulated in the Research Degrees Handbook, including responsibilities for standards. For quinquennial review, an external review panel includes external subject specialists. External examiner reports form part of the database for annual review and for quinquennial review. PSRB reports form part of the documentation required for quinquennial review, and a PSRB representative may be a member of the panel.

1.43   The University has significant involvement with PSRBs in relation to standards for subject-level accreditation or exemption, with a strategic commitment to PSRB accreditation where relevant. At least one PSRB is relevant to provision in most schools. PSRB relationships and alignment are relevant to programme approval, annual monitoring and quinquennial review, and the Quality Assurance Manager assists in aligning PSRB and University requirements.

1.44   The design for the use of external and independent expertise would enable Expectation A3.4 to be met.

1.45   The review team considered a range of documentation, including validation information, PSRB reports and commentary from external examiners and external specialists. The understanding of the role of externality in programme design and review was discussed in meetings with senior, teaching and professional support staff.

1.46   The team noted ongoing developments in governance arrangements for providing more externality at Council level. Staff described the operation of the process for appointing external advisers for programme approval, giving examples on involving local and international businesses, a range of professionals, and alumni. Senior staff confirmed that ULTC considers external reviewer comments with evidence demonstrating that external reviewers are used effectively in course development, including collaborative provision.

1.47   The team also recognised positive comments from PSRBs in relation to standards, with recent PSRB reaccreditations including the British Psychological Society in 2017 and inspection by Ofsted in 2013. The School of Medicine is subject to ongoing oversight by the General Medical Council, and this includes some oversight of assessment and Boards of Examiners.

1.48   Where there is no PSRB accreditation the University engages with employers and alumni in consultations and surveys, and while there is some variation in practice the team heard that this may contribute to programme design and development.

1.49   The team concludes that the Expectation has been met with a low level of risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards: Summary of findings

1.50   In reaching its judgement about the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered by the University, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.51   Six of the seven Expectations in this area have been met, with a low level of associated risk in each case and no recommendations or affirmations. There was one recommendation for Expectation A2.2, based on the need to provide accurate and complete programme specifications, leading to the conclusion that the University does not meet the Expectation for the provision of an accurate and definitive reference point for each programme and award. This outcome is linked to a moderate rather than serious risk level because no actual difficulties with the use of programme specifications were noted, with a central repository in place and University staff identifying the need for a more comprehensive approach for maintaining and updating relevant programme information.

1.52   The University of Buckingham uses appropriate reference points for academic frameworks and regulations associated with the approval and award of academic credit and qualifications. Definitive records are maintained for programmes, and the achievement of learning outcomes is demonstrated through assessment based on the satisfaction of academic standards. Monitoring and review procedures are implemented successfully, including the appropriate use of independent and external expertise in order to assure the integrity of higher education provision.

1.53   The review team concludes that the setting and maintenance of the academic standards 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   Programme design is considered during the development of an initial proposal, and is an integral part of the outline approval stage. As discussed in Expectation A3.1, the output from the design process is the definitive documentation presented to external reviewers and validation panels. This procedure articulates the structure, content, and learning, teaching and assessment strategies for the proposed programme of study. The more detailed planning and monitoring of programme approval activity and scrutiny of proposals is undertaken by SLTCs, reporting to ULTC. Senate retains oversight of the approval of all new programmes.

2.2   The design of these processes would enable Expectation B1 to be met.

2.3   The review team analysed a sample of documentation presented for approval, including records of recent programme approval exercises and minutes of relevant committee meetings, and considered the response of the school to the comments of anonymous external reviewers. Details were explored in meetings with a range of academic and professional support staff, as well as students who had been involved in the early stages of programme design and approval.

2.4   The documentary evidence for new programme approvals confirmed that the University adheres to its own processes, and that these are implemented consistently within and between schools. The first stage of the approval process involves an extensive consultation exercise within the University, where all internal stakeholders have the opportunity to influence the shaping of the programme. New programmes must be presented through the completion of a standard proposal template and approval checklist, and have the support of the relevant Dean. Proposals are considered on the basis of the strategic academic rationale, demand for the provision, and resource requirements. This lengthy initial scrutiny and consultation process ensures that only those programmes that are economically and academically viable go forward for consideration through subsequent formal approval processes.

2.5   There is also systematic engagement with key external stakeholders throughout the process, with external reviewers, including employers, using standard University templates for the provision of formal feedback that informs later approval stages. Approval panels are generally only used for collaborative provision, with internal award procedures responding to external reviewers' comments and suggestions through administrative processes that do not rely on face-to-face meetings. Validation panels for collaborative provision must include an external expert who is also required to provide independent written feedback on the proposal, confirming whether it meets University criteria.

2.6   The team noted that the programme approval process is thorough, and ensures that appropriate consideration is given to both the academic standards of the award and the quality of learning opportunities. Academic and professional support staff confirmed that they

have access to appropriate guidance, support and development to enable them to participate effectively in programme design and approval. Detailed guidance is also provided to external reviewers so that they are fully apprised of their role.

2.7 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met with a low level of risk.

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   The University does not currently publish an overriding Admissions Policy, with responsibilities for recruitment, selection and admission set out in the Admissions Terms and Conditions for Prospective Students. The Terms of Conditions for Prospective Students reflect the requirements of the CMA and include information on the General Regulations of First Degrees. Full course information, including programme specifications, are made available on the University website and through the University Handbook.

2.9   The Director of Recruitment and Admissions is responsible for the strategic recruitment policies and oversight of the management of recruitment, admissions and selection procedures. Schools are responsible for undertaking admissions decisions, made in accordance contained within the relevant programme specification. Each school has dedicated admissions tutors and administrative staff support. The Central Admissions Office is responsible for providing admissions statistics for the executive Committee and for general guidance, including use of the Application Instructions template, regulatory requirements, and deadlines. The Visa Compliance Committee ensures that the University complies with its obligations as a Tier 4 sponsor, and the Visa Support Office liaises with relevant schools to ensure that information is disseminated and reflected in admissions practices.

2.10   The University's website and prospectus provide information for prospective students who are invited to open days that provide additional information regarding studying at the University, including a dedicated course information tab for all courses at the University. Information on admission processes for taught and postgraduate research courses are available online, including entry requirements. Admissions criteria are clear, including those with specific requirements.

2.11   Procedures for recruitment, selection and admission to collaborative partners are set out in relevant Contracts and Collaborations Delivery Plans which confirm the responsibilities of partners. Guidance for admitting students is also included in the Collaborations Handbook which is overseen by the Collaborations Department.

2.12   These systems and procedures for recruitment and admissions would allow Expectation B2 to be met.

2.13   The review team scrutinised documentation and websites relevant to admissions in conjunction with defined procedures. Further details were discussed with a range of academic and professional support staff and students, including the clarity and understanding of guidance documentation proved to admissions staff within each school.

2.14   Admissions guidance provided by the Central Admissions Office successfully defines processes undertaken by schools when making formal offers to prospective students, including the assessment of each application and relevant English language requirements. Admission staff were aware of their responsibilities and provided the team with evidence of their undertaking of continuous training. It was clear that the Central Admissions Office remains responsible for ensuring that school staff are appropriately

supported throughout the cycle. The approach taken by the University ensures that all offers are consistent across the University. As discussed further in Expectation B4, applicants who do not meet the academic entry requirements for higher education programmes are referred to the Foundation and Academic Skills Department in order to ascertain if an offer can be made at a lower level.

2.15   The Medical School operates a separate Code of Practice for Selection which is in line with General Medical Council (GMC) requirements. Selection on to MBChB programmes is overseen by a Selection Lead and includes assessment by a recruitment panel. The approach taken by the Medical School is consistent with GMC requirements with positive feedback being noted by students.

2.16   The evidence shows that the University has an effective approach to recruitment, selection, and admission of students. The team noted the work of the dedicated admission tutors and admissions staff within in each school to ensure an effective and personal approach to the recruitment, selection, and admission of applicants. This process is reinforced by support, guidance, and training provided by the Central Admissions Office. Students commented positively on the process of admission and selection. Although the University does not have an overriding policy for admissions; the aforementioned Terms and Conditions provide the necessary detail, including the right to appeal a decision.

2.17   The University makes extensive efforts to enable applicants to make informed decisions. The application process is clearly outlined, as are entry requirements on the University website. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met with a low level of risk.

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   Oversight of learning and teaching is maintained at university level by Senate and ULTC. At school level there is a Board of Studies and the SLTC. The University makes substantial use of accelerated two-year undergraduate degrees, with teaching taking place intensively using a four-term academic year with 40 weeks of teaching. It seeks to ensure this does not compromise the quality of learning and teaching, identifying benefits in the steady pattern of learning, and preparation for working life after University.

2.19   The University is committed to maintaining its small-group academic tutorial system with a maximum of eight students, accounting for a third of contact time. This is seen as supporting staff and student interactions, supporting high rates of student satisfaction. Teaching is supported by a culture of personal attention to students, through personal tuition and office hours. Attendance is monitored, with actions in the case of student absence. Although it sees high standards in learning and teaching as important, the University does not have an institutional Learning and Teaching Strategy, with academic teams being afforded significant autonomy in determining their own strategies in relation to curriculum, delivery and assessment.

2.20   Discussion of learning and teaching is part of programme development and approval, and the quality of learning and teaching is overseen through review and consideration of data. ULTC gets institutional oversight reports in relation to student surveys, and a university-wide template for action plans for National Student Survey and Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey feedback is in place. Discussion and reflection on teaching practice also takes place within SLTCs and departmental meetings. The module data dashboards provide student feedback to assist in evaluating the effectiveness of learning and teaching and assessment. If there is a problem with a module an improvement strategy will be devised, and where appropriate an investigation by a member of the Executive Committee. Variations in performance between schools and potential actions have been considered at an away day. The University has established a cross-functional Curriculum Review Group to consider the portfolio, and an Academic Excellence Group to review student performance.

2.21   Academic staff are recruited directly by schools with support from Human Resources. Induction includes the provision of handbooks and online training with the Quality Assurance Office providing support for quality procedures. Performance is reviewed through an annual personal development review process for academic and professional staff. There is a developmental process for the peer review of teaching and mentoring, which is managed locally by collaborative partners. There is budgeted provision to support academic and professional staff who attend conferences, and the University will meet the costs of making a Higher Education Academy (HEA) Fellowship application with HEA accreditation levels being currently relatively modest. The CVs of teaching staff at collaborative partners are checked as part of due diligence on approval and at later stages must be approved by the collaborative provision administrator at Buckingham.

2.22   The design of these arrangements would enable Expectation B3 to be met.

2.23   The review team scrutinised the evidence base prepared by the University and triangulated information through discussions with senior staff, teaching staff, professional support staff and students.

2.24   The team noted the pronounced culture of support for learning and teaching, with a cross-institutional commitment to small group teaching and personal tutoring. This is reinforced by the awareness of the need for continually helping students who enter into and progress through an intensive two-year degree cycle. There is clear evidence of high levels of student satisfaction in relation to learning and teaching, through external NSS and PTES surveys and through internal module reviews. Students said that they valued the commitment to small group teaching and the quality and approach of teaching staff which makes it easy for them to form strong working relationships. Students stated that their teachers seemed experienced and knowledgeable, using research in teaching, though it was important to be fully up to date in specific areas, technology being one example. The commitment to small group teaching is reflected by partner providers, and this is something the University would be keen to retain as it expands. Students at collaborative partners are happy with the quality of teaching staff, not least where they have appropriate industry experience. On the basis of these observations the team identified as **good practice** the comprehensive and sustained approach to personalised support for learning including the systematic use of small-sized tutorial groups across all provision.

2.25   While there is flexibility for strategy in schools, the team heard of oversight by the ULTC, where the first part of each meeting focuses on policy and data, and the second on material coming through from the SLTCs. The Quality Assurance Office provides updates to school committees, and sessions on learning and teaching matters are also part of the regular Monday morning meetings for all staff. Staff commented that while the current approach works well in a relatively small institution, there are plans to double student numbers, extend the range of degrees and increase the number of collaborative partnerships. While there is a commitment to retain the small group teaching approach it is not envisaged that there will be any adverse impact on student experience. In such circumstances, the team therefore welcomed the University's intention to develop an institutional Learning and Teaching Strategy, with a plan for enhancement that that would provide a clear reference point for all provision.

2.26   The University accepts the need to develop the working environment for academic and professional staff, including recruitment, development and appraisal. The team noted that a draft Staff Development Policy has been developed and the appraisal process is becoming more systematic through the introduction of an online record. Staff described the scheme for the peer observation of teaching as robust and comprehensive, extending to personal tuition, with SLTCs considering progress reports before forwarding good practice findings to UTLC for further dissemination. As discussed in Expectation B11, the University is also aware of the need to develop equitable support opportunities for research students who teach.

2.27   There is also a systematic and varied approach to staff induction with ongoing training sessions offered to all staff, including group work and online opportunities. Any new member of staff who does not have a teaching qualification is asked to register for a PgCHE run by one of two other universities and the progress of new staff is reviewed at the end of the first term. The University provides financial assistance for staff development, for example for professional subscriptions. Schools are consulted about training needs, with the University providing support and mentoring in relation to quality assurance, including assessment. To support their research, staff do not teach in one term out of four, and have protected time of one day a week for scholarship activity.

2.28   The team noted that training at collaborative partners is offered by link tutors, including the use of videoconferencing with systems in place for mentoring and annual appraisal. Peer review of teaching is encouraged although staff engaging in collaborative provision stated that it could be used more fully.

2.29   The team concludes that policies and processes support effective learning and teaching practices at strategic and operational levels. The University is committed to personalised support of students, and takes an appropriate approach in relation to staffing and resources. The Expectation is therefore met with a low level of risk.

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

2.30   The University states that teaching is supported by a culture of personal attention and responsiveness to students, and views the personal tutor system as a core part of the support provided to students. Student experience is overseen by the academic committee structure and the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Student Experience. There is a Personal Tutor Code of Practice and each student has a personal tutor with whom they can discuss academic attainment and progression. The system was revised in 2014 and is being reviewed again by a Personal Tutors Review Working Group. Students at collaborative partners have personal councillors.

2.31   With four intakes each year, induction is characterised by short, intensive experiences provided by the University and its schools. A matriculation ceremony has been introduced to support transition into the two year degree programmes. Students are provided with a New Students Welcome Handbook, programme handbooks, and where applicable a module guide. They are made aware of support services through the website. The Foundation and Academic Skills Department oversees the provision of in-sessional support for all students in small group and individual settings, with specific assistance also being sought by schools. The Student Welfare Department applies a holistic model of well being, monitoring provision for students with specific learning needs, and providing web-based resources and links to external agencies. Where possible students needing reasonable adjustments are identified before registration, with pro forma for what is required and granted.

2.32   In relation to resources to support learning, the Executive Committee retains oversight, but schools have their own budgets that can take account of staff and student requests. Schools work closely with the library and with information technology specialists. Library staff monitor reading lists and online and hard copy usage in order to manage how the budget is best spent. There is a common basic standard for the use of the virtual learning environment (VLE). Resources at collaborative partners are checked as part of due diligence, and this is part of the business case considered by the Executive, with partners expected to mirror what is available to students at Buckingham. The University has a Student Employability Strategy and a Careers Service and there are plans for the development of an Academic Skills Centre that individual students will be able to access directly.

2.33   The design of these arrangements would enable Expectation B4 to be met.

2.34   The review team considered a wide range of documents relating to student support, and met a range of staff and students at Buckingham and one collaborative partner.

2.35   Staff emphasised that Buckingham students have high expectations for personal support, as discussed in more detail within Expectation B3. Students were very positive about personal tuition and the support available to them, stating that relationships with staff were good, with the University doing well in relevant NSS metrics and TEF outcomes. Students commented on the significant work burdens of the two-year degree programmes, but found them within the bounds they had been led to expect. Students and staff also noted that there is some flexibility to extend the period of study in appropriate circumstances.

2.36   In general, students commented favourably on the level and quality of learning resources provided with examples including the helpfulness of library staff, the use of the VLE, and support from Careers and Employability specialists who engage with local and national companies. Provision includes online resources, an annual Careers Fair, employability events, and an Employability Week for second years. In addition, there is a range of initiatives within Schools, with for example industry professionals providing workshops, and student involvement in the Street Law project. An Enterprise Hub and the BSc Business Enterprise Venture Creation programme supports students in creating and running businesses.

2.37   Staff and students were also aware of some resourcing issues to be considered by the University, including limited physical access to some facilities for students with special mobility requirements, better Wi-Fi facilities, and improved access to journals for postgraduate taught students, the development of internships, and the availability of on-site support for medical students moving to hospital placements off campus.

2.38   Staff are aware of the importance of providing timely feedback within a condensed two-year programme, with students from within the University and its collaborative partners confirming that feedback is provided in a timely way although there is some variation in the amount and detail. Students confirmed the comprehensive support for special study requirements, giving a range of examples that are also identified in Expectation B3. Diversity is valued, with the possibility of other special needs identified as part of ongoing support. Once a decision on support has been taken, and student consent has been obtained, then details are entered onto a database for access and monitoring by tutors.

2.39   Staff and students commented very favourably on the Positive University initiative, discussed within enhancement and referring to a range of developments for supporting the welfare of students. The Foundation and Academic Skills Department is an established University response to the recruitment of increasing numbers of students with special learning requirements and widening access backgrounds. This cross-university initiative has set up pre-entry certificated programmes which recruit twice a year into an intensive nine-month course with four pathways to degree programmes in schools. Students may choose this route, or applicants not yet ready for degree study may be directed to it, with some flexibility over the duration of the programme. The team noted that this non-accredited initiative focuses on supporting students in studying successfully at degree level. It supports widening participation, covering transferable skills as well as introducing subject-specific knowledge and briefing students about issues associated with academic misconduct. The programmes have proved successful in enabling students to enter and achieve degree programmes. The team therefore identified as **good practice** the embedding of innovative pathways into higher education provided by the Foundation Department, which enables a range of students to complete degree-level study.

2.40   The team concludes that the University offers wide-ranging support for a wide range of individual learners, and addresses diversity agendas successfully while giving students enhanced opportunities for progression into their chosen careers. The Expectation is met with a low level of risk.

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

2.41   The University's ethos of student engagement is set out in its Ten-Year Plan as a student-centred institution and through its core principles of a Positive University. The Student Charter outlines the expectations and responsibilities students and staff share as members of the University community.

2.42   Students are considered stakeholders in their University with representatives playing a central role in decision-making through the formal representative structures and the Students' Union. The Students' Union Executive Committee hold office for a period of six months through secret ballot in the winter and summer terms. The committee of nine student representatives participate in working groups and deliberative committees across the University.

2.43   The University has a module review process, which is undertaken during week seven of each nine-week term. Undergraduate students participate anonymously in module reviews with overviews provided to module leaders for sharing with student cohorts. Staff specify actions taken to address issues raised by students in class, in committees, and via the University's 'You Said We Did' campaign.

2.44   The University uses an online system to ensure a consistent approach to module review, though the School of Medicine undertake their own independent questionnaire. Research degree students are invited to participate in an internally devised longitudinal Postgraduate Feedback Questionnaire. The University produces and distributes reports on feedback from NSS; PTES and PRES to the school boards.

2.45   These student-centred approaches to student engagement would allow Expectation B5 to be met.

2.46   The review team explored committee minutes and terms of reference, handbooks, student feedback mechanisms and the student submission. Details for student engagement were discussed in meetings with senior, academic and professional services staff, and with students. Students confirmed their involvement in decision making through the university and school committee structures coupled with a variety of models to collect broad-based student feedback at departmental and programme level. Student representatives were aware of their responsibilities and confirmed that they are provided with training and given a student representative handbook.

2.47   The structure of the Students' Union provides suitable collective representation at formal and informal levels, although the University acknowledged the challenge for elected representatives in holding office for only six months per academic year while still studying. The review team recognised initiatives to improve student representation, in particular through incoming officers shadowing their outgoing colleagues. It was evident following discussions with staff and students that the University places a high value on student and staff engagement.

2.48   Following the rollout of online software, and the revised module evaluation survey, a more consistent approach to module review has been developed in order to monitor and evaluate student engagement. Students participate over 20 times in these reviews during their studies, thereby providing substantial opportunities for module leaders to gather and

respond to student feedback. The School of Medicine uses an alternative questionnaire methodology because of PSRB requirements.

2.49   The team recognised that students considered their voices and opinions to be valued and proactively sought, with the University placing a high value on student and staff engagement. While consistency was noted for formal student-staff dialogue, students commented that there was, however, more variation with more informal levels of communication between schools and programmes.

2.50   The review team concludes that the content and, for the most part, the operation of the University's Student Charter effectively addresses aspects of student engagement. The Expectation is therefore met with a low level of risk.

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

2.51　　The University's policy framework for assessment and accreditation is articulated through the General Regulations for First Degrees, the General Regulations for Higher Degrees, the General Regulations for the MC ChB, and the Research Degree Regulations. Specific requirements, such as those of PSRBs, are detailed in individual programme specifications. The structure of the academic year within the University's distinctive two-year degree framework has led to an institutional policy for a three-week turnaround time for feedback on assessed work. Academic misconduct is monitored and logged centrally, and procedures are set out in the University's Academic Misconduct Policy.

2.52　　Formal oversight of all assessment processes and the award of academic credit comes through the University's examining bodies. All assessment, progression between levels, and conferment of final awards is confirmed through the relevant boards of examiners. The University operates a two-stage exam board process - the first involves internal examiners only while the second involves both internal and external examiners. Recommendations from boards of examiners are ratified at meetings of the Senate, which provides assurance that all aspects of assessment are conducted in line with published policies. Arrangements for the accreditation of prior learning (APL) are broadly articulated as part of the General Regulations, although there is no detailed information on the volume of credit that may be achieved through this route.

2.53　　The design of these processes and procedures would allow Expectation B6 to be met.

2.54　　The review team considered relevant policies and procedures, sampled APL cases, explored information provided to staff and students, and scrutinised external examiner reports and minutes of boards and committees. Details were discussed with senior, academic and professional support staff, collaborative partner representatives, and students.

2.55　　The team noted that while the University does not have a single overarching assessment policy or strategy, it has a sound framework and defined procedures for managing assessment. Staff involved in assessment are provided with a thorough briefing during their induction, supplemented by detailed written guidance and mentoring support from more experienced colleagues. The use of defined assessment criteria ensures transparency and consistency in the assessment process. Further assurance on the validity and reliability of marking by staff is provided through internal double marking and moderation and external moderation processes. As noted in Expectation B11, staff involved in the assessment of research awards receive appropriate training for the task and research students are formally monitored through termly reports and annual reviews. The appointment process for external examiners for research awards ensures appropriate subject specialism and safeguards the independence of the examination process.

2.56　　Students receive comprehensive information on assessment through module and programme handbooks. These include information on the school's approach to assessment, as well as more specific assessment criteria for particular tasks. Students, including those

studying for research degrees and those engaged in collaborative partnerships with the University, confirmed that they were clear about what is expected from them in terms of their assessment. They considered feedback on assessed work to be timely, detailed, and developmental. Students are also provided with a range of opportunities for tutorial support, to supplement and contextualise written feedback.

2.57   The operation of examining bodies is consistent with documented regulations and ensures fairness in the award of academic credit. External examiners are required to be present at meetings of assessment boards. Formal records are kept for all meetings, and decisions are recorded in a way that can be communicated clearly to staff and students.

2.58   Assessment is considered as part of the annual monitoring process for programmes and modules. Through reflection on external examiner and student feedback, and analysis of achievement data, staff identify areas for enhancement.

2.59   The University has robust procedures for managing assessment. Staff and students are provided with clear information and guidance on assessment and the University makes effective use of data to enhance assessment practices. The team concludes that the Expectation is met with a low level of risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External Examining*

Findings

2.60   The University's arrangements for the appointment and use of external examiners are set out in the External Examiners Procedure, and Code of Practice. The University appoints external examiners for all higher education provision, with at least one external examiner for each programme and module. The use of externals is supported operationally by the Quality Office, or by the Collaborations Department in relation to collaborative provision. The External Examiner Nomination Form sets out criteria for appointment, nominations by schools are reviewed by the Quality Assurance Manager and approved by a senior member of the University on behalf of Senate. Appointments are reported to Senate and published on the website, with a central register being maintained. A copy of the External Examiners' Code of Practice, and an External Examiners' Contract Letter are provided on appointment, together with an External Examiner Handbook and an invitation to an induction at the University, with relevant materials also provided by schools and departments.

2.61   Assessment tasks that comprise examination papers, or coursework counting for more than 30 per cent of the final mark, must be approved by the relevant external, and they are provided with a range of papers to review. External examiners attend Board of Examiner meetings, and at least one must be present. The External Examiners' Report template asks specifically for comments as regards comparison with national standards, and confirmation that previous recommendations have been addressed alongside any observations of good practice. Copies of reports go to the Quality Assurance Office and a senior member of the University within four weeks of the Board of Examiners meeting, and the Quality Assurance Office ensures that the relevant Head of Department provides a timely response. External examiner reports are considered by STLCs and Boards of Studies, while annual overview reports summarising internal and collaborative external examiners' reports are submitted to Senate. An external examiner can raise a concern directly with the Vice Chancellor, but none has done so in the period covered by this review. External examiner reports and responses form part of the evidence base for annual and quinquennial reviews. External examiner reports are published to students, and programme handbooks are being reviewed in relation to information provided about the external examiner role.

2.62   The process for the appointment of external examiners is the same at collaborative partners. There is one programme delivered partly in Spanish at one collaborative partner, and for this the external examiner and the staff appointed are bilingual. The use of external examiners in relation to research degrees is set out in the Research Degrees Handbook. There is at least one external examiner for each research degree examination. Nominations are made by the relevant Research Officer in consultation with the supervisor and are approved by the relevant subject specialist and a member of the Executive Committee on behalf of Senate.

2.63   The design of these systems and procedures would allow Expectation B7 to be met.

2.64   The review team considered a range of external examiner reports, written responses to those reports, and annual overview reports. Minutes from examination boards were scrutinised, and details were discussed in meetings with teaching and professional support staff, collaborative partner representatives, and students.

2.65   The team noted a robust approach to external examining endorsing the standards at the University. Evidence confirmed that external examiners attend exam boards, and their oral reports are reported in exam board minutes, although the level of detail may vary. External examiner reports are discussed by relevant committees and examiners access a range of internal review data. External examiner reports are available to all students within the University and at partner colleges via the VLE or by request if they wish to see them.

2.66   The team heard that external examiners are trained in relation to relevant local regulations for collaborative partners overseas. The same external examiner might be appointed for internal and collaborative provision, or for provision at two collaborative partners. Link tutors see external examiner reports, and good practice in an external examiner's report for collaborative provision is picked up as part of annual monitoring. Collaborative staff are involved in responding to external examiner reports.

2.67   The policies and procedures of the University's external examining system are rigorously applied, and external examiners' reports are given close attention at every level of the institution. The team concludes that the Expectation is met with a low level of risk.

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

2.68   The University states that Senate has strategic oversight of the processes used by SLTCs and ULTC for programme monitoring and review. Relevant policies and procedures are defined in key University documentation including the Annual Monitoring of Programmes and Modules, Quinquennial Review, and Making Changes to Programmes and Modules with set templates for reporting being used by all schools. Subcommittees are convened by SLTCs when conducting reviews, using data to maintain strategic oversight of student and programme performance including module surveys and the NSS, external examiner reports and responses, and staff feedback. Quinquennial Reviews also refer to more extensive documentation such as committee minutes, PRSB reports, School Research Environment documents, staff publication lists and CVs.

2.69   Quantitative information for student retention, progression and achievement informs module monitoring processes. The University also has defined procedures and documentation for the possible discontinuation of programmes following monitoring and review. Students are involved in programme reviews through the use of committee representatives, in-class discussions, surveys, and staff/student forums. New and experienced staff are supported in their engagement with programme monitoring through formal training provided by the Quality office as well as mentoring by senior colleagues that include Heads of Department and/or Programme Directors.

2.70   The design of these systems and procedures would enable Expectation B8 to be met.

2.71   The review team considered a sample of annual reviews at programme level, self-evaluations and reports for quinquennial review, and minutes of committees that have oversight of these processes. Details were discussed with students and academic and professional support staff with experience of programme monitoring and review.

2.72   Completed annual monitoring reports confirmed that the review process results in a critical and reflective evaluation of programmes, which is informed by a wide range of internal and external feedback. The outcomes from annual monitoring are reported to UTLC, and from quinquennial review to Senate. This ensures that action plans to address recommendations arising from the exercises are progressed in a timely manner. Adherence to the process is also monitored through the secretaries and chairs of these committees.

2.73   Provision of data for annual monitoring has been improved through the introduction of procedures for presenting data dashboards for modules, with the use of a similar system for entire programmes constituting work in progress. The team therefore affirms the steps being taken to enhance the quality and accuracy of management data through the development of programme data dashboards. Action plans address areas of quality assurance, and report templates encourage the identification of good practice for wider dissemination within schools and across the University. School-level department overview reports summarise common themes arising across programmes, for consideration by ULTC in order to identify institutional action points.

2.74   The team recognised that programmes are periodically reviewed every five years through the process of quinquennial review, ensuring that programmes continue to align with the University's overarching strategy and mission. Documents submitted in preparation for the review, and the resulting panel reports, demonstrate the process to be thorough and consistently applied across the University's provision. These reviews offer a long-term perspective of the academic provision and involve a critical analysis of the ongoing currency and validity of individual programmes within the schools. The review involves the use of a panel whose membership includes externals, members from other schools, and students. Students who had recently been involved in reviews commented positively on the way in which they were encouraged to participate as quality full panel members.

2.75   The team concludes that the Expectation is met with a low level of risk.

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

2.76   The University has policies for academic appeals, complaints, fitness to practise and admissions complaints; all of which are set out in the University Handbook. The General Regulations for First Degree also provides relevant details, including the Academic Misconduct Policy and Procedures with links to other policies, such as Dignity at Work and Study.

2.77   The University's Complaints Policy and Procedure aligns with the UK Quality Code and sets out a three-stage process with specific timeframes. Appeals against disciplinary matters for Research Degree students are set out in the Research Degree Handbook.

2.78   The University has overall responsibility for the complaints and academic appeals processes. Students are informed of the appeals and complaints procedures through the University Handbook and the New Students' Welcome Handbook there are School Academic Misconduct Officers (SAMOS) within each school and a central Complaints Officer. The SAMOS handbook sets out the role description, and includes detailed information on the academic misconduct policy and procedures.

2.79   The academic appeals and complaints policies and procedures would enable Expectation B9 to be met.

2.80   The review team considered evidence, including polices, the University Handbook and the University's website. The review team also discussed details with a range of staff and students.

2.81   The team recognised that the University's Handbook sets out the University Academic Appeals and Complaints Policy and Procedure. Each policy and procedures details all stages of the complaints and appeal processes, and clearly details the various stages of the process and the timeframe for resolutions. Academic appeals are operated in accordance with University regulations and procedures and appeals are submitted to the Head of Department or Programme Director.

2.82   The University takes deliberate steps to ensure students are aware of the complaints and appeals processes by providing information in the University Handbook, New Students' Welcome Handbook, the VLE, and programme handbooks. For students on the MBChB undergraduate medical programme, information on appeals and complaints procedures are set out in General Regulations and Appeal Policy. Staff and students were aware of relevant complaints and appeals processes with supportive approaches being described. An informal complaint is raised in the first instance with a member of staff in the department concerned. The formal complaint stage sets out the full investigation following the receipt of the Student Complaints form, and if a student is dissatisfied with the outcome of the formal investigation, they have the right to request a review of the case by submitting the Student Complaints Request for Review form to the Registrar. Where a student has exhausted the University's academic appeals and complaints procedure, the student has the right to refer the complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA).

2.83   School-based training is provided in plagiarism avoidance and the Quality Assurance Office provides support when applicable. The Foundation and Academic Skills Department provides drop-in plagiarism avoidance and essay-writing workshops and training sessions for students. Taught students are given guidance at the start of the academic year on plagiarism with the requirement to complete an Academic Misconduct Quiz.

2.84   The evidence shows that the University monitors and reviews its processes, with outcomes of academic misconduct discussed in annual monitoring exercises and through school boards, UTLC and Senate. Since August 2017 an annual report on complaints is submitted to Senate to accompany the OIA outcomes. Academic misconduct procedures are currently being monitored by the Academic Misconduct Working Party and the activity of the working party is reported to ULTC and Senate.

2.85   The team concludes that the Expectation for fair, accessible and timely procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints is met with a low level of risk.

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

2.86   The Executive Committee has strategic oversight of collaborative provision with operational control delegated to Head of Collaborations. The strategy and criteria for collaborative partnerships was approved by the Senate in 2016. There are seven current partners with approximately 1,200 enrolled students. Oversight of the quality of provision and its enhancement is maintained by UCC with revised terms of reference, and Collaborations and Academic Link Tutor's Handbooks for the provision of guidance.

2.87   Prospective partners are required to complete the University's Comprehensive Due Diligence Checklist with the risk assessment being carried out on site, and contingency plans are maintained for each partner in the event of difficulties. All partnerships have contracts in place before the commencement of provision, and the University maintains a Collaborations Register which is updated termly and contains scheduled dates for annual and periodic reviews. An annual report on collaborative partner operations is produced. Placements are centrally managed by the careers office but evaluated by schools.

2.88   These systems and procedures would allow Expectation B10 to be met.

2.89   The review team sampled annual monitoring and periodic review documents and examined the minutes of committees where reports were received and considered. Collaboration arrangements were explored through discussions with University staff and via videoconference with collaborative students and staff at an international partner.

2.90   The team noted the outcome from the University's 2016 monitoring review for Specific Course Designation, which included the investigation of a Concern for collaborative partnerships. Recommendations were made for articulating the overall University strategy and criteria for partnerships, developing a more systematic approach to annual monitoring, and using consistent administrative arrangements for all University programmes.

2.91   The team used these recommendations as evidence trails and recognised a series of actions and developments across the University that have been implemented successfully. They include the effective implementation of revised processes and systems outlined in the revised Collaborations Handbook. The University has created the post of Head of Collaborations, reinforced by the Collaborations Office, Boards of Study and UCC. The current governance review has drafted revised terms of reference that await approval by the Senate for a strengthening of the role of ULTC and SLTCs in the approval of programmes and modules. Scrutiny by the team of documentation relating to programme approval, monitoring and review and external examining indicated that robust and comprehensive procedures are being used. The University has recently reviewed its guidance for link tutors, and staff were able to confirm that the processes were being implemented securely. The Annual Partnerships Monitoring Report and Student Feedback and Analysis Report demonstrated detailed analysis, engagement and oversight by the University. The University approves the CVs of staff who are involved in collaborative provision and recommends that partners use a system of peer review.

2.92   University and collaborative partner staff confirmed that University systems were being used successfully, and that collaborative students had a representative system in place that was working. The assessment of students within partner organisations is effectively managed through the clear definition of respective responsibilities, with the chairs of boards of examiners being appointed by the University and with oversight by cognate schools before ratification by Senate. The University delegates to its partner institutions the responsibility for admissions, subject to appropriate guidelines and application of entry requirements. Admission practices are audited by the University on a random basis. Similar checks are made on the accuracy of marketing and publicity information, although partners are required to provide such documentation to the University prior to publication and this is regularly checked during visits. Collaborative partners apply their own policies and procedures relating to complaints and appeals. Arrangements for the termination of collaborations are appropriate. The University provides appropriate certificates and transcripts in accordance with the requirements of the Quality Code.

2.93   The University has effective systems and procedures in place for the establishment and monitoring of collaborative partnerships, with effective oversight that responds to previous recommendations within the 2016 report of the monitoring visit for Specific Course Designation. The review team considers that the University meets with low risk the Expectation for ensuring that arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with organisations other than the degree-awarding body are implemented securely and managed effectively.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Findings

2.94   Oversight of research is by the URC chaired by the Dean of Research. There is also a University Ethics Committee. Each school has a Research Committee (SRC) which reports to the URC, a School Research Lead in relation to staff research, and a Research Officer responsible for all research students and processes. Each school produces an annual Research Environment Document for scrutiny by URC, not least to support postgraduate research opportunities. The University has 11 research centres and institutes, and it is planning to enter the REF for the first time in 2021. The University's Research Degrees Handbook specifies available research degrees and the regulations, policies and procedures that apply. This is a live document subject to continuous monitoring by URC. Special regulations and procedures, for example in relation to Professional Doctorates or Master's by Research, are retained by the school responsible for the programme in addition to the use of school-level handbooks.

2.95   Admission standards and procedures for research students are defined and include an interview, with schools having a significant degree of autonomy in tailoring offers under the oversight of the relevant Research Officer. The school Research Officer would also be involved.in relation to offers made by a collaborative partner. An application may be made in any area of study offered by the University, provided effective supervision arrangements can be made. The roles and responsibilities of research officers, supervisors and students in relation to management of the research, progression and annual review are set out in the Research Degrees Handbook. Induction arrangements are in place and each student is assigned a first and second supervisor in addition to a personal tutor. The supervisor is responsible for preparing a termly student progress report for presentation to URC by the relevant Research Officer. The University Guidelines for Annual Review details the timing, composition and requirements for panels for annual review of progress. Training and workload monitoring is in place for supervisors and annual workshops are held for postgraduate research supervisors to support their role.

2.96   Arrangements for the development and approval of research degrees are similar to those for other degrees, following the new Research Degree Approval Procedure, which has been mapped to B1 and B11 in the Quality Code. Approval is by school Board of Studies, with some oversight by the SRC, and proposals are then submitted to URC, with decisions ratified by Senate.

2.97   Research methods training is in place for research students, who have access to University resources and other services. There is a conference attendance fund, a Research Students newsletter and VLE page, and a schedule of research seminars that are open to all research students at the Buckingham and London campuses. Research students are invited to attend the termly meetings of the URC. An internal student feedback questionnaire is used alongside PRES feedback that inform action plans using a standard template with ULTC oversight.

2.98   Procedures for submission and assessment are set out in the Research Degrees Handbook, including external examiner arrangements as discussed in Expectation B7.

2.99   The design of these systems and procedures would allow Expectation B11 to be met. The review team considered relevant documentation, including handbooks, committee minutes, reports and online resources. Details were discussed in meetings with academic and professional services staff, and research students.

2.100   Evidence confirmed the effectiveness of the URC, processes for the appointment of supervisors, and the delivery of supervisor training and mentoring. Each student has two supervisors, at least one of whom will be based at the University, and for collaborative provision one supervisor will be based at the partner. Staff attend research and work in progress seminars, with access to financial support to attend conferences. Research degrees at collaborative partners are subject to the same processes as internal provision, with the Research Officer having oversight of the collaborative partner; the Research Officer, who can also be the link tutor, will observe annual PhD reviews that then go to the relevant SRC.

2.101   Postgraduate research students confirmed that they had sufficient advance information about their DPhil programme. Induction was achieved largely through personal meetings and the use of the Research Degree Handbook with students being content with their transition to DPhil study. Students expressed high levels of satisfaction for interaction with both first and second supervisors, including at least eight meetings a year and in some cases weekly meetings. All research students also have regular contact with a personal tutor. Part-time research students can participate in videoconference meetings with an expectation for between three and four face-to-face meetings a year. Overseas students are expected to visit the University during an academic session. Staff and students reported that progress meetings were recorded, with annual reviews carried out under the oversight of the Research Officer and with an opportunity for the student to comment on the quality of supervision.

2.102   Students' comments in meetings and PRES feedback confirmed that library resources were sufficient for their research, including research methods training, access to other libraries and inter-library loans, and sufficient work space and information technology. There are funds for students to travel to conferences, with the team recognising that students felt they had an effective student voice within governance of the University, and that they were part of a research community with a range of seminars, workshops and reading groups they could attend at the Buckingham and London campuses. The students valued the small and supportive environment, with a personalised approach, but they would like to see opportunities for post-doctoral positions developed.

2.103   The team noted student observations about variations with opportunities to teach or receive training in relation to teaching undergraduates. Research students gave examples of assisting with teaching or demonstrations in some subject areas, with training offered before or alongside teaching. Some opportunities were emailed to relevant research students, but there was a lack of general information about the institutional approach to offering teaching opportunities as well as possibilities for training to teach or to become HEA fellows. This feedback was compared with comments from students on taught programmes who valued the use in some schools of research students in specialist areas, favouring their input to teaching because they can relate more closely to undergraduate student experiences. Staff recognised that there is no single institutional policy in relation to research students who teach, with some variation between schools and departments, although those new to teaching would attend teaching workshops. The team was further informed that at the University priority is that of student tuition by professional teachers, but that the University was also aware of the growth of demand for opportunities for research students to teach, with URC considering the position. The team therefore **affirms** the identification of a systematic approach to providing equitable teaching skills development opportunities for research students.

2.104   The review team concludes that the University meets, with a low level of risk, the Expectation for ensuring that research degrees are awarded in an environment that secures academic standards and supports students' professional and personal development.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

2.106   All relevant Expectations in this area have been met, with a judgement of low risk being reached in all cases.

2.107   There were two instances of good practice. The first involves Expectation B3 for personalised learning and the use of tutorial systems and procedures throughout the University. The second involves Expectation B4 where the University has developed foundation pathways for degree programmes in a range of schools.

2.108   There were no recommendations, with two affirmations. The first involves the steps being taken by the University for supporting research students who teach, and for ensuring equitable opportunities for such teaching. The second recognises the University's introduction of data dashboards for the annual monitoring of programmes.

2.109   The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the University meets UK expectations.

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Findings

3.1   The University states that it provides a wealth of online information for prospective and current students, staff, and other stakeholders. The prospectus contains information for prospective students that explains the process for application and admission to a programme of study. It also provides details on the unique two-year degree and tutorial teaching model. Current students are provided with information during registration and at enrolment, with the expectation that ongoing access to information is provided through programme handbooks, the University website, and use of the University Handbook which houses key documentation for students and staff.

3.2   The Director of Admissions and Recruitment is responsible for the accuracy of information published on the website, supported by the Quality Assurance Office and other key staff. The Central Marketing Office is responsible for institutional oversight information, advertising and promotional activities. Ratification of the University's published information is undertaken by the Executive Committee on behalf of Senate.

3.3   Collaborative provision contracts for UK, EU and international partnerships set out responsibilities for the management of information published by partners, who are required to provide the University with marketing and publicity material for checking before publication. The Collaborations Department checks the integrity of the information available during visits to partner sites, and through general inspection of public platforms.

3.4   Certificates and transcripts are provided to all students who have successfully completed programmes of study leading to a University award. The Collaborations Department Office is responsible for the production of transcripts for students in partner organisations and for ensuring that where a programme has been taught in a language other than English, that this is clearly indicated on the transcript. The delivery institution is included on both the certificate and the transcript.

3.5   The University's approach to its provision of higher education information would allow Expectation C to be met.

3.6   The review team explored a wide range of documentation including the University website and VLE. Details were discussed with students, as well as senior, academic, collaborative and professional support staff involved in the production, use and monitoring of the University's information.

3.7   Students and staff confirmed the high quality and value of information that is provided by the University. The team noted that students and staff have access to a wide range of information on learning opportunities with examples including the Prospectus, key facts about the University, the Student Charter, induction procedures, policies and codes of conduct, accommodation, student support services, handbooks, admissions and enrolment and regulations. Much of this information is available online, with the University also publishing core documents, such as the Prospectus. As discussed in more detail in

Expectation B8, the University is also developing data dashboards for modules and programmes.

3.8   Students confirmed that they are provided with appropriate and accurate information during application, registration and enrolment stages for entry to the University. Matriculation and induction events provide opportunities for students to build a sense of belonging and for the University to ensure all students are given the Students' Welcome Handbook and relevant programme information. Students additionally are directed to the online University Handbook, which acts as the definitive guide, including programme learning outcomes. Module-level specifications are provided to students' ad hoc and on request.

3.9   Staff confirmed that Information for those responsible for academic standards and quality is provided by the Quality Assurance Office and through the University Handbook, with access to the General Regulations. Further guidance and training is provided to staff with specific roles relevant to the production and management of information, including all new staff, School Admission and School Academic Misconduct Officers, and those with responsibilities for collaborative partnerships.

3.10   Students and staff stated to the review team that they were aware of current policies and procedures, and that information provided to them was accurate and fit for purpose. The University provides regulation bulletins, and the team considered these to be in principle a useful tool for communicating updates and information amendments to staff. Regulations and policy documents did not, however, include version control although the team was informed that changes applied to all cohorts regardless of the start date.

3.11   The team identified inaccuracies within the voluminous University Handbook and, as discussed further in Expectation A2.2, in a number of the definitive reference points for programme information. Internal programme specifications are maintained within the Quality Assurance Office document system, although collaborative programme specifications are maintained by the Collaborations Department. Staff informed the team that University deliberative committees approve changes to current formal documentation that is then forwarded to the Quality Assurance Office, who update the University Handbook termly. Additional items included in the Handbook are ratified by the Registrar or Executive Committee. although the team noted that while the design of this system appears appropriate, in practice there is a lack of clarity as to who ensures the completeness of programme specifications and accuracy and currency of the information within the University Handbook.

3.12   On the basis of these observations the review team noted in discussions with senior and professional support staff that the University did not have a formal and effective policy or process in place for ensuring the accuracy of some types of information, especially at programme level. The University also stated that there were plans to appoint a Data Protection and Information Compliance Officer to address those areas that require improved oversight. As there is no formal approach to information oversight and sign off and the plan to appoint a Data Protection and Information Compliance Officer is in its infancy, the team **recommends** that the University formalises processes and procedures for the oversight of public information in order to ensure accuracy and completeness.

3.13   The University provides a wide range of information for intended audiences that this is valued as appropriate and helpful by prospective and current students as well as staff. Notwithstanding some difficulties with maintaining and updating some University documentation the team concludes that the Expectation for providing fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy information about higher education is met. While no actual difficulties have been noted with the use of any incomplete or inaccurate information,

the review team noted the potential for more significant concerns should action not be taken at this time with some University procedures. The risk level is therefore viewed as moderate because of the inconsistent documented approach to information oversight, especially in relation to maintaining up-to-date programme information.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

3.15   The Expectation for this judgement area is met and the associated level of risk is moderate. There were no affirmations, and one recommendation for formalising processes and procedures for the oversight of public information. A moderate risk level was attached to this Expectation because of the potential for incomplete or outdated information affecting student learning opportunities.

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

4   Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1   The University states that it has taken steps to establish enhancement as a continuous focus of reflection throughout its governance and quality assurance structures, most particularly in the terms of reference of the ULTC, which is charged with ensuring that enhancement activities are overseen and monitored at institutional level. There is an explicit objective for disseminating good practice systematically between schools. Decisions within the Senate and its subcommittees are informed by analysis of data, and its consideration and review of student external and internal survey information leads to the generation of action plans.

4.2   The design of these processes would enable the Expectation for enhancement to be met.

4.3   The review team considered annual monitoring reports, periodic review documentation, external examiner reports and minutes of University and school-level committees. Details were discussed with students as well as senior academic, and professional support staff in addition to representatives from a collaborative partner institution.

4.4   The team recognised that the University has a considered and embedded approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities, although it does not have a central published enhancement strategy document. The minutes of the SLTCs confirm that strategic efforts for improving the quality of the learning experience are deliberate and monitored regularly. There is also evidence that all staff are encouraged to take ownership for and participate in University-wide initiatives, such as the Positive University. The reporting structure is effective in ensuring that strategic priorities are informed by work that is undertaken at a local level within individual academic units, and that staff are engaged in the delivery of enhancement initiatives.

4.5   Enhancement is also considered through the regular iterative processes of the University, including the annual monitoring of modules and programmes, the pattern of periodic review, the consideration of external examiners' reports, and the action plans that emerge from these processes. This process is effective in encouraging staff to explicitly focus on enhancement, as well as quality assurance, as part of their review of programmes. Programme annual monitoring informs school-level review reports and enables themes to be captured. The team viewed these reports as comprehensive, making systematic use of robust information, and focusing on developing the provision further. Data considered through the monitoring process includes NSS results, feedback from external examiners and module feedback reports. The data is considered and reflected on in detail both at programme level and across the University, ensuring that enhancement activity is evidence-based.

4.6   In addition to the regular structures for enhancement, the University has set up specific initiatives to make institution-wide improvements to the student learning experience and to student and staff wellbeing. One illustration is the Foundation Department's degree pathway programmes, as discussed in more detail in Expectation B4. The Positive University is another key development, also discussed in Expectations B3 and B4, and was set up as part of the University's strategy to engage the whole community in a structured and ongoing

commitment to positive psychology and holistic care. Senior, academic and professional support staff referred to this initiative in detail, explaining the ongoing and strategic focus on linked projects for supporting student and staff welfare within a pastoral community, including personal support and tuition, employability coaching skills and enhanced staff and student engagement. Students on taught programmes were also aware of the Positive University initiative, saying it included a focus on maintaining mental health. The team therefore recognise as **good practice** the coherent and systematic development of the Positive University initiative that promotes and supports the welfare of students and staff through a wide range of interrelated activities.

4.7   The approach to enhancement, particularly within quality assurance processes and governance, is improving the quality of the student learning experience. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met with a low level of risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

4.9   The Expectation for this judgement area is met and the associated level of risk is low. There were no recommendations or affirmations. The review team identified examples of strategic and deliberate curriculum and resourcing developments for improving learning opportunities, including good practice associated with the University's pioneering and strategic Positive University programme.

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

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 21-24 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.