



Higher Education Review of Queen's University Belfast

November 2015

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About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Queen's University Belfast. The review took place from 23 to 26 November 2015 and was conducted by a team of five reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Jeremy Bradshaw
- Professor Kristyan Spelman Miller
- Dr Dave Dowland
- Professor Ian Robinson
- Mr Neil Mackenzie (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Queen's University Belfast and to make judgements as to whether or not its academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. These expectations are the statements in the [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, the QAA review team:

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

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 7.

In reviewing Queen's University Belfast the team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland.

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

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

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

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

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

⁴ Higher Education Review web pages: www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Queen's University Belfast

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Queen's University Belfast.

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

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at Queen's University Belfast.

- The thorough and positive engagement by the Academic Affairs Department in supporting the security of standards and the assurance of quality (Expectation A3.3).
- The institutional recognition of good educational practice and its dissemination as exemplified by the teacher and supervisor awards (Expectation B3).
- The wide range of opportunities for student skills development within and beyond the curriculum, including activities recognised under Degree Plus such as peer mentoring (Expectation B4).
- The strong strategic approach to enhancement exemplified by the University's employability and internationalisation initiatives (Enhancement).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Queen's University Belfast.

By April 2016:

- revise partner approval procedures to formalise a proper risk-based approach that encompasses all potential situations, and ensure variations from partner approval procedures are formally approved through the appropriate deliberative processes (Expectation B10)
- strengthen the current guidance for the production of programme, module and School handbooks and associated information to establish a coordinated approach (Expectation C).

By September 2016:

- comply with the requirements of the University's own Procedures for Recognition of Prior Learning to provide an annual report on the operation of Recognition of Prior Learning to Course and Regulations Group (Expectation A3.2)
- confirm that policies and procedures for managing the quality of learning opportunities address comparability of student experience (Expectations B3, B4, B5, B8)

- strengthen procedures for monitoring complaints by students on collaborative programmes (Expectations B9, B10).

Theme: Student Employability

Employability is central to the institutional strategy and Vision 2020. Vision 2020 provides the framework and context for the University's new Corporate Plan, which was under development at the time of the review.

The University places a premium on preparing graduates who can serve as leaders through their careers and stresses engagement with employers and society. The strategic theme of employability is closely connected to the strategic theme of internationalisation. There are systems and data reports, including external surveys, to enable monitoring of activities reporting ultimately to the University Executive Board. The University has paid particular attention to the provision of student volunteering opportunities, clubs and societies involving more than 8,000 students and an established peer mentoring scheme, as well as developing several programmes through engagement with employers and Invest NI (Northern Ireland).

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

About Queen's University Belfast

The University was established in 1845 as part of the federal Queen's University of Ireland with colleges in Belfast, Galway and Cork, and was awarded independent degree awarding powers in 1908 when it became a university in its own right.

Located in Belfast, the University operates within the context of the Northern Ireland devolved administration and governance structures. Consequently, the funding arrangements, strategic oversight and support structures for higher education differ from those in the rest of the UK. The University receives its funding through the Department for Employment and Learning Northern Ireland (DELNI), which has developed two regional strategies for higher education, Graduating to Success and Access to Success. Northern Ireland student fees are capped at £3,805 (2015-16) and a Maximum Aggregate Student Number (MASN) cap still operates in Northern Ireland.

In 2014-15, the University had a total of 18,296 full-time equivalent students and 3,762 staff, of whom 1,149 were academic staff. Undergraduate students numbered 14,874, postgraduate taught 1,975 and postgraduate research 1,447.

A new President and Vice-Chancellor of the University was appointed in March 2014.

The vision for the University is to be 'A world-class international university that supports outstanding students and staff, working in world-class facilities, conducting leading-edge education and research, focused on the needs of society' (Vision 2020).

Vision 2020 is shaped by the following principles: developing a culture of integrated, empowered and enabled leadership; becoming more financially independent and growing in key priority areas, including research income and postgraduate and international student numbers; developing and implementing academic standards that align with Vision 2020; creating empowered and accountable faculties; facilitating and enabling inter-disciplinarity and a collaborative approach to delivery; creating a Graduate School and growing a strong and vibrant postdoctoral community; and enhancing the University's positive impact on society.

A major development since the QAA Institutional Audit in March 2009 has been the development of the University's Education Strategy 2011-16. A major project has been initiated to look at the structure of the academic year and how this can be enhanced through changes in assessment methods and removing examinations in semester one. It is intended that the outcomes from this project will be implemented fully in 2017-18.

Since the QAA Institutional Audit in 2004, the University has made major capital investments in new services and facilities, including a new business campus, major developments in the health campus and a range of measures to support the student experience, including investment in state-of-the-art sports facilities and enhanced teaching facilities. The University plans to continue this level of investment over the next 10 years.

The University has established a new Graduate School, both in the physical infrastructure and the differentiation in the postgraduate experience. An inaugural Dean of the Graduate School was appointed in February 2015 and is overseeing the development of the postgraduate community, partnerships with business, government and the community sector, and engaging with other graduate schools, nationally and internationally. A new Research Strategy was approved in 2015 to guide the University's research policies and directions for the next five years. A new Postgraduate Strategy is currently under development for 2015-20.

In 2012-13, the University instigated a Queen's Scholars Scheme whereby students from schools in Northern Ireland are nominated by their schools to apply for full fee Scholarships, which apply for the full duration of the undergraduate degree including any placement year. There are five Scholarships available for entry in 2015. The Scholarships are designed to reward academic achievement and recognise wider social and community contributions including sports, music and the arts, business and enterprise and the community.

A key challenge is the implementation of Vision 2020 within a difficult financial environment. The University is facing severe financial pressures. The overall budget for higher education is determined by the Northern Ireland Executive and the Northern Ireland Assembly. Political decisions mean that the University has already faced challenging budget cuts, which are likely to continue in the foreseeable future. The implementation of Vision 2020 is viewed by the University as timely since the goals of Vision 2020 provide for increased financial autonomy.

The University is undertaking a period of restructuring and refocus which will involve disinvestment in some areas and a targeted re-investment in others to enhance strengths and meet societal demands. The Vice-Chancellor is chairing a Strategic Planning Group to determine the future size and shape of the University and to prioritise investment. In addition, three Faculty Student Growth Project Groups have been tasked with bringing forward plans for reshaping the student cohort to reflect Vision 2020's priorities. This will involve challenging traditional delivery models and silo-working; encouraging flexible, blended and distance learning; creating market-led programmes; creating flagship postgraduate taught (PGT) programmes linked to Research Institutes; and focusing on student experience, employability, life skills, flexibility and innovation.

The University engages with higher education in a UK context, for example through liaison with QAA, staff membership of the Higher Education Academy, and attendance at various sector groups including the Academic Registrars' Council and its practitioner groups.

The University is engaged with the Bologna Process and the European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (ERASMUS) programme, and is developing international partnerships with a view to increasing the recruitment of international students to 20 per cent of the overall student population in 2020.

The University currently has a relatively small number of collaborative partnership arrangements. These include those that are based in Northern Ireland and those overseas. Recently the University entered into a collaborative partnership with China Medical University, Shenyang, to establish a joint college in China offering degrees in Pharmaceutical Sciences. The first Queen's student cohort will commence in 2015-16 and it is intended that this partnership will grow to include other subject areas and two-way mobility.

In 2009, the University entered into a joint venture agreement with INTO University Partnerships Limited (INTO) to establish 'INTO-Queen's University Belfast', which delivers Queen's awards to international students, from English language teaching to foundation certificates, foundation diplomas and international diplomas preparing students for further study at the University. INTO-Queen's is located close to the main campus.

The University has responded to the recommendations of the QAA Institutional Audit 2009. The actions taken in response to the recommendations indicate detailed consideration with significant change as a result.

Explanation of the findings about Queen's University Belfast

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

1.1 The University has clear procedures for the approval and periodic review of taught academic programmes, which are designed to test the alignment of the programme with *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and Subject Benchmark Statements. The framework for the assessment of postgraduate research programmes derives from the FHEQ and the Quality Code.

1.2 These processes and procedures would permit the University to meet the Expectation. The team tested them by reading reports from course approval events, periodic review activities, and various committee papers; by scrutinising definitive course documentation; and by meeting a number of academic and professional services staff.

1.3 The central Academic Affairs Department tracks any changes to national frameworks and benchmarks and ensures that the relevant committees and School Directors of Education are made aware of any changes. Programme teams take account of these in their programmes during the periodic review and enhancement process, where scrutiny panels are specifically required to confirm alignment.

1.4 Staff are positive regarding the robust processes for the approval, monitoring and review of taught provision. Evidence from approval panels, periodic review events, records of the Courses and Regulation Group and Education Committee demonstrates that the

various processes consider alignment with the FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements and appropriate professional standards.

1.5 Programme specifications demonstrate that alignment with subject benchmarks has taken place during the approval process. The study regulations for research degree programmes include criteria for the award of research degrees that align with QAA's published doctoral characteristics.

1.6 Where appropriate, the University's awards are approved or accredited by the relevant professional, statutory or regulatory body (PSRB). The University maintains a register of such recognition, which is updated annually. Reports from such activities are received with a comprehensive overview report at Course and Regulation Group, which identifies any institutional issues. The University demonstrated in detail how it had responded to a critical, albeit helpful, PSRB report. It is clear that such matters are given appropriate scrutiny and support at institutional level.

1.7 There has been institutional discussion regarding the alignment of the University's integrated master's degrees, master's degrees by research and professional doctorates to the FHEQ and other national benchmarks. In its reading the team formed the opinion that the matters under discussion relate principally to diverse approaches between Schools (see recommendation under Expectation B4, paragraph 2.73) rather than to non-alignment with national guidelines, but noted that the Graduate School was working with faculties to minimise future differences.

1.8 The robust institutional procedural guidance, requiring programme teams to benchmark against national standards, together with the detailed consideration given to the standards agenda in approval, monitoring and review exercises led the team to conclude that the Expectation is met, and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.9 The senior deliberative academic body of the University is Academic Council, which has responsibility for oversight of academic standards and for determining academic regulations. The Study Regulations are contained within the General Regulations, and include separate sections for both undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. The undergraduate regulations apply to all bachelor awards with the exception of professional degrees in the School of Medicine, Dentistry and Biomedical Sciences and the School of Nursing and Midwifery. Regulations for these degrees are defined in the relevant programme specifications. Concessions (exemptions) from the undergraduate or postgraduate regulations may be approved by the chair of Education Committee or the chair of Research and Postgraduate Committee respectively. The University also publishes a Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes, which complements the Postgraduate Research Degree Study Regulations.

1.10 Responsibility for the routine maintenance of the General Regulations is delegated to Education Committee for taught programmes and to Research and Postgraduate Committee for research degree programmes, both of which are updated annually. Detailed preparatory work on regulatory matters is conducted by the Courses and Regulations Group on behalf of both Education Committee and Research and Postgraduate Committee. Major changes to the regulations are referred back to Academic Council for approval and reported to Senate.

1.11 University foundation degrees are currently only delivered in partner further education colleges. The associated regulations are currently embedded within each programme specification, although there are plans to introduce a set of general regulations pertaining specifically to foundation degrees.

1.12 The Academic Affairs web pages provide links to the detailed General Regulations, the Code of Practice on Examinations and Assessment, the Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes, and arrangements for appeals, complaints and misconduct, and host a comprehensive series of procedures and templates relating to both on-site and collaborative provision.

1.13 The University's processes both to approve and to regularly review its academic regulations allow the University to meet the Expectation. The review team evaluated the arrangements by scrutinising the regulations and definitive course documentation, reading various committee papers, and meeting a number of academic and professional services staff.

1.14 Responsibility for the conferment of University awards is delegated to the Board of Examiners, and the University's Charter empowers it to revoke degrees for proper reasons.

1.15 The comprehensive General Regulations are available online and are also contained in the University Calendars for undergraduate and postgraduate students. The Calendars are detailed and include admissions, fees, study regulations, student conduct, appeals, complaints, assessment, the composition and conduct of examination boards,

academic offences, and student-facing policies and procedures. Students reported that handbooks and other guidance give appropriate signposts to the necessary regulations. The programme specifications for professional degrees in the School of Medicine, Dentistry and Biomedical Sciences and the School of Nursing and Midwifery contain detailed exemptions from the General Regulations to meet the requirements of the various professional and regulatory bodies. The team learned that in-year concessions were granted for five schools during the previous academic year, and found that all were fully documented and strong cases existed for all of them. The concession process is used sparingly and is given appropriate senior consideration.

1.16 The team found variation in the level of detail within the regulations embedded in the various foundation degree programme specifications. A number gave only sparse detail regarding assessment. The various student handbooks (see also paragraph 3.8) generally signpost the University General Regulations, but include somewhat variable detail on regulations specific to the particular foundation degree (see recommendation in paragraph 2.73). The University has acknowledged the need to introduce a more consistent regulatory approach for its foundation degrees, and has embarked upon the development of a bespoke set of Foundation Degree Institutional General Regulations. At the time of the review, the draft new regulations had already been considered and agreed by the Collaborative Provision Group, and would be presented to Education Committee for approval for the next academic year.

1.17 The team learned that the University confirms alignment with changes to the Quality Code through the appropriate deliberative committees, and was able to confirm that updates to the regulations are published annually. Training and briefings are provided as necessary, at institutional and School level, on the implementation of key regulatory procedures, and to ensure that key staff are updated on changes to the Quality Code.

1.18 The University has a detailed set of regulations and an appropriate framework for academic governance. The comprehensive Academic Affairs web portal provides detailed guidance for staff and students. The University has acknowledged some variability in its regulations for foundation degrees, and has developed an institutional-level set of regulations for implementation next session. Despite this current shortcoming, the remedial action already put in place leads the team to conclude that the Expectation has been met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.19 The University summarises and defines its programmes and curricula using standard templates for programme specifications and module descriptors.

1.20 Programme specifications are scrutinised and agreed during the programme approval and periodic review processes (see Expectations A3.1, A3.3, B1 and B8 for further details). Minor changes may be made to courses during their period of approval, for example as a result of annual monitoring, and the associated programme specifications updated and approved by the School. Major changes to programme specifications require the approval of the Courses and Regulations Group. Following approval or updating, programme specifications are made publicly available on the University web pages.

1.21 Module details are approved, retained and maintained by the appropriate School, and the curriculum they contain is subsequently considered by University programme approval panels. Changes arising from annual module reviews are reported to the Courses and Regulations Group.

1.22 The University applies the same processes to the approval and recording of the modular aspects of professional doctorate curricula. The programme of research for all postgraduate research degree students is recorded in a formal personal research plan following agreement with their supervisors at the outset of their research. The criteria for the award of a doctoral degree are clearly articulated within the Postgraduate Research Study Regulations.

1.23 The team explored the production, oversight and availability of the University's definitive records by scrutinising a wide range of programme and module specifications, documentation arising from the University's various monitoring and review processes and minutes of a number of deliberative committees. The team also scrutinised a number of module sites on the virtual learning environment (VLE), and met academic and senior staff involved in the production and approval of specifications.

1.24 Programme specifications are comprehensive, align well with the Expectations of the Quality Code, and are readily available online, both for on-site programmes and for those delivered in partner institutions. Programme specifications are routinely updated by Schools, and any major changes to specifications are subsequently considered and approved by the Courses and Regulations Group. The register of programme specifications makes the annual updating process clear and thus ensures that the published material relates only to current, not prospective, provision. The register properly signposts potential applicants to the more appropriate course information in the University's promotional material (see paragraph 2.19). The specifications indicate whenever a programme includes related exit awards at early completion points; such awards are generally restricted to postgraduate provision. Exit awards are customarily reflected in additional programme specifications with their own defined programme learning outcomes.

1.25 The University indicated that work is underway to embed the programme specification as a core record within the student record system, thus directly linking the certification of student achievement to the definitive record of the programme of study. This should tighten editorial control of the specifications, reducing the risk of variability of information (see paragraph 3.8). Responsibilities for generating student certificates, transcripts, diploma supplements and the Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR) lie with the Student Registry Services. Transcripts of study include the location and language of instruction and assessment.

1.26 In aligning its processes with the Quality Code, the University recognised the variability of module descriptors in use throughout the institution (see also the recommendation under Expectation B4, paragraph 2.73), and has subsequently introduced a new standard module template. The new template includes a detailed description of the module, its curriculum and assessment, and in time, as modules are updated and new provision approved, the detailed module information for current students will become more consistent (see also paragraph 3.7). Short module summaries are available to both potential and current students through the University's online prospectus.

1.27 Although full module details do not necessarily appear within student course handbooks, some departments make them available on departmental web pages. The team was able to confirm that module templates are updated by Schools, and that changes are properly reported to the Courses and Regulations Group. It also concluded that the material made available to students undertaking modules is appropriately detailed.

1.28 The review team concludes that the University has appropriate arrangements for the approval and updating of definitive records for each programme and qualification. These are readily available to both staff and students. The Expectation is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.29 The University takes a comprehensive approach to programme design, development and approval, covering both directly delivered and collaborative programmes. The process begins at School level before receiving scrutiny through both management and committee processes. The Courses and Regulations Group provides detailed scrutiny for taught programmes, and the Research and Postgraduate Committee undertakes scrutiny for research programmes. This work is overseen by the Education Committee and the Academic Council under a scheme of delegation.

1.30 Proposals for new programmes, taught, research and collaborative, begin at School level and are generally included within a School's forward plan. Proposals progress to approval in principle stage through a subgroup of the University Executive Board, where the business case for a new programme is considered. With the development of the new faculty structure, this approval in principle will now be considered through the relevant Faculty Executive Board.

1.31 If a proposal achieves agreement in principle it then progresses to a Programme Evaluation Meeting, chaired by the relevant Head of School. These panels also contain an external representative and, where appropriate, a representative of the relevant PSRB. A member of Academic Affairs staff is in attendance. These meetings examine key documents including the programme specification and module specifications. At this stage there is detailed consideration of threshold academic standards, including the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements. Panels may request that proposals are reconsidered in the light of their scrutiny and resubmitted.

1.32 University approval for new programmes is through the Courses and Regulations Group for taught programmes and the Research and Postgraduate Committee for research programmes. Further detailed scrutiny takes place at this stage, including in relation to threshold standards and university regulations.

1.33 The team considers that the processes in place for programme design, development and approval would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.34 The team examined documentary evidence including minutes of Programme Evaluation Meetings and Course and Regulations Group meetings, and examples of programme specifications and programme approval documents. They also met both senior and teaching staff involved in programme design, development and approval.

1.35 The processes for design, development and approval are adhered to across the University and all staff show a strong understanding of the processes and procedures that are in place.

1.36 The processes and procedures for programme design, development and approval are clearly described for staff through the Academic Affairs website, with further support made available upon request. Additional advice is also provided in the case of collaborative

programmes. Academic staff are aware of, and very positive about, the support available from the Academic Affairs Department. The support provided through the Academic Affairs website makes explicit the need to consider threshold academic standards in programme design, development and approval (see also Expectation C, paragraph 3.15).

1.37 A number of examples of new course proposals were provided to the team, and these show the detailed scrutiny undertaken by the Courses and Regulations Group and the Research and Postgraduate Committee. A number of proposals are taken through a fast-track process by the Courses and Regulations Group. This process provides equal scrutiny to the standard approval route and was valued by staff where decisions were required between the regular meeting of the Courses and Regulations Group.

1.38 The evidence shows that threshold academic standards are considered through Programme Evaluation Meetings and the scrutiny of the Courses and Regulations Group. This includes reference to benchmark statements, the FHEQ and, where relevant, standards required by PSRBs.

1.39 Student involvement in design, development and approval varies by School, but there is a student member on both the Courses and Regulations Group and the Research and Postgraduate Committee. In addition, there are a number of student members of both the Education Committee and the Academic Council, which oversee the process.

1.40 Based on the thorough processes in place and the evidence of adherence to, and strong understanding of, the processes displayed by staff, the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.41 The Study Regulations for undergraduate, taught postgraduate and research degree programme students form part of the General Regulations available in the University Calendar for Undergraduate Students and Postgraduate students and on the Academic Affairs website. The regulations for taught programmes summarise the operation of a Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme under which modules are assigned a level and number of credit points, reflecting the value of the module or unit contributing to the appropriate award and examination process. Postgraduate taught and research programmes have equivalent sets of regulations.

1.42 Programme specifications, available on the Academic Affairs website, indicate for each programme the FHEQ level, the subject benchmarks, relevant accreditation and any exemption from the University's General Regulations. The methods of assessment are presented in relation to the programme learning outcomes, and the programme requirements indicate the structure of the programme in terms of modules, credit, level and assessment.

1.43 Through its programme design, approval and review processes, module review, Annual Programme Review, Educational Enhancement Process and Periodic Review and Enhancement Process, the University ensures that the achievement of learning outcomes may be demonstrated through its assessment. Module learning outcomes are specified in module descriptions.

1.44 Boards of examiners have authority to make decisions on progress and awards, with external examiners asked to confirm the achievement of the relevant outcomes through appropriate assessment methods and to report this through their annual report. For postgraduate research students, the annual progress review is a formal point of summative assessment.

1.45 The specification of credit and of intended learning outcomes at the module and programme level, and the mapping of assessment in relation to these, would enable the Expectation to be met. The University's processes to approve and regularly review its academic provision should allow the University to test its ability to meet this Expectation.

1.46 The Expectation was tested through consideration of Study Regulations, programme and module documentation and additional module information available on the VLE, and also through discussion with staff and students at the University.

1.47 The Study Regulations available online as part of the Academic Affairs web pages and in the University Calendar clearly specify the requirements to qualify for the award of a degree, including the number of credits, the regulations to gain credit and how the degree

classification is calculated. Links to the Code of Practice on Examinations and Assessment, and the Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes, provide clear signposting to the way in which credit and qualifications are awarded. The regulations include reference to the award of credit for courses taken elsewhere.

1.48 Included in these regulations are the Conceptual Equivalents Scales for undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes, which guide assessment at an individual level. Although the University has an Assessment Policy, which sets out principles guiding assessment practices including feedback, methods and grading criteria, Schools have their own policies and procedures for the implementation of these principles, in particular with respect to moderation and marking, and the variation in practice has been noted by students (see also the recommendation under Expectation B4, paragraph 2.73).

1.49 Programme specifications that the team reviewed are presented on a standard template and contain explicit reference to the methods of assessment and how they relate to programme learning outcomes. Learning outcomes at the module level are articulated in various documents, including module outlines, module guides and as part of course handbooks.

1.50 External examiner reports provide an opportunity for explicit reference to the alignment of assessment with learning outcomes in the award of academic credit and qualifications. The consideration of these reports as part of the Annual Programme Review process, through the work of the Academic Review Group, ensures institutional oversight of issues concerning the achievement of relevant learning outcomes through assessment.

1.51 Students were familiar with the concept of learning outcomes, were satisfied that they had access to the criteria used for the marking of their work, and were positive about the review of assessment being undertaken as part of the Academic Year Structure initiative.

1.52 With respect to the recognition of prior certified and/or experiential learning, the team noted that the University had updated its procedures in 2013-14. Decisions may be made either at the point of admission or after admission. With regard to record keeping and monitoring of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) decisions, while the policy indicates that the Course and Regulations Group should monitor the implementation of policy through an annual report of decisions recorded at local level and provided by Student Records and Systems, staff confirmed that such a report had not yet been received. To ensure institutional oversight, albeit given low numbers of cases, the team **recommends** that the University should comply with the requirements of its own Procedures for Recognition of Prior Learning to provide an annual report on the operation of Recognition of Prior Learning to the Courses and Regulations Group.

1.53 Through the processes of module and programme design, approval and review, the University has in place appropriate systems to ensure the alignment of intended learning outcomes and assessment tasks in the award of academic credit and qualifications. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation has been met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.54 Authority, in relation to the monitoring and review of programmes, is delegated by Academic Council to the Education Committee and the Research and Postgraduate Committee. The central management and support for the processes is through the Academic Affairs Department.

1.55 The University ensures that UK threshold academic standards, as well as the University's standards, are achieved through module reviews at the conclusion of each module, annual programme reviews for both taught and research programmes, and periodic reviews through the Educational Enhancement Process (EEP). The University is in the process of moving to a Periodic Review and Enhancement Process (PREP) and has trialled this with one department.

1.56 Collaborative provision is subject to a periodic review process including a visit from a panel. This process is overseen by Collaborative Provision Group.

1.57 Module review takes places at School level, and should take place within six weeks of the conclusion of each module. This process is led by those responsible for teaching the module and takes account of student feedback surveys.

1.58 Annual Programme Review is led by the Heads of School, and encompasses those responsible for teaching on a module. This process takes account of threshold standards including the FHEQ and Quality Code. A standard form is used for this process to ensure consistency. Schools produce a report on the annual programme reviews that is considered by the Academic Review Group of the Education Committee, where there is a further check against UK standards and University regulations.

1.59 Periodic Review takes place through the EEP. This process is led by a panel of academics, including an external expert. All course materials, programme specifications and external examiner reports are considered through the EEP. Threshold and University standards are checked in detail, with particular consideration given to the Quality Code.

1.60 The processes operated by the University to monitor and review programmes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.61 The team examined documentary evidence including minutes of the Education Committee and its subgroups and read completed review documentation from all of the processes operated by the University. They also met senior staff, teaching staff, support staff and students from the University and collaborative partners.

1.62 The team found that staff at all levels showed a strong understanding of the processes in place to monitor and review programmes and described a positive engagement with them. The support from the Academic Affairs Department is thorough and positive and effectively supports staff in ensuring that processes are thoroughly and consistently applied, which makes a significant contribution to securing standards and assuring quality. The team

therefore identifies the thorough and positive engagement by the Academic Affairs Department in supporting the security of standards and the assurance of quality as **good practice** (see also paragraphs 1.18, 1.36, 2.7, 2.12, 2.114, 2.172 and 3.15).

1.63 Reviews at all levels take account of threshold standards and check against the University's regulations and frameworks. Staff described the processes as important and useful for developing the quality of education and for ensuring that key standards are met. In particular, the annual review of programmes is seen as a key process in maintaining and enhancing standards at the University.

1.64 The committee processes overseeing Annual Programme Review and the Educational Enhancement Process provide a further check against threshold standards and assurance that the University frameworks and policies are being consistently applied.

1.65 In general, there was evidence of strong engagement in monitoring and review processes across the institution; however, the team noted that there are some areas that had failed to engage fully with review processes in recent years. The University is aware of this variation and has plans in place to ensure full compliance through the introduction of the new faculty structures.

1.66 As a result of the implementation of the University's Vision 2020, all programmes are going through a process of re-approval, beginning with undergraduate taught programmes in 2015-16. This process is coordinated through the Courses and Regulations Group. Following this the new periodic review process, PREP, will be implemented across the institution. The evidence of the trial of the process highlighted the importance of maintaining threshold standards and close alignment to the Quality Code.

1.67 Overall, the team found effective processes in place to monitor and review programmes in relation to threshold academic standards and the University's frameworks. These processes are systematically applied, have the positive engagement of staff and are positively and thoroughly supported by the Academic Affairs Department. As a result, the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.68 Externality in setting and maintaining threshold academic standards is met through the use of external examiners and the participation of external panel members in the approval and review of programmes. External examiners are appointed for all undergraduate and taught postgraduate awards to monitor and report on academic standards, annually in the case of taught programmes. External examiners are used in the assessment process for research degree programmes, and the Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes outlines the criteria and process for the appointment of external examiners.

1.69 External examiners are appointed for taught programmes, both undergraduate and postgraduate, by the Education Committee on the recommendation of the relevant School. They act as moderators, ensuring that the assessment system is equitable and operated fairly in the classification of students, and in ensuring that the degrees are comparable in standard with those awarded in other UK universities. They are members of subject and/or programme Boards of Examiners. The role of the external examiner in relation to these responsibilities is set out on the Academic Affairs website.

1.70 The University also draws on external expertise in assuring standards through their involvement in approval of its programmes. An adviser from outside the University serves as a member of the panel at a Programme Evaluation meeting (PEM) to provide specialist information and guidance on current developments in the discipline or in the workplace. Contributions may also be made from appropriate PSRBs to inform curriculum development.

1.71 The approach taken by the University to ensure appropriate externality would enable this Expectation to be met.

1.72 The review team tested this Expectation through the examination of a range of documentary evidence, including the Code of Practice on Examinations and Assessment information concerning the appointment and role of the external examiner, the Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes, external examiners' reports, responses by Schools and Academic Affairs to external examiners' reports and the minutes of an examination board at which external examiners were present. The reports of Programme Evaluation Meetings were also considered, as were a range of relevant University committee minutes and documents.

1.73 As part of the Code of Practice on Examinations and Assessment, comprehensive information about the role and responsibilities of external examiners is available on the Academic Affairs website, and letters of appointment to external examiners provide links to that material. With respect to external examiners for research degrees, the appointment letter includes a link to the relevant section of the Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes.

1.74 External examiner nominations made by Schools address the suitability of the examiner in relation to required criteria. Through its Education Committee and Research and Postgraduate Committee, Academic Council has oversight of these nominations. External examiners attend subject and/or programme examination boards at which they comment on the standards of the work they have seen.

1.75 External examiners for undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes are required to produce an annual report, which comments on the achievement of learning outcomes, the quality and standards of student performance in relation to level, the rigour and fairness of assessment, and features of good practice. From these reports Academic Affairs collates a digest, which is presented to the Course and Regulations Group, noting the percentage of reports not yet received, common issues raised and features of good practice worthy of dissemination. In addition, at the end of their period of appointment external examiners are asked to produce a final report for which there is no pro forma. Heads of School provide a reply to the relevant external examiner report. The review team also noted evidence of responses from the University following a PhD external examiner's comment.

1.76 The annual report produced by external examiners feeds into the annual programme review process and through the Academic Review Group to the Education Committee. The Collaborative Provision Group also notes annual monitoring reports in relation to partnership provision. The contributions made by external examiners are also referred to in the Educational Enhancement Process. Programme specifications indicate the name and institution of the external examiner.

1.77 Although guidance on the role of the external examiner is given on the Academic Affairs website, there is no on-site induction, although this has been given consideration. School and programme-level policies and procedures vary according to local context in relation to such matters, as does the sample of assessed work provided to the external examiner and the induction process (see also the recommendation under Expectation B4, paragraph 2.73).

1.78 External and independent expertise is also drawn on to support the approval and review process, for example as evidenced in the Programme Evaluation Meeting or validation process, and the Educational Enhancement Process or Periodic Review and Enhancement Process. Where appropriate, external professionals as well as academics contribute to the evaluation of the provision against professional standards. Around 120 programmes are accredited by PSRBs. The importance of professional links, for example through the involvement of experts in training events within modules and curriculum development, is noted, and the links with employers through the opportunities for placements are noted positively by students.

1.79 The team concludes that it has confidence in the University's approach to externality in relation to standards. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

1.81 All of the Expectations in this judgement area are met and the associated risks are considered low. The thorough and positive engagement of the Academic Affairs Department in supporting the security of standards and assuring quality is recognised as good practice under Expectation A3.3.

1.82 One recommendation is made under Expectation A3.2. This relates to compliance with an aspect of reporting under the University's own existing procedure. The level of risk associated with this recommendation is considered low. The issue can be addressed promptly and without difficulty. The team therefore concludes that the setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered at the University **meet** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, Chapter B1: Programme Design and Approval

Findings

2.1 Proposals for new programmes are developed by the relevant School, generally through inclusion in the School plan, to ensure alignment with the wider University strategic plan. Proposals with the support of the Head of School are submitted to the subgroup of the University Executive Board to receive approval in principle. This process ensures that the programme is in line with the University's vision and plans, with the necessary resources available to deliver the programme effectively.

2.2 Proposals that receive approval in principle progress to a Programme Evaluation Meeting. This is chaired by the Head of School and includes an external panel member; where appropriate a representative of a relevant PSRB may also be involved. All key programme documents, including the programme specification, are checked at this stage of the process and detailed scrutiny of the plans for the delivery of the programme takes place. This includes consideration of resources required to ensure the quality of learning opportunities, with alignment to the Quality Code. Student feedback is considered at this stage of the process, though students are not required to be a formal part of the decision making.

2.3 A successful Programme Evaluation Meeting results in the proposal being submitted to the Courses and Regulations Group, a subcommittee of the Education Committee. Further detailed scrutiny takes place at this stage in relation to both standards and learning opportunities. The Courses and Regulations Group may request changes and resubmission of proposals. A fast-track process is in place where necessary, with proposals scrutinised via online circulation of documents. If a proposal is approved through this process, it is sent to the Education Committee for endorsement. Students are formally part of the approval process at this stage through membership of the committees.

2.4 Proposals for collaborative programmes are required to go through the same processes, with the additional scrutiny of the Collaborative Provision Group, also a subgroup of the Education Committee.

2.5 The team considers that the comprehensive approach to programme design, development and approval would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.6 The team examined documentary evidence submitted by the University, including proposals for new programmes, minutes of Programme Evaluation Meetings, the Courses and Regulations Group, the Collaborative Provision Group and the Education Committee. They also met senior staff, teaching staff and students from across the University.

2.7 The team found that there is a very good understanding among staff at the institution of the processes for the design, development and approval of programmes. Processes are seen as positive in ensuring that the learning opportunities provided are of a high standard and that the programmes meet with both external and internal quality benchmarks and thresholds. The support provided by the Academic Affairs Department in

preparing for Programme Evaluation Meetings was seen as positive and effective in supporting the development of key documentation (see also paragraphs 1.36, 2.9 and 3.15).

2.8 Proposals are thoroughly examined through the process. Both Programme Evaluation Meetings and the Courses and Regulations Group comprehensively review proposals, and regularly require amendments or further information from Schools to secure approval. The fast-track process is used effectively by the Courses and Regulations Group, allowing timely decisions to be made but without any reduction in the detailed scrutiny that takes place.

2.9 The criteria for approval are clearly set out on the Academic Affairs website, which is easy to navigate and contains links to all relevant information, templates and forms. The forms themselves contain references to all external benchmarks to ensure maintenance of standards as well as consideration of the University's own plans and strategies. The processes, roles and responsibilities are also laid out clearly on the Academic Affairs website, with further detail available through terms of reference for committees and groups.

2.10 Externality is present throughout the process, with external expertise membership included as part of the Programme Evaluation Meeting panel (both external to the institution and to the discipline). External panel members are nominated by Schools and require approval by Academic Affairs to ensure appropriate scrutiny. These external members cannot be external examiners for the programmes to ensure appropriate objectivity. External reference points are given in programme specification forms.

2.11 Students are formally engaged in the processes through their involvement in the committee structure. There is variation between the Schools as to the level of active engagement with students at the early stages of programme design. The descriptions of the changes to programmes that have taken place in the School of Pharmacy, the Centre for Dentistry and the School of Planning Architecture and Civil Engineering show examples of positive engagement with students that resulted in improvements to the quality of learning opportunities. The University acknowledges that this way of working should be considered more widely across the institution.

2.12 Overall the team found that robust processes are in place at the University and that there is evidence of their systematic and comprehensive application. Staff understand and engage with the processes effectively, with clear and considered support available through the Academic Affairs Department. As a result, the University meets the Expectation and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission*

Findings

2.13 The University has a coherent and inclusive approach to admissions with links between Schools and central admissions and marketing operations. The institution-wide undergraduate and postgraduate admissions policies are informed by the University's strategic priorities.

2.14 The team tested admissions arrangements through review of the publicly available information, documentation supplied by the University, and discussions with a range of students and members of staff.

2.15 Students are largely appreciative of the University's admissions arrangements and how they support their transition into the University, including written information, open days and outreach activities. There is a wide range of tailored online and personal support for applicants and their advisers.

2.16 The University is sensitive to the needs of particular groups of students, including international students and first-time entrants to higher education. The entry criteria are clear and there is a Course Finder facility, including resources on 'how we choose our students'. There is systematic provision of feedback to applicants on admissions decisions.

2.17 Undergraduate admissions decisions are centralised, as well as most postgraduate admissions decisions made since 2013-14. There is a Good Practice Guide on postgraduate admissions to assist with the operation of areas that continue to be managed locally. There is some variation arising from differences in subject needs in selection practices for postgraduate research and some taught postgraduate provision. There is, however, central oversight of these areas through the submission of all applications, and through several methods including the University's portal, the checking of international applications, regular liaison between Schools and the Admissions Service, and training for those involved in admissions decisions.

2.18 The admissions policies and performance against recruitment targets are reviewed by the Admissions Policy Review Group, overseen by the Education Committee and the Research and Postgraduate Committee. The University committees monitor admissions figures and student retention rates. Collaborative admissions arrangements are monitored by the Collaborative Provision Group and the Memoranda of Agreement set out responsibilities for admissions decisions. The University has systematically reviewed its operations against the Quality Code and taken account of advice from the Supporting Professionalism in Admissions network. An action plan arising from the review is being implemented with significant progress so far achieved.

2.19 The University's deadline for the withdrawal of programmes of study is February each year. When programmes are withdrawn or changed significantly, applicants are informed by the Admissions and Access Service and their options are explained. The University acknowledges that there have been some cases of later withdrawals and it is taking steps to avoid such occurrences, including changes to the review of programmes to reduce the risk of the introduction of provision for which there is insufficient demand.

2.20 The University conducted a review of RPL in 2013-14. The University has not yet implemented a system of annual reports on the operation of the policy and will, no doubt, monitor the completion of this action (see also paragraph 1.52).

2.21 There is systematic provision for appeals and complaints, including appeals against decisions on the admission of applicants with criminal convictions. The University is considering the extension of the reporting system for complaints and appeals to undergraduate admissions, and senior management will no doubt monitor progress.

2.22 There is a wide range of training and development for staff involved in admissions and participation in external good practice networks and the University trains and supervises its international agents. The University's internal networks include a team of Business Development Officers and Faculty Student Recruitment hubs to promote the alignment of central operations with those in the newly established faculties.

2.23 Overall, the team regards the University's policy and procedures as consistent with the Expectation. Policy is clearly set out and published online. Prospective students are well informed regarding the process of admission and have access to a range of information that they find helpful. The review team concludes that the Expectation is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.24 The University's strategic approach is set out in the Education Strategy and several accompanying plans, policies and frameworks. Its implementation is monitored by the Supporting Student Attainment Action Group that reports annually on performance and initiatives to the Education Committee. Each School has at least one Director of Education who has responsibility for taught provision and who plays a central role in implementing the institutional strategy in the context of their own School. The Directors of Education meet in the Directors of Education Forum to discuss education-related issues.

2.25 A review of the academic year structure is underway, with the aim of facilitating the introduction of more innovative models of assessment and curriculum delivery, to reduce over-assessment and to make time for developmental activities relating to placement, internationalisation and student transition.

2.26 Inexperienced academic staff joining the University are expected to have, or be about to obtain, a relevant PhD or equivalent qualification. While on probation, they are required to work towards a Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Teaching, or membership of the Higher Education Academy. There is also a Postgraduate Certificate, Diploma and Masters in Clinical Education for clinical teachers. All new staff receive induction. New academic staff members on probation are assigned a mentor and may also be supported by a small committee that sets objectives, monitors their progress and reports formally to the Head of School.

2.27 The Staff Training and Development Unit and the Centre for Educational Development offer training and development opportunities to all staff. Further training opportunities are provided by Information Services. Individual Schools and units also have their own development programmes. The Centre for Educational Development runs an Annual Conference, a Guest Speaker Series and subject-specific events with guest speakers. They also publish a newsletter called 'Reflections'. Engagement with training and development activities is considered at annual staff appraisals, which may also include consideration of feedback from students and peer review. The University uses external organisations, such as the Leadership Institute, for senior staff development.

2.28 Staff from partner institutions who teach or support learning on collaborative provision programmes must possess the appropriate qualifications and experience to teach or supervise on a Queen's award. Their suitability is considered by subject assessors in the University and approved by the Chair of the Collaborative Provision Group. They may apply to take the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Teaching, which is mandatory for all new full-time recognised teachers, unless the teacher can demonstrate equivalent previous teaching experience. The financial responsibility for undertaking the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Teaching remains the responsibility of the college concerned. Staff at collaborative partners of the University have full access to all courses offered by the Centre for Educational Development.

2.29 There is a teaching award scheme to recognise and reward good practice in learning and teaching. Winners of the award are required to prepare a podcast summary of the good practice that their award has recognised. These podcasts are made available to other staff on the University website. A similar Supervisory Excellence Award, designed to recognise, develop and reward good practice in the supervision of research students, was introduced in 2015. The award process includes student nomination and a written submission by the nominee, then the final decision is made by a committee. The institutional recognition of good educational practice and its dissemination as exemplified by the teacher and supervisor awards is **good practice**.

2.30 Peer review of teaching is a compulsory part of the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Teaching and, therefore, for all probationary teaching staff. It is not compulsory for other teaching staff, though it is 'strongly encouraged'. A number of Schools have developmental peer review processes.

2.31 The Centre for Educational Development provides generic and tailored courses for teaching assistants. These include small group teaching, writing learning outcomes, laboratory demonstration and assessment. The training is supported by module convenors in Schools, who explain assessment and feedback practices and marking criteria for their particular modules.

2.32 Courses and Regulations Group and Research and Postgraduates Committee are responsible for considering the sufficiency of learning resources as part of the approval process for new programmes. In terms of accommodation, the Student Centred Timetable project has analysed teaching provision to determine the appropriate distribution and optimise use to support the demand.

2.33 The University's Corporate Plan 2011-16 and the Estates Strategy 2012-22 include enhancement to the student experience through development of the teaching and learning estate. It has recently made major capital investments in new services and facilities including a new business campus, major developments on the health campus, creation of state-of-the-art sports facilities and enhanced teaching facilities. The University intends to continue a similar level of investment for the next 10 years.

2.34 The libraries provide traditional, silent and group study space, access to computers and networked resources and social learning spaces. Estates and Information Services regularly participate fully in benchmarking exercises, such as those run by University and Colleges Information Services Association, and Society of College, National and University Libraries. Student satisfaction with central and School-based provision of learning resources is monitored through surveys.

2.35 The Education Strategy and its implementation, supported by the work of the Directors of Education, the Staff Training and Development Unit and the Centre for Educational Development, would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.36 The team tested this Expectation through the review of a wide range of strategy, policy and framework documents, committee terms of reference and papers, role descriptions, programme specifications and course descriptions, and the University website. The team met staff and students to assess the implementation of policy and procedure.

2.37 The project to review the academic year started in 2014, with agreement of the principles and preparation for implementation in June 2015. Minutes of the most recent meeting of the Academic Year Project Implementation Group, September 2015, show it is clearly a work in progress, with a target date of implementation in 2016-17 across Level 1 leading to full implementation in 2017-18.

2.38 In a recent (2015) survey by the Students' Union, 87 per cent of respondents thought that academic staff are suitably trained and qualified. Figures seen by the team show that 40 staff members completed the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Teaching in the previous two academic years. Attendance data for events and courses run by the Centre for Educational Development and the Staff Training and Development Unit show high levels of take-up by teaching staff of opportunities for training and development. Staff confirmed that colleagues in collaborative partners have full access to Centre for Educational Development resources and attendance figures show that they are being used.

2.39 The University recently reviewed its academic standards for appraisal and promotion in line with the Vision 2020 objective of academic leadership. The review was completed in 2014-15 and resulted in revised academic profiles. Identification of development needs is considered a critical component of the annual appraisal. Consideration of module evaluations, which include Teaching Evaluation Questionnaires, and peer review are both mandatory components of promotion review for teaching staff.

2.40 The Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Teaching has recently been revised, and a continuing professional development scheme (the Queen's Merit Scheme) is being developed. It will be aligned to the UK Professional Standards Framework.

2.41 Staff confirmed that the more judgemental process of teaching observation is part of the confirmation-in-post process and is conducted by senior staff within Schools, who act as mentors for probationary staff. It is also mandatory for promotion. However, engagement with the developmental peer review scheme varies across the University: of the 20 Schools, participation is voluntary in 10 and compulsory in only two. The review team consider this to be one of a number of examples of variability in the way in which the Schools operate in delivering the University's business. Other examples are described elsewhere in this report (see also Expectation B4, paragraph 2.73 and recommendation).

2.42 The 2009 QAA Institutional Audit recommended that the University should 'clarify further and standardise across Schools both the training the University requires of those postgraduate research students who teach, demonstrate and/or contribute to the assessment of undergraduate students and the limits it imposes on the extent of such activities'. The University has recently introduced a more systematic regime of training for teaching assistants, which will run twice each academic session from now on. The Students' Union is satisfied that the University has developed and implemented suitable training programmes for postgraduate research students who teach, demonstrate and/or contribute to the assessment of undergraduate students.

2.43 The Collaborative Provision Group is responsible for consideration of the sufficiency of learning resources and carries out this function as part of the approval process for new programmes delivered in collaboration with partners. Scrutiny of relevant documentation shows this process to be effective.

2.44 There is variability in approach across Schools but the team came to the conclusion that the University has effective processes for reviewing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, including systems to receive and act upon feedback from a variety of sources, review the learning environment, and provide support for staff development. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement

Findings

2.45 The Supporting Student Attainment Action Group oversees systems for tracking and supporting undergraduate student attainment, reporting to University committees. There is an annual report on student attainment to the Education Committee and the University Operating Board. For research students, responsibility for oversight of progress lies with the Research and Postgraduate Committee, which reports to Academic Council.

2.46 Roles and responsibilities, both for staff and students, are set out in the annually reviewed Student Charter, which is presented to all students in their Welcome Pack.

2.47 New students are encouraged to engage with the welcome and orientation website that is live from the end of August each year. There is also a New Students website with different sections for UK/EU and international undergraduates and postgraduates.

2.48 New students receive a Welcome Pack prior to arrival, and international applicants receive additional information about the International Welcome and Orientation Week.

2.49 There is a Welcome and Induction programme that includes both centrally delivered and School-based activities. These events are held in September and January or February for programmes with a mid-year start such as Nursing. Central and School-based events are coordinated to ensure that students receive both programme-specific information and information about the support services and the Students' Union. School-based events introduce students to their Personal Tutors, Advisers of Study and peer mentors, while centrally delivered events tend to be tailored to the needs of particular groups, such as mature students, international students or postgraduate research students. They also provide opportunities for networking and relationship building with other students through teamwork activities, cultural and student society displays and interactive social spaces.

2.50 For postgraduate research students, the induction events are held in October and February, and are delivered by the Postgraduate Researcher Training Team. This programme is supplemented by School-level induction programmes that include meetings between supervisors and students.

2.51 The University considers Undergraduate Peer Mentoring to be a key mechanism for helping new students to make the transition into university. Training is provided for peer mentors, successful completion of which, together with service as a peer mentor, may be recognised under the Degree Plus scheme. Undergraduate peer mentoring is student-led, assisted by an academic coordinator within each participating School, and coordinated by the Learning Development Service. The Learning Development Service holds an annual review session with academic coordinators and student mentors, and produces a handbook for students and staff. Student mentors are encouraged to tailor the mentoring scheme to suit the particular needs of students within their School.

2.52 Peer mentoring began in the School of English in 2008-09, with four selected students acting as mentors together with an academic coordinator. At the time of the review, there were 370 mentors in place within 15 Schools and 33 subject areas.

2.53 There is also a peer mentoring scheme for postgraduate research students, coordinated by the Postgraduate Researcher Training Team. A Queen's Researcher Plus

Award provides official recognition of the development of a range of generic skills through participation in the Postgraduate Researcher Development Programme as well as in other developmental opportunities.

2.54 Students may seek advice from a range of sources, including their Personal Tutor, Adviser of Study, the International Student Support, the Graduate School, Disability Services, Information Services, the University Health Centre or the Learning Development Service. The Students' Union also provides students with an extensive range of wellbeing and support mechanisms.

2.55 The University's Employability Framework describes the institutional priorities and associated activities to develop and support employability. Each School has an action plan mapped against the framework, which identifies the needs of its students and describes its employability-related activities. Requirements for School-specific careers advice programmes are agreed annually between the School's lead careers consultant and careers liaison academic, and reviewed at the end of each semester in a School Careers, Employability and Skills activity report. The agreed School Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) provision is coordinated across all academic levels of study from first year to postgraduate. Good practice is monitored centrally and used to inform recommendations for further enhancement of School CEIAG provision.

2.56 The University has a Personal Development Planning scheme that includes a Careers Management System. It is intended to help students to assess their own progress.

2.57 The Student Guidance Centre provides support services for students. The staff and trained Student Information Assistants provide information about available support and are able to help to make appointments. Information about student support is also available through the Student Gateway. A wide range of support is available, including that provided by International Student Support; Graduate School; Mature Student Support; Support for Young People with Care Experience; Careers Adviser (International); and Counselling Service and Disability Services.

2.58 The Learning Development Service is a student-facing unit that provides support in academic skills development, including essay writing, referencing, time management, mathematics and statistics.

2.59 The University has a Student Disability Policy and Guidelines. The Disability Services make recommendations for reasonable adjustments for disabled students to give them an equal opportunity to access and to demonstrate learning. The service works in conjunction with School Disability Officers.

2.60 Students may be identified as struggling by their Personal Tutor, Adviser of Studies, Director of Education, staff in their halls of residence or others. Students may be placed on the at-risk register based on their performance or engagement. The register also includes foundation degree students entering directly into the second year. Representatives from the relevant Support Services meet fortnightly as the Student Multidisciplinary team to discuss students identified as using more than one support service. Struggling students are invited to a pastoral Student Support meeting.

2.61 There is a major emphasis on the development of digital learning at the University. The main drivers, as articulated in Vision 2020, are projected increases in postgraduate and international student numbers, and the planned enhancements to undergraduate student experience, which includes a commitment to enhancing learning and teaching through changes to assessment, the restructuring of the academic year and the development of interdisciplinarity.

2.62 The University's provision for student support would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.63 This Expectation was tested by examining a wide range of documentation, including policy, committee and other papers, School action plans, the Student Charter, induction and training material, handbooks, and the University website. Meetings with staff and students were held to explore the implementation of policy and procedure.

2.64 Oversight of academic planning has recently been devolved from the Pro Vice-Chancellor Planning and Public Engagement to the three faculties. The approach is monitored and reviewed annually against Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) by the Schools and Directorates as well as by Supporting Student Attainment Action Group, Education Committee and University Operating Board. An annual report is presented to Senate in December of each year. The Supporting Student Attainment Action Group has particular responsibility for ensuring that systems for monitoring and supporting undergraduate student attainment are effective. It prepares an Annual Education Report for the Education Committee and the University Operating Board.

2.65 Transition support and academic progression are monitored and evaluated by the Supporting Student Attainment Action Group. There is an annual report on welcome and orientation provision, and an annual report to the University Operating Board detailing preparations for the coming Welcome Week based on the previous year's evaluation. Undergraduate and postgraduate students told the team that the induction experience had been helpful. This view was shared by students studying on collaborative programmes.

2.66 The Student Charter is updated annually. The University is working on a project to develop student partnerships, which will supersede the Student Charter. This project forms part of the DELNI higher education strategy Graduating to Success.

2.67 Students spoke favourably of the peer mentoring schemes that form part of the Degree Plus and Researcher Plus awards. The Degree Plus scheme is reviewed annually. The University aims to increase the take-up level from the current 900 students per year and to differentiate it into different levels of award. The team considers the wide range of opportunities for student skills development within and beyond the curriculum, including activities recognised under Degree Plus such as peer mentoring, to be **good practice** that makes a positive contribution to the students' learning experience.

2.68 Undergraduate students reported that they found their personal tutors and advisers of study to be helpful. Students studying at collaborative partners were happy with the academic and personal support provided by the University, together with their access to University study resources.

2.69 Availability of personal tutors for postgraduate students currently varies widely across the University. The Dean of the Graduate School has been gathering information from the Schools about personal tutors for postgraduate taught students and is now working to introduce a University-wide scheme (see also paragraph 2.73).

2.70 While engagement with Personal Development Planning (PDP) is not compulsory, PDP processes are embedded in a key range of activities at School, programme and student support service level. This means that all students will engage with the PDP processes, even though they may not all realise that they are doing so.

2.71 There is information and a coordinated range of student services for applicants and students to support their transition through the University and into employment, with the provision subject to regular evaluation. Student support can be tailored to specific student cohorts, such as mature students, international students, those who do not have English as

their first language, and students entering from non-traditional backgrounds. Students report good provision from central services for disabled students, careers advice and educational care support.

2.72 The Head of Education and Skills Development surveys Annual Programme Review reports annually to look for emerging issues that may impact on Professional Services.

2.73 The team was unclear about how the University ensures consistency of standards in online provision, as highlighted by some students, who referred to an 'inconsistent and often poor service across the University' arising from a lack of central requirements or guidance. The University's position is that it takes a 'facilitative rather than a regulatory approach to encouraging the use of the VLE and other educational technologies'. It previously considered whether minimum expectations on use should be developed but decided that this would drive inappropriate use of the VLE. This leaves open the question of how the University avoids substandard provision of resources on the VLE, and results in varied practice across the institution. The review team notes that the University is in the process of replacing its VLE software, but does not consider that this in itself would be sufficient to address the variability of provision across the Schools. This was one of a number of examples of variability in the way in which the Schools operate in delivering the University's business. Other examples are described elsewhere in this report (see paragraphs 1.7, 1.16, 1.26, 1.48, 1.78, 2.41, 2.69, 2.77, 2.91, 2.115, 2.116, 2.174 and 3.9). Collectively they lead the team to **recommend** that the University confirms that policies and procedures for managing the quality of learning opportunities address comparability of student experience.

2.74 Overall the University has effective systems in place that support students in their academic, personal and professional development. The recommendation focuses on variability in operational aspects of the University's approach to providing learning opportunities. The team formed the view that while students were provided with effective support and development opportunities, improving consistency would provide the University with a more robust basis for assuring itself that all students had access to threshold levels of service. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met but given that the variability makes it more difficult for the University to monitor its component parts, the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

2.75 There is a wide range of opportunities for student representation across the University. The Student Charter, which is distributed to students across the University, highlights the significance of student representation and engagement. The Charter is under review as the University seeks to introduce greater emphasis on partnership between staff and students.

2.76 The team discussed the effectiveness of student engagement with student representatives, reviewed committee documentation and the analysis of results of student surveys and explored the impact of student feedback on the University.

2.77 There is some variability of approach at School and programme level. Nevertheless, all Schools now have staff-student consultative committees and some have student councils as an additional means of facilitating consultation. There are also established requirements for collaborative partners to maintain student representation systems, and student representatives gave positive feedback to the team on their experience. The team heard from students more generally on the increasing commitment of the University to student consultation. The team also received positive comments from research student representatives on the development of the research student representation system, with the recently created Graduate School now offering a focus. The University will no doubt wish to continue to build strong baseline standards for student engagement across all Schools and faculties (see also Expectation B4, paragraph 2.73).

2.78 The Students' Union has played a major role in establishing and extending student representation across the University. There is reliance on the Students' Union for the delivery of training and support for student representatives at School and programme level, and the Students' Union has been notably energetic and thorough in its engagement with this task.

2.79 There is wide student representation on institutional committees and officers of the Students' Union have regular access to the Vice-Chancellor and other senior managers. There is an active central Postgraduate Forum, and Academic Board acts as a University-wide forum to discuss major themes and address issues that have not been resolved at other levels of the institution. The team heard of a series of examples of issues of interest to students that had been addressed through Academic Board.

2.80 Student feedback is sought at modular, programme and institutional level, including annual and periodic programme monitoring. Some Schools also involve students in programme approval. Student surveys are central to University quality assurance systems, with prominent use of the National Student Survey, the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey, and the First Year and Second Year Student Experience Surveys.

2.81 The University has a number of recognition schemes informed by student feedback, including the annual Queen's Students' Union Education Awards and Research Supervisors' Awards. The Degree Plus and Researcher Plus Awards are examples of good practice as a considered means of enabling formal recognition of the work of student representatives.

2.82 The University has well supported systems for student engagement, and values the contributions to quality assurance and enhancement made by its students. While recognising the variability of approach adopted by Schools, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.83 The University states that it 'operates 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'. In the context of the University's Education Strategy 2011-16, and informed by the Assessment Working Group, the Assessment Policy establishes a number of principles based on the Quality Code, *Chapter B6*, which guide assessment and feedback practice.

2.84 The Code of Practice for Assessment and Examinations provides students, staff and external examiners with a range of policies, regulations and guidelines to support the assessment process for undergraduate, taught and research postgraduate provision.

2.85 Students can also access general information on assessment through the Student Gateway website and in the University Calendars. This includes reference to the Conceptual Equivalents Scales, which are intended to facilitate consistency in marking undergraduate and postgraduate assessments. Beyond this and the General Regulations, there is no University-wide policy on marking and feedback, and Schools have their own policies and procedures.

2.86 Assessments are detailed in the programme specifications and further information on assessment modes is available in School handbooks, web pages and module guides. The appropriateness of the assessments to demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes is tested through the University's approval and review processes, and through the input of external examiners, who comment on the extent to which the learning outcomes are assessed, the quality and standards of student performance in assessed work, the rigour and fairness of the assessment, and the consistency of marking. The application of the regulations to affect the award of credit and qualifications is ultimately the responsibility of the Board of Examiners, of which the external examiner is a member. The University maintains oversight of the examinations and assessment process through its review of external examiners' reports, the Annual Programme Review process, and, in 2014, the University Operating Board's audit of School examination and assessment practice.

2.87 Assessment practice is supported through staff training and development activities and materials.

2.88 The University's approach to assessment would enable the expectation to be met.

2.89 The Expectation was tested by examining a range of documentary evidence, including programme specifications, module handbooks, policy documents, and a variety of committee papers. The review team also heard from staff and students during the visit.

2.90 The University takes a strategic approach to the development of assessment and feedback practices. Under the banner of the Academic Year Structure, the University is undertaking a review of student learning and assessment with the aim of facilitating the introduction of more innovative models of assessment and curriculum delivery. In particular, a priority is set to reduce the dominance of summative assessment by written examination and to reduce over-assessment. The Academic Year Project Implementation Group outlines

progress with respect to implementation in 2016-17 across Level 1 and full implementation in 2017-18. The development builds on the outcomes of the e-Assessment and Feedback for Effective Course Transformation (e-AFFECT) project, with its focus on assessment and feedback using technology. Staff and students spoke positively about the Academic Year Structure development, with students seeing this as 'an excellent opportunity to address the long-standing issues around student satisfaction with assessment and feedback'.

2.91 Against the backdrop of student satisfaction scores relating to assessment and feedback, the team noted evidence of diversity in School assessment policies (see also Expectation B4, paragraph 2.73). Students were able to confirm the general practice of the return of work, and their awareness of the criteria for assessment and progression within their programmes.

2.92 On the basis of the evidence reviewed, the team is confident that the University's approaches to assessment enable the Expectation to be met. The associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining

Findings

2.93 In accordance with the University's Code of Practice on Examinations and Assessment, external examiners for undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes are nominated at School level using a nomination form and appointments are approved by the Education Committee. External examiners for postgraduate research awards are nominated by the School and approved by the Research and Postgraduate Committee in line with stated criteria.

2.94 The role of the external examiner is defined as ensuring that the assessment system is equitable and fairly operated in the classification of students and in ensuring that the degrees awarded by the University are comparable in standard to those awarded in other UK universities as well as in line with the Quality Code. In fulfilling their role, external examiners attend Boards of Examiners at the end of the second semester, and normally after the first semester of the first year of their appointment.

2.95 External examiners are required to submit an annual report to the Head of Academic Affairs, using a template designed for either undergraduate or postgraduate taught provision. This template prompts the external examiner to comment on standards, to make recommendations and to identify good practice. At the end of their period of appointment external examiners are asked to submit a final report. Heads of School provide a reply to the external examiner report. Where external examiners have serious concerns relating to the standards of a programme, they may submit a confidential report to the Vice-Chancellor, and if internal procedures are exhausted, involve the QAA Concerns scheme or inform the relevant PSRB.

2.96 The Code of Practice on Examinations and Assessment indicates that Schools must make the name, position and institutions of their external examiners available in module and programme information and make external examiners' annual reports available in full to students via intranet sites, staff-student consultative committees or in the School office.

2.97 The approach the University takes in relation to external examiner input would enable this expectation to be met.

2.98 The review team investigated the approach the University took to external examining by considering external examiner reports, screenshots of these on a School intranet site, annual programme reports and their associated action plans, and committee minutes documenting the annual programme review process. Meetings with students explored students' familiarity and engagement with the external examining process.

2.99 The process for the nomination and approval of external examiners for taught and research provision is robust, with criteria identified on the Academic Affairs website and through a standard nomination form. Responsibilities for the approval of external examiners by the Education Committee for taught awards and by the Research and Postgraduate Committee for research awards are evidenced through minutes.

2.100 Although external examining procedures at School level vary with respect to access to student work, information and induction arrangements, the role of the external examiner is in line with the remit and responsibilities defined in the Code of Practice on Examinations and Assessment. External examiner reports feed in to the review process of the University through the Annual Programme Review and Educational Enhancement Process or Periodic

Review and Enhancement Process. School and University responses to the external examiner's report confirm the process of response when an issue has been raised.

2.101 Academic Affairs monitors receipt of external examiners' reports and collates a report to Courses and Regulations Group highlighting central issues and good practice identified within the reports. This report provides evidence of the University's monitoring of the timeliness and quality of external examiners' reports, and of the use of these reports to identify issues of central concern, such as the use of the University's conceptual equivalents scale, and the timeframe and procedures for moderation, as well as features of good practice. The outcome of discussion had been reported back to the external examiners.

2.102 Access by students to external examiner reports has been noted as variable and this issue is identified elsewhere through the Academic Review Group scrutiny of annual programme reports. While some Schools make the reports and responses available on their student site, comments from students whom the team met confirmed that practice is not consistent. Students did demonstrate familiarity, however, with the role of the external examiner and knew where to locate relevant information about the external examiner role, as well as their report.

2.103 In conclusion, the team is confident that the University has in place appropriate mechanisms and processes for the effective use of external examiners' input. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review

Findings

2.104 The University has a range of processes in place to monitor and review programmes at all levels, covering taught, research and collaborative provision. Schools operate module reviews, all programmes undergo annual review, and periodic review takes place through the Educational Enhancement Processes. These processes are supported through the Academic Affairs Department and are designed to ensure both the maintenance of standards and the enhancement of learning opportunities. Oversight is provided through the University's committee structure under a scheme of delegated authority from the Academic Council.

2.105 Module review takes place at School level within six weeks of the conclusion of a module. Staff responsible for teaching the module are involved in the process, with particular attention given to feedback from students.

2.106 Annual Programme Review is required for all taught programmes and requires the completion of template documents to ensure consistency. External examiner comments and student feedback are considered through the Annual Programme Review, along with a check that module reviews have taken place across the programme. Schools submit a summary report of Annual Programme Reviews to the Academic Review Group of the Education Committee, where institutional oversight is provided. Research programmes go through the Annual Review of Research Programmes, with institutional oversight provided through the Research and Postgraduates Committee.

2.107 Collaborative programmes are also subject to annual review processes, with the additional institutional oversight being provided by the Collaborative Provision Group. Collaborative provision annual reviews are led by the relevant University Coordinator, making use of standard documentation provided through the Academic Affairs Department.

2.108 Collaborative programmes are subject to a specific periodic review process that operates outside of the Educational Enhancement Process, reflecting the different complexities of this type of provision.

2.109 Periodic Review is through the Educational Enhancement Process. Schools are subject to review every six years through a panel including an external expert and, where relevant, a member of a professional body. This process is closely aligned to the Quality Code and has the consideration of academic enhancement as a key feature. The University is in the process of moving to a new periodic review format, the Periodic Review and Enhancement Process. This process will include programme re-approval with periodic review. A trial of this methodology is currently underway.

2.110 Student feedback is considered at all levels of review and the University has included students as members of periodic review panels since 2007.

2.111 The arrangements in place for monitoring and review at the University, covering all taught, research and collaborative programmes, would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.112 The team examined documentary evidence, including completed module and annual review forms, completed EEP forms and minutes from key committees. The team also met senior staff, teaching staff, support staff and students studying both at the University and through collaborative partners.

2.113 The team found that monitoring and review processes at the University are, in general, planned, regular and systematic. They are aligned to key external benchmarks, take due note of student feedback and include consideration of academic enhancement to support the development of student learning opportunities. Furthermore, the oversight provided by University committees provides institutional consideration of the issues raised through review processes, both to consider the dissemination of good practice and to address issues arising.

2.114 The advice and guidance provided by the central Academic Affairs Department in supporting staff to carry out the various review processes is clear and relevant. This includes clear guidance on the roles and responsibilities of staff through the Academic Affairs website. Further support is available to Schools upon request and staff described this as useful in carrying out their roles effectively.

2.115 However, the team did see evidence of some variation in regards to the engagement of Schools with review processes, with instances of incomplete or inadequate documentation being submitted (see also Expectation B4, paragraph 2.73). While these instances were identified through the Academic Affairs Department, actions taken to ensure compliance in the future were not clear. The University's new faculty structure will introduce a new layer of scrutiny to monitoring and review processes to ensure the consistent implementation of processes.

2.116 The team also found that there is variation across the Schools in relation to the identification and dissemination of good practice identified through Annual Programme Review and the EEP. The role of the School Directors of Education is key to the dissemination of good practice identified at the University, and while there are some examples of staff engaging effectively with the process to drive enhancement, it does not appear to be consistently embedded across the institution to ensure a comparable student experience across all Schools (see also Expectation B4, paragraph 2.73).

2.117 The review processes take thorough account of student feedback and students reported being aware of both the monitoring and review processes at the University and the changes made as a result of the reviews. In addition, students have recently become involved as members of the review panels through the EEP. Those involved described it as a very positive experience, with staff treating them as full members of the panels and providing an opportunity to develop student learning opportunities.

2.118 The University showed a commitment to reviewing its monitoring and review arrangements to ensure they remain relevant and effective. The development of the new Periodic Review and Enhancement Process is a good example of this.

2.119 The University showed a commitment to reviewing its monitoring and review arrangements to ensure they remain relevant and effective. The development of the new Periodic Review and Enhancement Process is a good example of this, with enhancements such as the inclusion of student panel members being introduced.

2.120 Overall, the team judged that the University has in place effective processes to monitor and review programmes, taking account of academic standards and student learning opportunities. The team did, however, identify some variation in the application of these processes. The University is aware of the need to ensure consistency across all of its provision and the move to a faculty structure will support this standardisation. The team concludes that the Expectation is therefore met, and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints

Findings

2.121 There are separate procedures for complaints and appeals. The regulations for each are set out in the University General Regulations. Where there is any question about which procedure would be most applicable, the Director of Academic and Student Affairs identifies in the first instance which procedure should be used.

2.122 Since the University does not fall under the remit of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator, complainants unsatisfied by the University's judgement may go to the Board of Visitors for an independent consideration of their case. The Board of Visitors is an external body and independent of the University, with the power to adjudicate on a final decision by the University for unsatisfied students.

2.123 Guidance for both staff and students is available on the Academic Affairs website. The Central Student Appeals Committee website has further information and guidance.

2.124 Students wishing to lodge a complaint or appeal are encouraged to seek advice from the Students' Union Advice Centre. Guidance is also available from Schools, for example from Personal Tutors, Advisers of Studies and Student Support Meetings. Assistance and support are available to staff in the form of workshops, visits to Schools, through topical discussion at Directors of Education and School Managers' Forums and one-to-one advice.

2.125 Memoranda of Agreement for collaborative provision include explicit reference to the arrangement for complaints and appeals. While the appeals process in operation for any given partnership would normally be that of the University, as the awarding body, the complaints process may be that of the University or the partner, depending upon the exact type of partnership arrangement. Students studying at collaborative partner institutions are advised of the relevant procedures in accordance with the Memorandum of Agreement, by means of the handbooks, teaching staff and advisers of study.

2.126 There are separate procedures for appeals relating to the admissions process, as discussed in paragraph 2.21 of this report.

2.127 There are different procedures and committees to manage academic appeals from taught and research students. Undergraduate and postgraduate taught student appeals are directed to the Central Student Appeals Committee, while academic appeals by postgraduate research students are considered by the Central Student Research Appeals Committee. Both procedures require the student to identify the specific grounds on which they are requesting an appeal, and students are advised that an appeal against academic judgement is not permitted. Both sets of regulations provide opportunity for early resolution without recourse to a full meeting of the committee, if the student's appeal meets defined grounds and the School is supportive of the appeal. From the 2014-15 academic session, the taught student appeals process was modified to include a sifting stage, in an attempt to optimise the procedure. Students are permitted a review by a Pro Vice-Chancellor of appeals sifted out at this stage.

2.128 The University recently introduced a separate procedure that provides students with the opportunity to raise difficult or personal issues in confidence with the Director of Academic and Student Affairs. This was in direct response to concerns raised by students at Academic Council.

- 2.129 Students are notified of the outcome of an academic appeal normally within five working days of the committee meeting and the outcome is also communicated to the relevant School for action.
- 2.130 The Student Complaints Procedure provides a definition of what constitutes a complaint and provides guidance to establish which of the University's procedures should be followed.
- 2.131 Stage 1 of the complaints procedure involves discussions with staff in the School or Service where the difficulty has arisen. If this does not provide the desired outcome, or the matter is too serious to be addressed in this way, then a formal complaint may be made to the Head of Academic Affairs through Stage 2 of the procedure. A complaint at Stage 2 is formally investigated at Faculty or Directorate level.
- 2.132 If the matter cannot be resolved at Stage 2, the complainant has the right to a Stage 3 appeal on specific grounds to the Director of Academic and Student Affairs. At this stage, the Director can uphold the appeal on the basis of the written evidence presented, allowing for the possibility of earlier resolution, or refer the appeal to a Panel that will consider only the grounds of appeal, unless new evidence has come to light.
- 2.133 Memoranda of Agreement with partner institutions with which the University offers collaborative provision programmes define the arrangements for complaints and appeals. The nature of the arrangements differs with different types of partnership. For programmes and partnerships where the applicable complaints procedures are those of the partner, the Memorandum of Agreement states that the partner is required to report the outcome of all complaints to the University.
- 2.134 Academic appeals data from Central Student Appeals Committee are considered by Education Committee, and data from Central Student Research Appeals Committee are considered by Research and Postgraduate Committee annually. Each committee receives the data and an analysis of trends. Any changes to the appeals and complaints procedures are approved by Education Committee or Research and Postgraduate Committee as required, annually. The University also seeks feedback annually on the academic appeals processes from a range of stakeholders to inform the development and updates of procedures.
- 2.135 The arrangements in place would allow the Expectation to be met.
- 2.136 In testing this Expectation, the team met senior managers, teaching and support staff and students and reviewed a wide range of documentation, including committee papers, procedures, details of workshops and forums, Memoranda of Agreement, handbooks and other documents, and the University website.
- 2.137 There are comprehensive complaints and appeals procedures, with provision for internal review, a right of resort for the review of complaints to the Board of Visitors, and defined timescales for responses. Students have access to a variety of support from the institution and the Students' Union.
- 2.138 The team noted comments from students reporting that a survey by the Students' Union showed low levels of awareness about complaints and appeals processes (28 per cent), and tested this by speaking to students. While collaborative provision students at a number of partner institutions had varying opinions about the ease of finding information about complaints and appeals procedures, generally students knew how to find out about the procedure for submitting a complaint or appeal. Scrutiny of sample handbooks revealed clear guidance, in addition to that available on the University's website and VLE. Decision letters advise students about the mechanism of appeal, including whether the internal process is exhausted.

2.139 There is no requirement for a Sabbatical Officer in the composition of either Central Student Appeals Committee or Central Student Research Appeals Committee. Students feel that such a requirement would 'provide assurance to students that the processes are being fairly applied to all students, particularly in a situation whereby a student does not bring someone to accompany them to a hearing'. Senior staff told the team that this was under consideration by the institution.

2.140 The appeals complaints processes were reviewed by an external auditing company in 2013, followed by the identification of a series of actions that would bring it more closely in line with the Quality Code. This led to the adoption of a new procedure for exceptional circumstances, the removal of School Student Progress Committees, the introduction of Student Support Meetings and a revised procedure for the Central Student Appeals Committee. The review also recommended that details of all complaints made at School or Departmental level (Stage 1) should be logged and evaluated. The first annual review of Stage 1 complaints was considered by Education Committee in October 2015. Following this consideration of complaints data, Education Committee noted that further clarification was required for Schools on the definition of a complaint, and that training would be developed to assist staff in investigating Stage 2 complaints.

2.141 Training sessions on appeals are provided for School Managers and Directors of Education. The training emphasises the need to ensure that students are fully and properly advised about the procedures and their responsibilities. Directors of Education told the team that they had attended the training. Information about complaints and appeals training is also included in the induction training of new academic staff.

2.142 There are explicit requirements in the Memoranda of Agreement about reporting of complaints by collaborative partners, but it is not clear how compliance with this requirement is checked. The review team was concerned, therefore, that the University may not always be fully aware of Stage 1 complaints handled exclusively by a partner institution. Staff admitted that they might not hear about a complaint that was resolved quickly by the partner, though they did expect such complaints to be brought to the University's attention by the University Coordinator, examination board, staff-student liaison committee or annual programme review. The review team **recommends** that the University strengthens procedures for monitoring complaints from students on collaborative programmes.

2.143 Overall, the team concludes that the Expectation is met. The University has procedures in place to meet the requirements and students are made aware of these processes. A recommendation is made but this relates to enhanced monitoring rather than to substantive weaknesses in policy or operation, and therefore the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.144 The University's Vision 2020, in addressing the funding challenges for higher education, includes aspirations for significant growth in on-campus provision for international students, building on the earlier increases emerging from the 2011-16 Corporate Plan. The continued growth will be achieved in part by the development of new and larger international partnerships. Collaborative provision thus remains an increasingly important aspect of the University's business.

2.145 The University currently believes itself to be a relatively small player in the collaborative arena, with some five per cent (1,001) of its student population studying in some form of partnership arrangement. The University's Register of Collaborative Provision lists 58 partnerships, including validation relationships, franchise partnerships, partnerships delivering joint awards with institutions in the Republic of Ireland, articulation arrangements, and partnerships for the joint supervision and award of PhDs (including membership of two Centres for Doctoral Training).

2.146 The validation partnerships include a number of arrangements with further education colleges in Northern Ireland for the delivery and award of foundation degrees. There are a number of articulation relationships with Chinese universities, one of which leads to joint teaching and the award of degrees from both Universities to successful students. The University has recently launched a joint college in China in which both Universities deliver and assess programmes. It also operates a number of ERASMUS partnerships in Europe. The University operates a long-standing joint foundation study venture with INTO (INTO-Queen's University Belfast), and exercises academic oversight through its standard processes for collaborative provision.

2.147 The Collaborative Provision Group has responsibility to Education Committee and to Research and Postgraduate Committee respectively for the oversight of taught and research degree partnerships. Its responsibilities include the development of policy and procedures, as well as making recommendations for the approval of collaborative arrangements with partner institutions.

2.148 The University's procedures for the approval, monitoring and review of programmes delivered in partnership with others bolster the normal arrangements for the management of on-site provision (see also paragraph 2.4). Proposals for substantive academic partnerships must first, as for on-site programmes, obtain approval in principle for development from a subgroup of the University Executive Board, and then be considered in a formal Institutional Approval process by a validation panel at the partner institution. If the proposal involves the development of a new programme, the validation panel will also conduct the Programme Evaluation Meeting.

2.149 The recommendations from the validation meeting for institutional approval are considered by Collaborative Provision Group, and if the partnership includes the delivery of a new programme, the recommendations are also considered by the Courses and Regulations Group. Recommendations from both Collaborative Provision Group and Courses and Regulations Group are reported to Education Committee or Research and Postgraduate Committee, which hold delegated authority to approve partnerships and programmes. If a partnership is of significant strategic importance, Academic Council will make the final decision.

2.150 A formal Memorandum of Agreement is agreed and signed for each collaborative relationship. The Memoranda specify the various responsibilities for quality and standards to be exercised by the two partners, and specify the length of agreement.

2.151 At the conclusion of the approval process, an Institutional Coordinator is appointed at the University for each partnership programme, providing the Institution with oversight of the 'development, monitoring and enhancement of the collaborative arrangement at programme level'.

2.152 Proposals to work in partnership with other higher education institutions for the joint supervision of postgraduate research students undergo a similar process, requiring approval in principle, followed by consideration of the proposed Memorandum of Agreement and associated background checks by Collaborative Provision Group, before approval of the partner is endorsed by the Research and Postgraduate Committee.

2.153 Collaborative programmes are subject to a three-tier academic quality assurance framework similar to that for taught courses, comprising Module Review, Annual Programme Review and Periodic Review. Module reviews are conducted locally in the partner institution, feeding into the Annual Programme Review, which is conducted jointly by the University Coordinator and the partner programme team. The review is reported using a standard University template based upon that for on-site programmes, but further developed to draw out matters specific to the partnership. The reports are subsequently considered by Collaborative Provision Group, which provides detailed reports to Education Committee highlighting good practice, affirmations and issues of concern. In addition, Schools reflect on their collaborative provision in their annual overview report, which pulls together all programme annual reviews. Research degree partnerships are reviewed annually as part of the Schools' annual review of research degrees.

2.154 Periodic Review of partner programmes operates separately from a School's Educational Enhancement/Periodic Review and Enhancement Process, reflecting the need to also consider a range of partnership-specific matters, and takes place before the end of the agreed partnership agreement. It follows the same general format as for on-campus provision, but takes place at the partner organisation, addressing the success of the relationship as well as the programme of study. A successful review leads to a new Memorandum of Agreement.

2.155 Staff who teach and/or support learning in institutions with which the University has collaborative provision are required to reach and maintain a high standard of professional practice to be recognised as teachers by the University. There is a detailed and regulated process whereby staff may be so recognised by Collaborative Provision Group. Recognised teachers have access to University staff development activities at preferential rates, and have borrowing rights with the University Library.

2.156 The University produces a general handbook for students studying on collaborative programmes and Memoranda of Agreement require partners to produce local course handbooks. The University expects partner institutions to operate staff-student consultative committees in the same way in which they operate on-site, and students on programmes in partner institutions are asked to complete the normal University student satisfaction surveys.

2.157 An increasing number of students undertake formal work placements within their programme of study or their time at the University. They are provided with pre-placement support to enable them to prepare for and make the most of their placements and students on placement also receive ongoing support.

2.158 The team explored the University's approach to academic provision with partners, in particular the approval, monitoring and review of a number of arrangements, including work-based learning. The team reviewed handbooks, policies, examples of the establishment, renewal and withdrawal from partnerships, monitoring reports and records of relevant

committees. It tested its findings in meetings with a range of senior and academic staff, as well as staff and students from partner organisations.

2.159 The team's investigations confirmed that in general the University's procedures for the approval of institutional partners of programmes for delivery through partnership, for the routine annual monitoring of such programmes, and for the periodic review of both programmes and partnerships work well.

2.160 The University's procedures for the approval of the delivery of foundation degree provision with further education colleges in Northern Ireland do not appear to align with a number of the Indicators of sound practice in the Quality Code. While the procedures include detailed consideration of the programme to be validated, the University confirmed that it believed that it was unnecessary to conduct any institutional-level investigations to confirm the appropriateness of the partnership. The rationale for the absence of such scrutiny was not apparent in the procedures, or in records of deliberative committees available to the reviewers.

2.161 In discussions with the team the University indicated that it considered the Department for Employment and Learning's Higher Education Strategy, Graduating to Success, in which it states an intent for universities and further education colleges to work in partnership to offer higher education throughout Northern Ireland, to obviate the need for institutional-level scrutiny. While appreciating that the financial and legal arrangements of public sector further education are well understood, the team considered that scrutiny of other matters, such as the proposed partner institution's academic and strategic plans, its organisational structure, its support arrangements for students, its arrangements for quality assurance, and any recent inspections by external quality bodies, might all have a legitimate impact upon the University's willingness to enter into a partnership with a college. Indeed, such matters are included in the University's normal arrangements for approving other validated or franchised partnerships.

2.162 The team appreciates that there might be a case for a 'proportionate' process of institutional approval, which minimises any legal or financial scrutiny of other public sector organisations, and that the detailed programme-level validation and monitoring processes will actually secure the students' experience at the point of delivery. However, it considers that the lack of a requirement to consider the student learning and support environment at institutional level might present an elevated risk to the overall student experience. In scrutinising recent outcomes from programme-level validations, the team found that many institutional matters were explored, and that risk had thus been minimised. The team therefore **recommends** that the University formalises a risk-based approach to partner approval that encompasses all potential situations and ensures variations are approved through the appropriate deliberative processes.

2.163 The team learned, in general, of the care taken to ensure that arrangements provide an appropriate environment for student learning, a physical visit to the proposed partner always being included as part of the validation event. Validation events paid particular attention to matters such as staffing, staff development, quality assurance arrangements, the management of student work placements, and support for students whose first language is not English. In one case, reviewers heard that approval had been granted for only a limited period to ensure that remedial matters agreed at validation had been successful. Articulation arrangements undergo a well-defined approval process, which scrutinises academic alignment.

2.164 The University has recently decided to enter into arrangements that result in the award of a degree from both partners, and the team was able to track the careful consideration given at institutional level to ensure proper alignment with the Quality Code, the thorough nature of the validation processes and the detailed contents of the agreements reached with the partner to minimise risk. Where proposals are for a single joint award made

by both partners, approval is specifically required to confirm agreement of alignment of the regulations of the two institutions.

2.165 The team heard that the joint venture with INTO, which does not appear to be included in the register of collaborative partnerships, had previously included a third-party organisation that validated the academic provision. The University now provides the validation service itself, and thus has greater academic control of the arrangements, using its normal collaborative processes to approve, monitor and review the taught provision.

2.166 A number of Memoranda of Agreement with partner institutions were made available to the team. They are detailed and thorough, including procedures for early termination of the agreement, were that to prove necessary. In tracking the arrangements for the closure of a programme in one partner institution, the team noted senior institutional involvement at both executive and deliberative level to confirm that closure was fully justified and that arrangements were in place for existing students to progress to other appropriate provision. The memoranda for joint doctoral arrangements are appropriately detailed, and make clear the arrangements for supervision, assessment and certification.

2.167 In the team's reading and discussions with staff and students it was apparent that the process of annual programme review was effective in teasing out aspects of good practice and matters of institutional concern. In particular, taught students confirmed that induction was sound, that placements were satisfactory, and that they had good access to support services, both at the University and their own college. They also stated that they engaged in reviewing modules, and research students affirmed that they were formally engaged in regular monitoring of their progress. The Collaborative Provision Group scrutinises all annual programme reviews for collaborative programmes in detail, and produces an institutional overview report that identifies trends and matters that warrant consideration elsewhere. This report is considered in detail by Education Committee, and thereafter Academic Council receives a substantial summary containing matters of note.

2.168 Collaborative Provision Group identified a worrying trend in the 2013-14 annual reviews: a significant proportion were either submitted very late or not submitted at all. The subsequent follow-up investigation was thorough, and swift action was taken to elicit the late reports. In addition, it was identified that a number of the missing reports were attributed to international recruitment partnership relationships that had not been active in that particular year; procedures were amended to seek performance reports only from active partnerships.

2.169 In its reading and meetings, the team was similarly reassured that the periodic review process for collaborative partnerships and programmes was thorough and effective, and noted that in one case no recruitment was permitted to take place until adequate resources were available.

2.170 The team found that the University's Policy and Guidelines on Work-based and Placement Learning are comprehensive, affording support for students, employers and University staff monitoring the placement. Students confirmed that extensive preparation was made available and that visits were regularly made by staff to visit students on foundation degree placements. The team learned that where students are assessed in the workplace, training is provided for placement providers. Students on compulsory placements are required to sign contractual agreements with the placement provider and appropriately detailed Memoranda of Understanding are agreed between the University and the participating company.

2.171 The institutional arrangements for the management of ERASMUS and study abroad placements are centred around the Careers, Employability and Skills team. The team learned that it is the student's responsibility to apply for a placement, but found that there are detailed guidelines, preparatory procedures and processes to monitor and support students while overseas.

2.172 The team's reading and various meetings contributed to its opinion that the University Coordinator is a crucial appointment, and the responsibilities are detailed and well described. The coordinator is the principal point of liaison with the partner, is chair of the relevant boards of examiners, provides the annual monitoring report for each programme, and acts as the principal conduit for gaining University approval of promotional material for partners' programmes. The University provides detailed support to the coordinators, principally by convening annual update meetings. Partner institutions value the contribution made by the coordinators. In addition to the coordinator, it was apparent to reviewers that the University's Academic Affairs team plays a central role in coordinating collaborative arrangements, in particular where the relationship includes multiple Schools and programmes.

2.173 The team heard a number of times that collaborative students have full access to University resources and support services, in addition to those in their normal place of study; the students were particularly positive regarding the flexibility this affords them in their private study. The team learned that the University will carry out a major review of its collaborative portfolio and its frameworks for collaborative provision, and will include within this a review of student access to University resources.

2.174 In its scrutiny of validation documentation, Memoranda of Agreement and student handbooks, the team noted that there was some variability in the specific arrangements regarding handling complaints from students in partner institutions (see also Expectation B4, paragraph 2.73). In some cases, students appear to have the opportunity to elevate complaints to the University; in others they do not. Students themselves stated confusion regarding the complaints processes, and the team subsequently heard from staff that the opportunity to elevate a complaint to the University would always exist. In discussions with staff it became apparent that complaints considered by partners under their informal procedures may remain unseen by the University, and thus not be formally reported either through the annual programme review or in the University's routine reflection on complaints. Emerging trends and issues may thus remain hidden (see recommendation under Expectation B9, paragraph 2.142).

2.175 In conclusion, the team considered that although the volume of collaborative provision is relatively small, the University's international ambitions and range of partnerships have the potential to bring added complexity. The University's decision not to conduct any institutional approval process prior to validating foundation degree programmes in further education colleges brings an elevated element of risk to partnership operations, although this is mitigated by the detailed consideration of partnership arrangements by the Collaborative Provision Group, Education Committee and Academic Council. The team thus concludes that overall the Expectation is met, and the associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B11: Research Degrees

Findings

2.176 The University states that it is committed to facilitating excellence in postgraduate education and research training. Recognition of the importance of postgraduate research underpins the University's Postgraduate Strategy.

2.177 In the 2014-15 academic year, there were more than 1,400 postgraduate research students at the University, representing nearly 10 per cent of the total student body. The University's Vision 2020 includes 'growing in postgraduate numbers' and 'creating a Graduate School'. The intended increase in postgraduate numbers is substantial (from 23 per cent to 30 per cent), but the majority of the increase will be in the number of taught postgraduates.

2.178 A new Postgraduate Strategy is currently under development for 2015-20. The high-level principles have been agreed, following input from a wide range of stakeholders. The document will be considered by University Executive Board sometime in the next few months.

2.179 Regulations for postgraduate students are contained in the University Calendar for Postgraduate Students. The Study Regulations for Research Degree Programmes were developed, approved and applied (from 2011-12) to all Research Degree Programmes awarded by the University, including the research elements of Professional Doctorates. The taught components of professional doctorates are regulated by the Study Regulations for Postgraduate Taught Programmes, and the research components are regulated by the Study Regulations for Research Degree Programmes, as described in The Principles for Professional Doctorates.

2.180 The Study Regulations for postgraduate research students are reviewed and updated annually. Following consideration by the Postgraduate Advisory Body, and endorsement by the Courses and Regulations Group, any changes must then be approved by the Research and Postgraduate Committee on behalf of Academic Council.

2.181 There is a Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes, which also includes relevant Study Regulations. This Code of Practice has been aligned with the Quality Code, *Chapter B11*, and is regularly reviewed and updated to reflect changes in regulations, procedures, good practice and the higher education sector.

2.182 The Research and Postgraduate Committee is responsible for formally approving concessions to the Study Regulations for Research Degree Programmes, including requests for extensions beyond the maximum period of study and for periods of temporary withdrawal beyond a cumulative maximum of two years.

2.183 The University has invested in a new Graduate School together with an inaugural Dean of the Graduate School, who took up the appointment in February 2015. The University considers that the Graduate School plays an important role in integrating research students into the research culture of the University as a whole, and will increasingly provide the primary access route to information for postgraduate research students. The Graduate School provides a dedicated space for postgraduate students in recently refurbished

accommodation, including individual study, group study, formal teaching and social areas, together with administrative support.

2.184 A University-wide programme aimed at sharing good practice among research supervisors will begin in the Graduate School in 2015-16.

2.185 There is a Graduate School website with information about postgraduate funding opportunities, information, training courses and activities.

2.186 The University encourages postgraduate research students to take responsibility for their own personal and professional development, supported by their supervisors, who help them to prepare personal development plans and monitor their progress. Students record their training activity on the University's student record system and are expected to undertake 30 days of training and development activity throughout the period of their research degree programme.

2.187 Training and development opportunities are provided at School or University level. The University's central training is delivered by the Postgraduate Researcher Development Programme, with training courses, online resources, personal effectiveness programmes, careers advice and one-to-one sessions. The website includes information about the Researcher Plus Award, which provides official recognition of the development of a range of generic skills through participation in the Postgraduate Researcher Development Programme and in other developmental opportunities. A key feature of Researcher Plus is the peer-assisted programmes that provide peer mentoring to help prepare students for the differentiation and viva voce examination (see also Expectation B4, paragraph 2.54).

2.188 Research students may also have the opportunity to teach or demonstrate, and training and mentoring is provided to help them to develop associated skills. The 2009 QAA Institutional Audit recommended that the University should clarify further and standardise across Schools both the training the University requires of those postgraduate research students who teach, demonstrate and/or contribute to the assessment of undergraduate students, and the limits it imposes on the extent of such activities. In response to this, training was standardised by the Education Committee in May 2010. There is a half-day course tailored to the particular type of teaching or support the students are required to deliver, and a School-based briefing on assessment and feedback for those who assess students' work. A new training course for students who teach has been piloted and will now be run twice each year.

2.189 Postgraduate research supervision is regulated by clearly defined appointment criteria in The Study Regulations for Research Degree Programmes. These regulations are designed to ensure that Schools delegate supervisory responsibilities only to suitably qualified academic staff.

2.190 Supervisors are required to ensure that they have the appropriate training and skills to perform the task of supervision satisfactorily, and are expected to engage in developmental opportunities. There is a one-day training course for those new to supervision, which is delivered by the Graduate School, and resources to support continuing professional development (CPD) for supervisors.

2.191 The University has recently introduced regular progress monitoring, including Annual Progress Review. The processes are described in the Study Regulations for Research Degree Programmes.

2.192 Every postgraduate research student at the University must agree a research plan with their supervisor at the beginning of their research. The plan may be updated, as required, throughout the period of study. They are then required to attend courses and to perform research work as specified in the research plan.

2.193 Postgraduate research students are required to have formal, minuted meetings with their supervisors at least six times a year. The minutes are signed by the student and supervisors and contribute to the annual review. The same requirements apply to students based in collaborative partners.

2.194 PhD students are initially registered as undifferentiated research students, reflecting that it has not yet been determined whether the research is best presented as an MPhil or PhD thesis. Following a successful Initial Review, normally within three months of first registration, students seeking to differentiate must present a written submission, a research plan and training record, and attend an interview with a differentiation panel. Following a successful differentiation, postgraduate research students have annual progress review meetings with a Chair, the student's supervisor and one other academic staff member from the same research area. The University considers that annual progress review provides for a formal point of summative assessment.

2.195 The structures and procedures at the University would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.196 The team tested this Expectation by examining strategy documents, regulations, committee papers, codes of practice, handbooks and other documents, and the University website, checking its understanding through meetings with staff and students.

2.197 Postgraduate research students told the team that they find the resources available through the Graduate School and the Learning Development Service to be very useful, especially the training and development opportunities that they provide. This view was shared by students at collaborative partners. Students also confirmed that the Graduate School had organised bespoke training for their programmes.

2.198 Senate recently confirmed that all categories of staff, including the most senior, must complete the University's training course for supervisors before appointment as a supervisor. Newly appointed staff reported that their induction training had included material on research student supervision.

2.199 The Code of Practice states that it is the responsibility of supervisors to ensure that they are appropriately trained. However, performance in supervision is monitored at School level, and through the Annual Review of Research Degree Programmes process, which includes reviews of student feedback, complaints and appeals, and pass rates. This information is considered as part of the University's academic promotions criteria. The Graduate School is working with a focus group of supervisors to develop an enhanced training framework for supervisors, comprising induction and three-yearly refresher training for all staff, including those in collaborative partners. Supervisory Excellence Awards, similar to the Teaching Excellence Awards, designed to recognise, develop and reward supervisory excellence, were introduced in 2015.

2.200 The arrangements for supervision of postgraduate research students at collaborative partners are essentially the same as for students at the University itself, with one supervisor from the University and one from the partner. The exception is the Institute of Theology, where both supervisors are staff of the Institute. However, all supervisors at collaborative partners are required to meet the same selection and training criteria as supervisors at the University, and to be recognised teachers of the University. Supervisors at the Institute of Theology have honorary status with the University.

2.201 Staff and postgraduate research students confirmed the requirement for students to meet with their supervisor at least six times per year, and that the meetings are recorded. Students at collaborative partners confirmed that the same arrangements applied for regular meetings, for differentiation and for annual review.

2.202 Feedback from Schools following the first year of implementation of Annual Progress Review has been positive. Positive feedback has also been received from students and staff who have engaged in the Annual Progress Review process, and the University's internally monitored statistics, such as differentiation, submission and completion rates, have shown improvements as a result of more robust monitoring and review.

2.203 The University participates in the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES), analyses the data and considers it at institutional level.

2.204 The team concludes that the University's policies and procedures for the management of its research degree programmes, and the quality of its research provision, provide an environment that supports research students in their academic, personal and professional development. The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

2.206 All Expectations are met and the risk is judged low in all but one Expectation, where a moderate level of risk has been identified. Three recommendations are made in this judgement area. Two recommendations present a low level of risk. A third recommendation, relating to comparability of student experience, has a moderate level of associated risk because variability makes it more difficult for the University to monitor its component parts.

2.207 Two features of good practice are highlighted in this judgement area. The team therefore 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 aligns with the requirements of Part C and *Chapter B10* of the Quality Code and of the Higher Education Funding Council for the Key Information Sets, as well as meeting its obligations regarding Data Protection and Freedom of Information.

3.2 The team reviewed the information produced by the University regarding its higher education provision and discussed the quality of information with a wide range of students and staff.

3.3 Applicants receive coordinated information to enable them to make informed choices and to support their transition into and through their studies. The University is sensitive to the variety of needs of applicants and students and offers a wide range of tailored information in support of the institutional commitment to widening access to higher education. The team received mostly positive feedback from students on the quality and helpfulness of the information they had received at admission and induction.

3.4 There is significant online information for students through the VLE, Queen's On Line, the Student Gateway and other services. The University is investing in major further development through the Digital Transformation project and related initiatives to enhance the systematic presentation of information; the aim is to complete the Digital Transformation Project by 2016-17. A customer relationship system is also being implemented.

3.5 The Student Charter is distributed to all students and sets out the shared responsibilities of staff and students. The University is presently reviewing the charter.

3.6 There are central arrangements to approve marketing materials, in liaison with the Schools, and the central admissions service monitors other admissions information.

3.7 Programme and module specifications are published by Academic Affairs. One of the aims of the Digital Transformation Project is to integrate programme specifications into the Student Records System so that they link directly to the Course Finder and other central information, which will also help to ensure their accuracy.

3.8 The University publishes guidance on School and programme handbooks. There is, however, variability in the quality of information available through the handbooks. This variability detracts from the effective coordination of information and editorial control of definitive documents, including the programme and module specifications. The systematic dissemination of policies such as local standards for the return of feedback on assessed work is also affected by such variability. The University recognises the need for baseline standards to ensure the full, accurate and consistent presentation of information at programme, School and University level. The team therefore **recommends** that the University strengthens the current guidance for the production of programme, module and School handbooks and associated information to establish a coordinated approach.

3.9 The University is also aware of variability in the use of the VLE. Students mention the impact this has on the consistency of support and information for students. The

University is making a major investment in the development of the VLE and the use of digital technology (see also Expectation B4, paragraph 2.73).

3.10 The University understands the importance of making students aware, as far as practicable, of any hidden or additional course costs and is seeking to address this matter systematically through the provision of admissions information and liaison with Schools.

3.11 The University maintains records of all collaborative partnerships. The partnership coordinators are asked to check publicly available information at validation and through the Annual Programme Review process. The team noted that there is a high degree of reliance on individual coordinators to check the quality of information published by partner organisations and the University will, no doubt, bear in mind the need to maintain oversight of the effectiveness of these arrangements.

3.12 The arrangements for the provision of detailed records of student achievements and for the issue of award certificates are appropriate. The University is working towards the introduction of the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR) by 2017-18.

3.13 The institutional mission and strategy are set out on the University's website. The resources include the About Queen's web page, which indicates the University's position within the higher education sector.

3.14 Details of the external examiners are published to students. Following some challenges with achieving compliance, the University now provides ready access to external examiners' reports to students across all Schools in alignment with *Chapter B7* of the Quality Code.

3.15 The Registrar's Office and the Academic Affairs Office provide comprehensive information about arrangements for corporate and academic governance. The resources maintained by Academic Affairs on academic standards and quality assurance are commendable in their extent and accessibility (see paragraph 1.62).

3.16 Overall, the University provides information in a wide variety of forms that are clear and accessible. The team concludes that the Expectation is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

3.18 The one Expectation for this judgement area is met and the associated level of risk is low. The one recommendation relates to strengthening existing approaches and can be addressed promptly. The team therefore concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the University **meets** UK expectations.

4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1 The University's approach to enhancement is supported by a number of current frameworks and policies, including the Employability Framework, Internationalisation Strategy, Widening Participation Framework, and Assessment Policy. The Supporting Student Attainment Action Group, chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education and Students), provides a locus for the consideration of School action plans in relation to retention, recruitment, internationalisation, employability, student experience and satisfaction. As a subgroup of the Education Committee, the Supporting Student Attainment Action Group was established to ensure that the University has effective systems in place for tracking, monitoring and supporting student attainment. It provides an annual report to the University Operating Board and Education Committee in relation to its progress.

4.2 The University identifies three main areas of enhancement: employability, assessment and feedback, and the academic year restructure. To inform its approach to employability the University has established an Employability Framework. Schools are set institutional targets for work-related learning and articulate their actions through School Development Plans for Employability. Annual Programme Reviews also reflect on their performance in relation to employment statistics and approaches to employability. Skills development and work-readiness for both undergraduate and postgraduate students are supported through a range of curricular and extracurricular opportunities, including the international learning experiences (see also section 5 of this report).

4.3 In the context of its Assessment Policy, the University aims to enhance its assessment and feedback practices. Following on from its involvement in a Higher Education Academy Enhancement Academy project, the University has initiated the e-AFFECT project. With its focus on assessment and feedback using technology, the introduction of this project, and its roll-out through a phased project plan to 16 degree programmes in 12 Schools by March 2015, demonstrate the University's systematic approach to change and enhancement. The outcomes to date include the development of a toolkit for reflection and action around principles of assessment, and increased uptake of technologies for assessment. However, as the University takes a facilitative rather than regulatory approach to the use of the VLE and other educational technologies, variation in practice and absence of standard expectations lead to inconsistency in student experience (see also Expectation B4, paragraph 2.73).

4.4 The enhancement of assessment practices also underpins the University's focus on restructuring the academic year. The aims of this initiative are to facilitate innovative models of assessment and curriculum delivery, including the use of electronic assessment and feedback; meet the changing skills and development needs of students; reduce over-assessment and the reliance on the written examination; and make time at the end of the academic year for development activities, including placements. Changes are to be formally introduced for Level 1 modules in 2016-17 and across all levels in 2017-18. The implementation of these proposals has been discussed at Directors of Education Forums involving staff and students, at School-based events and at other stakeholder meetings.

4.5 Further examples of institutional enhancement include those with respect to improving pre-entry, induction and transition, and for postgraduates, through the establishment of a Graduate School. The role of the Directors of Education is identified in shaping enhancements both within their Schools and collectively through the work of the Directors of Education Forum. The Centre for Educational Development plays a key role in

building an ethos of enhancement, in particular through the provision of continuing professional development events such as the Higher Education Lunchtime Forum and annual conference. The Postgraduate Advisory Board considers aspects of the postgraduate student experience and through representation from Schools promotes the dissemination of good practice.

4.6 The University's strategic approach to enhancement, drawn from key documents such as the Corporate Plan and Education Strategy, would allow this Expectation to be met.

4.7 The team conducted a comprehensive review of evidence that identified a strategic approach to enhancement. This included strategic documents; School and directorate action plans; terms of reference and minutes of key strategic committees and groups; and staff development documentation. Meetings with staff also provided an opportunity to determine the ethos of enhancement and the extent to which initiatives were embedded in the work of the University. Students confirmed their level of awareness of the enhancement agenda.

4.8 The team saw evidence of the University's approach to enhancement emanating from the Corporate Plan, Vision 2020 and the Education Strategy. The University has a robust and thorough framework for communicating its priorities and monitoring its progress in key areas. Staff and students are able to articulate the priorities for the University and their involvement in the deliberate steps taken to improve the quality of the learning experience, and are enthusiastic about the positive benefit of such change.

4.9 The Supporting Student Attainment Action Group has a central role in tracking progress against undergraduate student attainment, and through its reporting to the Education Committee and the University Operating Board enables the University to have clear oversight of its progress. Through the Annual Programme Review process and the Annual Review of Research Degree Programmes, the Education Committee and Research and Postgraduate Committee respectively gain oversight of good practice reported through School-level reports. Reports for collaborative partner provision are reviewed by a subgroup of the Collaborative Provision Group before being reported onwards. This reporting allows good practice to be identified and shared, although the quality and engagement by some Schools with the process is noted as being variable (see also Expectation B10, paragraph 2.168).

4.10 The dissemination of information and discussion of initiatives is enabled through attendance at the Centre for Educational Development events and the Directors of Education Forum, which includes membership from partner colleges and which reports to Education Committee. Evidence of attendance indicates variation in attendance over the seven meetings during the year, although staff whom the team met confirmed the significance of the Director of Education role in relation to enhancement.

4.11 The team heard that the initiative to restructure the academic year and to review assessment strategies is being managed through an implementation group, reporting to Education Committee. Staff and students are aware of the principles and timescale of the project.

4.12 In relation to the priority area of employability and skills, the team noted the implementation of strategic objectives through the School Employability Development Plans, which are received and monitored by the Supporting Student Attainment Action Group. While variation in the level of engagement and commitment to placements and internships was apparent, the School Employability Plans indicate a range of activities supporting employability and skill enhancement opportunities for students.

4.13 The alignment of central activities and resources offered by Educational and Skills Development with Schools is attested through meetings with staff and evidence in School plans and activity reports. The progress made by academic and professional services in relation to institutional strategic priorities is reported as part of the annual performance

management reports received by the University Operating Board. University Management Board has institutional oversight of performance targets for work-related learning and international placement experience.

4.14 The aim to increase the number of both study and work-related learning opportunities locally, nationally and internationally is supported through the provision of funding for students and the promotion of Study Abroad initiatives, including a Go Global Week. Increasing the number of students taking up international opportunities is a key element of the Corporate Plan and Education strategy. In line with this commitment, the International Opportunities Fund offers awards to students on a range of international programmes, including Generation UK China, Study China, Study India and Teaching in Thailand. In addition, funding supports students undertaking a study programme at Vanderbilt University, Tennessee. The University reported that the number of students participating in centrally coordinated international study or work placements has risen from 286 in 2013-14 to 334 in 2014-15.

4.15 Skills enhancement and employability opportunities are recognised formally through the Degree Plus scheme. Stranmillis University College and the Institute of Theology also participate in the Degree Plus accreditation. Staff whom the team met spoke of the intention to develop the Degree Plus programme further, to differentiate levels of engagement.

4.16 From the evidence it considered, the team is confident that the University has appropriate strategies, frameworks and mechanisms to enable a strategic approach to enhancing the quality of students' learning opportunities. The University maintains oversight of the implementation of its enhancement priorities through its committee structures. It demonstrated a particularly clear approach to enhancing student employability through international study and work-related opportunities, including through international learning opportunities. The team therefore identifies as **good practice** the University's employability and internationalisation initiatives, which demonstrate a strategic approach to enhancement.

4.17 The University's strategic approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities, together with the wide range of examples of strategically led enhancement activity, leads the team to conclude that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

4.19 There are no recommendations or affirmations. The good practice identified in this judgement is an example of the strategic approach to enhancement taken by the University. The team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the University **meets** UK expectations.

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1 Employability is central to the University's strategy and to Vision 2020. The University places a premium on preparing graduates who can serve as leaders through their careers and stresses engagement with employers and society. This is a major factor in the extensive, ongoing review of the curriculum. The strategic theme of employability is closely connected to the strategic theme of internationalisation, and the University's drive for enhancement in these areas is recognised elsewhere in this report as an example of good practice (see paragraph 4.16).

5.2 The Employability Framework, introduced in 2012-13, is the basis for an extensive programme to equip graduates with the qualities needed to thrive in graduate-level employment and study. Each School maintains a Development Plan addressing the Framework. There are systems and data reports, including external surveys, to enable monitoring of activities reporting ultimately to the University Executive Board.

5.3 Employability is embedded within the curriculum in various ways, with opportunities for work-related learning and skills development, engagement with employers and career management workshops. There is a Postgraduate Researcher Development Programme.

5.4 Many subjects have a placement element, including Computer Science, Biological Sciences, Management Civil Engineering, and Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering. Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering operates a Leadership Programme enabling Level 2 students to compete for placements with companies, leading to a pass in a zero-credit Level 3 module. Computer Sciences run a Professionalism in Computing initiative for first and second-year students, with support from employers and the Higher Education Academy.

5.5 The University is promoting employability for subject areas that are not usually identified as vocational including, for example, a Skills Module for English Level 1 students and presentations on career options for history students. The Queen's University Internship Programme provides placements for students from Arts and Humanities and students from Schools with lower graduate employment outcomes.

5.6 The University carried out an audit of work-related learning in 2012-13 and this has provided the basis for a sustained increase in the number of international opportunities open to students (with the aim of offering work-related learning to 90 per cent of students in any cohort and 20 per cent of international students in any cohort). There has been investment in several initiatives and innovations, including the creation of a Student Hub within the Student Guidance Centre as a space for working with students on employability; My Future, a Career Management System that tailors careers information to particular student needs and the Careers Lounge approach to careers support for students; funded projects to support work-related learning opportunities; activities to promote enterprise and entrepreneurship, such as the Students' Union Enterprise Unit and the Enactus Student Society, which runs social enterprise projects in Northern Ireland and internationally, and which reached the final of the UK National Competition in 2015; the Hatch, which has been opened as a business incubation unit; and the Science Shop, a Higher Education Innovation Funding (HEIF)-funded knowledge exchange initiative with the Science Shop at Ulster University, enabling students to carry out research projects for organisations.

5.7 The team recognised the energy, imagination and care that characterise the approach taken by the service departments, in partnership with the Schools, to the development of international employability opportunities and the attention paid to the cross-cultural implications. The Go Global Week festival promoted international opportunities through a variety of methods, attracting more than 600 students. An International Opportunities Fund was launched in 2013-14. The University makes good use of British Council programmes such as Study China and Teaching in Thailand, as well as ERASMUS

schemes, with a relatively high number of students taking advantage of these opportunities. There are also opportunities for shorter-term international experiences which can lead to longer-term activities. The University piloted a scheme in 2014-15 enabling several Queen's and Vanderbilt University students to spend time in each other's institutions as part of a Level 3 module.

5.8 The University takes into account principles of equality and diversity. Additional support has been provided for students with disabilities. The University works with Specialisterne, a social enterprise that helps students on the autistic spectrum to develop careers in IT, including coaching and consultancy on placements. There is also a partnership with the DELNI Access to Work scheme that funds support for paid placements.

5.9 The University has paid particular attention to the provision of student volunteering opportunities, clubs and societies involving more than 8,000 students, an established peer mentoring scheme, which is well regarded by students, and the accreditation of extracurricular activities through schemes such as Degree Plus, Research Plus and the Volunteering Excellency Awards.

5.10 The University has developed several programmes through engagement with employers and Invest NI, including, for example, a Mathematics with Finance programme and a postgraduate degree for software developers. Higher Level Apprenticeships are being created in partnership with the Northern Ireland devolved government, employers and further education colleges.

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 30 to 33 of the [Higher Education Review handbook](#).

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

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

Academic standards

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

Award

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

Blended learning

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

Credit(s)

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

Degree-awarding body

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

Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

Dual award or double award

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

e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

Enhancement

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

Expectations

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

Flexible and distributed learning

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

See also **distance learning**.

Framework

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

Framework for higher education qualifications

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

Good practice

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

Learning opportunities

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

Learning outcomes

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

Multiple awards

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

Operational definition

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

Programme (of study)

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

Programme specifications

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

Public information

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

Quality Code

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

Reference points

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

Subject Benchmark Statement

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

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)

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

Threshold academic standard

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

Virtual learning environment (VLE)

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

Widening participation

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

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