



# Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of Ashridge

February 2017

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## About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Ashridge. The review took place from 27 February to 1 March 2017 and was conducted by a team of four reviewers, as follows:

- Professor John Baldock
- Mr James Coe
- Professor Hilary Grainger
- Dr Libby Pearson.

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>2</sup> QAA website: [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk).

<sup>3</sup> Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers): [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education).

## Key findings

### Judgements

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

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

### Good practice

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

- The extensive individualised support offered to applicants throughout the admissions process from initial inquiry to induction after enrolment (Expectation B2)
- The sustained comprehensive support for students who transfer between campuses (Expectation B3)
- The substantial contribution made by the virtual learning environment to ensuring consistent, responsive and interactive learning support (Expectation B3)
- The careful and individualised support enabling students to develop academic, personal and professional potential in a global environment (Expectation B4).

### Recommendations

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

By September 2017:

- ensure that independent external advice is available to students wishing to complain or appeal (Expectation B9).

### Affirmation of action being taken

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

- the steps being taken to implement formal processes for monitoring and review of all programmes in order to confirm that UK threshold academic standards are achieved (Expectation A3.3)
- the steps being taken to ensure that academic staff and external examiners are fully aware of the nature and purpose of the role of external examiners (Expectation B7).

## About the provider

Ashridge is an independent, self-financing institution with the legal status of a charitable educational trust. It received degree awarding powers for taught programmes in 2008; its research degree provision leads to the award of doctoral degrees from Middlesex University. At present it has about 700 students on a range of programmes in business and related areas, primarily postgraduate students in employment studying on a part-time basis, and students on programmes in non-degree executive education.

In 2015, Ashridge established an operational merger with Hult International Business School (Hult). While Ashridge and Hult remain legally distinct institutions, the result of the operational merger is that they work as combined institutions in many respects.

The combined institutions have established a single common academic framework for the delivery and management of Ashridge and Hult programmes, which leads to UK degrees awarded under Ashridge's degree awarding powers as well as to degrees of the USA awarded under the powers granted to Hult by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC).

Hult regards itself as a global business school, using its campuses in Boston, San Francisco, London and Dubai to deliver undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. In 2015-16 it had 1,084 undergraduate students of whom 802 were based at its London campus, and 2,401 postgraduate students of whom 541 were based in London.

The combined institutions have formed a unified academic management structure based on three Schools, for undergraduate, postgraduate and executive education. Under the governance arrangements of the combined institutions there is a single chief executive (the President of Hult International Business School) and two governing boards with identical compositions (the Ashridge Representative Body and the Hult Board of Trustees).

The scope of this review is the provision offered by the combined institutions which leads to the award of UK degrees.

The key challenge facing the combined institutions is to establish a fully integrated academic framework in which the differing regulatory requirements of the UK and of the USA are embedded. While they have made substantial progress towards this, the combined institutions accept that they face a complex regulatory environment requiring further progress on governance and management of academic quality within multiple jurisdictions.

Ashridge's most recent engagement with the QAA was an Institutional Audit conducted in 2011 which resulted in positive outcomes. The report of the Audit identified four features of good practice and made four recommendations. Since then, Ashridge has made sound and effective responses to each of the recommendations and has updated practices and policies to align with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code).

The report of the Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight of Hult in 2014 confirmed positive outcomes, identified four features of good practice and made three recommendations. The monitoring visit of April 2016 found that Hult was making acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, evaluate and enhance its provision.

## Explanation of findings

This section explains the review findings in greater detail.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### Findings

1.1 The Academic Board holds the ultimate academic authority for the standards of the degrees awarded by the combined institutions and through its committees maintains oversight of academic standards and quality, teaching, learning and assessment, admissions, curriculum development and research and scholarly activity. The Academic Standards and Quality Committee has delegated responsibility for academic standards and quality assurance across all programmes leading to awards and/or academic credit. Since 2015-16 Academic Board has confirmed the award of both Ashridge and Hult degrees by delegated authority of the Governing Board.

1.2 The Academic Governance Framework evolved from Ashridge's previous framework and specifies clear responsibilities for the award of academic credit and qualifications, including an academic credit system that meets UK and USA requirements. Where these differ, both UK and USA requirements are met. The Academic Regulations articulate the framework that governs all degree programmes and the processes in place to ensure that provision is aligned with the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ), the Quality Code and the requirements of NEASC.

1.3 The combined institutions have adopted a unified approach to the naming of awards. Joint UK/USA undergraduate programmes lead to a Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA); MBA programmes lead to a Master of Business Administration (MBA) and other Masters programmes lead to a Master of Science (MSc). DipHE, PgCert and PgDip remain available as UK awards, as do those of programmes at partner organisations which lead to BA, MSc or MBA. Exit awards are only applicable in the UK since credit transfer is used more widely in the USA.

1.4 The combined institutions' arrangements enable the Expectation to be met in principle.

1.5 The review team met senior staff with responsibility for quality assurance and with teaching staff with experience of programme design, validation, monitoring and review. The team viewed a selection of minutes from Academic Board, Academic Standards and Quality Committee and Curriculum Committee.

1.6 The review team found evidence of committed engagement with quality and standards. Subject Benchmark Statements are used as external reference points in the design of new programmes, programme specifications and in programme review and the team saw this evidenced in validation and approval documentation and programme specifications.

1.7 The recent validation of the Executive MBA for the Creative Industries (EMBACI) attests to the provision of documentation required for validation as specified in the Academic Regulations, comprising a programme specification; master course syllabi including a representative selection of master course syllabi for elective courses; Student Handbooks and information on proposed faculty, student support and other attendant resources. The validation panel is provided with Subject Benchmark Statements, extracts from the Quality Code, the Academic Regulations and any additional regulatory documentation. The EMBACI validation also showed engagement with the standards of the Association of MBAs (AMBA) and the NEASC Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education On-Line Learning.

1.8 Institutional systems, policies and procedures make appropriate use of all relevant reference points to secure threshold academic standards. 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 Academic Board has responsibility for the academic mission and strategy, and for the planning and delivery of the educational provision of the combined institutions. It has responsibility for the approval, implementation and review of policies and procedures and delegates detailed work to its reporting committees, the responsibilities of which are clearly articulated in the Academic Regulations.

1.10 Ashridge has exercised its own degree awarding powers since 2008, at which time its Governing Body delegated the power to award degrees to Academic Board. Following the granting of degree awarding powers, the Ashridge Academic Regulations were used consistently for all Ashridge degree programmes until 2016 when the new Academic Regulations for the combined institution came into effect, subject to the transitional arrangements contained within the Academic Regulations for example for continuing students. Programmes that are closing, including those delivered by partner organisations, continue to use the existing programme handbook and Ashridge Academic Regulations, and will not transition to the new Academic Regulations. Under the revised Academic Regulations, Academic Board confirms the awards of both Ashridge and Hult degrees. This represents a significant change for Hult, where previously final academic awards were approved by a faculty meeting chaired by a Global Dean or equivalent.

1.11 The Academic Regulations articulate the framework that govern all degree programmes and, taken together with the Academic Governance Framework, specify clear responsibilities for the award of academic credit and qualifications. The mapping of the UK and USA credit systems has been the subject of considered analysis following initial pre-merger discussions in 2015-16.

1.12 The Academic Regulations reflect longstanding processes operated consistently by Ashridge and which now operate across the combined institutions. These include processes for assessment boards, sample grade review, external examining, programme validation and the formalisation of periodic review and annual monitoring. The Regulations address all regulatory aspects relevant to the securing and maintenance of academic standards, with sections relating to external examining showing alignment with the updated Quality Code; the Ashridge Qualification Programme Framework, and an updated approval process for partner institutions. Updates to the Regulations are communicated to students by means of their virtual learning environments (VLE).

1.13 The Ashridge's formal quality assurance framework and the comprehensive Academic Regulations, each overseen by Academic Board and its relevant committees, provide a sound basis for the provision to meet this Expectation.

1.14 The review team met staff and students to discuss reference points for academic standards. The team viewed a range of validation documents, together with a selection of minutes from Academic Board, Academic Quality and Standards Committee, Curriculum Committees and samples of programme handbooks.

1.15 The review team found evidence that the new Academic Regulations and programme specifications have been carefully considered, are complete, and provide an effective reconciliation of UK and US credit systems and equivalence to the European Credit Transfer System. The terms of reference, constitution and standing orders of the Academic Board and its committees are clear and appropriate. The minutes and action plans of the main deliberative bodies make effective use of the structures to safeguard standards and quality.

1.16 The new postgraduate grading system, piloted in 2015-16, has been introduced across all campuses and employs standardised templates; staff development is supporting the transition across the combined institutions to the new system. Students attested that the grading system and the attendant rubrics have been well received.

1.17 Overall, the review team concludes that the combined institutions have effective processes to govern the award of credit. The Expectation is met and the 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**

1.18 The Academic Regulations for the combined institutions, which came into effect from September 2016, define a programme specification as part of the definitive documentation for a programme of study leading to an award. The other elements of the definitive documentation are the syllabus for each course within a programme together with a student handbook describing all aspects of learning and teaching. The Academic Regulations also prescribe the required content of programme specifications which includes learning outcomes, the approach to teaching and learning, and the methods and weighting of assessment. The sections of the Academic Regulations governing programme approval, annual monitoring, periodic review and subsequent revalidation confirm that programme specifications are the core reference point used for these procedures. Changes to programme specifications require the approval of the Curriculum Committee under delegated authority from Academic Board. The master copies of all programme specifications are held on a secure cloud storage system under the control of the Dean of Quality. Programme specifications are readily available to students as they are included in student handbooks and are also accessible via the VLE.

1.19 The programme specifications together with the quality management procedures set out in the Academic Regulations allow the expectation to be met in principle.

1.20 The review team examined all current programme specifications, a sample of course syllabi and documentation relating to the development and approval of programme specifications, and met academic and support staff to discuss how the specifications were managed, updated and used.

1.21 At the time of the review the combined institutions had just completed a transitional year (2015-16) during which changes had been made to regulations and programme specifications in order to allow Ashridge and Hult to deliver degree programmes within a common academic framework leading to the award of both UK and USA degrees. This had involved the development of new master's and undergraduate programmes as well as the adaption of existing Hult programmes and courses so that they could be validated for the award of UK qualifications. This process had included adjustments to a large number of individual courses to ensure that they led to learning outcomes compatible with the FHEQ.

1.22 The approval events for new and adapted programmes had been conducted by September 2016 followed by detailed adjustments to course syllabi which were completed by November 2016. As a result, programmes delivered to students joining the combined institutions from September 2016 were aligned with both USA and UK expectations in terms of both credit weightings and academic levels. The combined institutions also used external advisers at appropriate points in the development and approval processes. While considerable care will continue to be necessary to assist teaching staff from a variety of academic cultures in working with the new programme specifications, the development and amendment of programme specifications and course syllabi has been conducted with care and attention to a substantial volume of detail. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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**

1.23 The combined institutions apply the programme approval and revalidation procedures which are set out in the academic regulations and which have been used since August 2016. These procedures are a development of, and largely similar to, the approval processes contained in the Ashridge Academic Regulations which had been used to approve programmes since the granting of taught degree awarding powers in 2008.

1.24 The approval process comprises two stages: business approval by the President of the combined institutions based on market research and other due diligence checks; academic validation by the Curriculum Committee following the work of a faculty design team and the approval of definitive programme documentation by a Validation Panel which includes students, academic staff from other disciplines, and external members with experience in the subject area. In addition to ensuring that a proposed programme is consistent with the UK standards as expressed in the FHEQ, the Quality Code and Subject Benchmark Statements, the approval processes take account of the accreditation requirements of a wide range of international and professional bodies including those of NEASC, AMBA, the European Quality Improvement System, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, and the European Mentoring and Coaching Council. In principle this approval process and its implementation ensure that programmes of study are aligned with UK threshold standards.

1.25 The review team examined the regulations governing approval processes and read reports of validation panels and minutes of the committees that had approved programmes. The team also met members of academic staff who had participated in these processes as members of faculty design teams and validation panels.

1.26 At the time of the review the most recent examples of programme approval were the validation in January 2016 of the EMBACI programme and the approval in August 2016 of a range of existing Hult undergraduate and postgraduate programmes which had been adjusted so that they could lead to both USA and UK awards.

1.27 The design and approval of the EMBACI programme took place under the Ashridge Academic Regulations (2014). The validation panel set a number of conditions and recommendations, relating to the updating of module learning outcomes, to their mapping against both UK and USA benchmarks and guidelines, to their alignment with programme outcomes and to the assessment strategy. All conditions and recommendations were agreed as complete by the Chair of the Validation Panel in September 2016. This approval process demonstrated the complexity of meeting the requirements of both US and UK academic frameworks but confirmed the robustness of the current approval processes.

1.28 The combined institutions used the new academic regulations in August 2016 to determine whether five existing Hult master's degree and one Hult bachelor's degree in business administration were consistent with the academic standards required of UK degrees. The reports of the validation events show consideration of documentation including course syllabi and reports from independent external advisers. Conditions on approval,

including measures relating to enhancing the documentation of course learning outcomes and their explicit linking to assessment methods, were met prior to approval of the programmes in November 2016.

1.29 In meetings with staff from the combined institutions the review team heard that the August 2016 validation events were a part of a larger year-long process of programme and course development that took place to ensure that Hult programmes were aligned with relevant USA and UK expectations in terms of both credit volumes and academic level. The documentation seen by the review team confirmed this account of a multi-stage process which included initial due diligence reporting, external membership of the validation panels, reviews by additional external experts, reviews of credit levels and learning outcomes, revisions to programme specifications and course descriptions, and the matching of assessment methods to learning outcomes.

1.30 Diligent use of their approval processes alongside those for annual and periodic review and for managing the work of external examiners will enable the combined institutions to assure themselves that academic staff across six international campuses are continuing to deliver and assess courses at levels consistent with the standards set. The approval processes which they have established are sufficient to ensure that their qualifications are set at levels that meet UK threshold standards. The Expectation is met and the 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**

1.31 The Academic Regulations provide the framework for the combined institutions' approach to assessment. Programme specifications along with student handbooks contain all the information necessary to define the credits required for progression and also detail how course hours are aligned to credit. The achievement of both programme and course learning outcomes is demonstrated through the vehicles of assessment to ensure academic standards are achieved. The Academic Regulations are incorporated into individual programme regulations to ensure both staff and students are provided with clear assessment guidelines. The combined institutions make awards only on demonstration of achievement of the programme outcomes.

1.32 The review team scrutinised a sample of assessment rubrics together with the corresponding programme specifications and course outlines, and met academic staff and students.

1.33 Staff and students confirmed their clear understanding of how academic thresholds are met and achieved through alignment with the FHEQ. Assessment instructions are created through a detailed mapping exercise of assessment learning outcomes against course learning outcomes, providing assurance that UK threshold standards are achieved.

1.34 Although arrangements for managing external examining and assessment boards are in place, they have not yet been used through a full annual cycle. Nevertheless, the Academic Regulations outline the process for moderation and second marking to ensure consistency of marking standards, with sampling conducted across all campuses. It falls to academic staff to ensure that marking is aligned to published criteria, that marks fit the level of study, that the range of marks is appropriate, that student work meets the learning outcomes, and that markers' feedback is constructive.

1.35 The combined institutions are aware of their responsibilities for ensuring that the award of credit and qualifications is aligned with UK threshold standards, and have satisfactory processes for ensuring that this takes place. The Expectation is 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**

1.36 The combined institutions' process for the monitoring and review of programmes is outlined in the Academic Regulations. The process describes how monitoring and review will be achieved through assessment boards, annual monitoring of programmes and the periodic review cycle. The combined institutions have a six-year cycle for the periodic review of programmes, to be carried out by the Curriculum Committee with oversight from the Academic Board. Although the process has not yet been fully implemented, the combined institutions have a schedule of events demonstrating their intent to implement monitoring and review processes in the normal cycle of occurrence. These arrangements, if securely implemented, would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.37 The review team scrutinised the Academic Regulations, the outcomes of previous monitoring cycles and the schedule of events for monitoring and review, and discussed the future arrangements with academic staff and senior managers.

1.38 Members of academic staff confirmed their clear understanding of the monitoring and review process outlined in the Academic Regulations and demonstrated a knowledge of the schedule of future review events.

1.39 The combined institutions' arrangements are based on processes which have been in use for some time at Ashridge. The Academic Standards and Quality Committee will consider outcomes of programme and course reviews as well as comments in external examiners' reports in order to produce a single overarching annual Academic Report to include an overview of the main features of each programme and any trends and patterns in the recruitment, progression and achievement of students.

1.40 Although academic staff at campuses outside the UK lack familiarity with the operation of monitoring and review processes in relation to UK standards, particularly at the undergraduate level, the combined institutions are taking steps, through a series of roadshows, to secure greater awareness of them on the part of all academic staff. A schedule for future monitoring and periodic review is in place, as documented in the Live Action Tables, living documents that enable direct update and commentary on actions arising from monitoring and review. The review team **affirms** the steps being taken to implement formal processes for monitoring and review of all programmes in order to confirm that UK threshold academic standards are achieved.

1.41 The combined institutions have taken steps to develop formal and satisfactory processes for monitoring and review of all programmes: the Expectation is met. The lack of evidence of implementation of the processes across the combined institutions and limited familiarity of academic staff in using the processes to secure UK academic standards, due mainly to the fact that the processes have not yet had time to complete a full cycle, indicate a moderate level of risk.

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

**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**

1.42 The Academic Regulations outline the combined institutions' requirements for external and independent participation in the setting and monitoring of academic standards. As a result of the operational merger, the level of externality in internal processes in relation to Hult programmes has increased significantly in order to meet UK requirements.

1.43 The use of at least one external member of the validation panel is mandatory in the approval process for a new programme or in the review of an existing programme. Typically, there are two such members: one with a background in quality assurance, and another a subject specialist to provide subject and national perspective. Additionally, there are two internal panel members who are not involved in the development or delivery of the programme. At the validation event, external members examine the aims, outcomes, content and assessment in the context of relevant Subject Benchmarks Statements, the FHEQ and any relevant requirements from accreditation bodies. Programme approval and validation events may also include a recent alumnus from the programme or from a similar programme. Alumni may also form part of the panel to introduce an employer perspective into programme development.

1.44 From 2016-17 the level of external scrutiny has increased and now forms part of the programme approval process by accreditation bodies. For example, NEASC requires pre-approval for all programmes before they are approved for delivery; local regulators, such as the Knowledge and Human Development Authority of Dubai and the Massachusetts Board of Education, may also require pre-approval before programmes are offered within their jurisdiction. These arrangements have served to strengthen the external scrutiny of standards in Ashridge programmes.

1.45 At Ashridge, external examiners have provided the principal mechanism for assuring the maintenance of academic standards, benchmarking and confirming comparability of standards with other higher education institutions. The Academic Regulations for the combined institutions include the provision of external examiners for Hult programmes, as described in Expectation B7.

1.46 Externality is also exercised in the academic governance framework of the institutions. Historically, the majority of committees at Ashridge included one or two external members, but since the formation of the combined institutions, there has been a wider pool of faculty and academic leaders within the Schools to provide externality. There is an independent external member on Academic Board, with a strong background in quality assurance. Alumni and/or part-time student representatives also bring an external perspective.

1.47 The processes in place for the use of external and independent expertise enable the Expectation to be met in principle.

1.48 The review team considered regulations and guidance, validation and review documentation, external examiners' reports and the institution's responses to those reports. The team also met academic staff with responsibility for the design and approval of programmes and considered minutes of key committees.

1.49 External advisers take part in programme validation and review. The validation of the Hult programmes for UK awards involved two stages of externality: two external advisers, one for undergraduate and one for postgraduate programmes, each produced a report for the validation panel in advance of the event. In turn each of the two panels included a different external member with quality assurance experience in the UK. There are instances of professional body representation at validation and review events. The validation of the EMBA programme included consideration of accreditation bodies' requirements.

1.50 The combined institutions engage with additional external reference points including the standards and criteria of accrediting bodies as described in Expectation A3.1.

1.51 The combined institutions gain appropriate external and independent input at key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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



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

1.52 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All Expectations in this judgement area are met. The level of risk is moderate for Expectation A3.3 and is low for all other Expectations.

1.53 There are no features of good practice or recommendations in this judgement area. There is a single affirmation relating to the steps being taken to implement formal processes for monitoring and review.

1.54 There are secure frameworks to ensure that standards are maintained at appropriate levels and that the definitive record of each programme is used to govern the award of academic credit and qualifications.

1.55 The review team concludes that the setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards **meets** UK expectations.

## 2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

#### Findings

2.1 The combined institutions have in place a common set of regulations and procedures for the design, development and approval of academic programmes. The Academic Regulations prescribe a process of programme development and validation as described in Expectation A3.1. While the approval process for the combined institutions has been in place only since August 2016, it is similar to that prescribed in the former Ashridge academic regulations which, since 2008 have been successfully applied to the development and approval of a range of programmes. The approval procedures address both academic standards and the quality of student learning opportunities and are in principle comprehensive and appropriate.

2.2 The review team read the regulations governing approval processes, reports of validation panels and minutes of the committees that had approved programmes. The team also met members of academic staff who had participated in programme approval as members of faculty design teams and validation panels.

2.3 The approval process considers both matters related to the academic rigour and standards of a programme and the quality of the learning opportunities available to students. Validation panels review the content and delivery of proposed new programmes, the quality of documentation such as the student handbook and assessment briefs, the planned staffing and the sufficiency of student learning resources. The minutes of the EMBACI validation panel in January 2016 demonstrated clear attention to the operation of blended learning using the institution's VLE, particularly for students on master's programmes who, combining study with employment, rely on electronic access for reading materials and staff.

2.4 The most significant recent validation exercise took place in August 2016, as described in Expectation A3.1. The review team were told that the August 2016 validation events were a part of a larger year-long process of programme and course development that took place to ensure that the Hult programmes were aligned with relevant USA and UK expectations in terms of both credit volumes and academic level. While the focus of the panels was on whether the Hult programmes met UK academic standards rather than on full initial validation or periodic review, the inclusion in faculty design teams or in validation panels of staff from student services might have enabled an additional focus on learning support such as facilities and access to texts and other materials.

2.5 The processes for programme design and approval support the assurance and enhancement of learning opportunities and the Expectation is met. The level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.6 The combined institutions' policies for admissions are codified in their Academic Regulations, and information on the application process is made available to students through programme brochures. Admissions activity is overseen by the Admissions Committee, which provides information for discussion at Academic Board.

2.7 Prospective students' applications are reviewed by admissions staff who make decisions based on entry criteria outlined in programme specifications. For applicants to Ashridge courses, programme directors or a suitable faculty member review and approve applications. At Hult, applications are reviewed by an enrolment team led by Associate Admissions Managers. The recruitment and admission process is underpinned by an undergraduate recruitment strategy: the institutions highlighted that this is where they anticipate further growth in their provision. The provider's policies, public information, and oversight of recruitment, selection and admissions activity, allow the Expectation to be met in principle.

2.8 The review team assessed the effectiveness of recruitment, selection, and admissions activity by meeting staff and students, reading Academic Regulations, programme handbooks, programme specifications, student surveys, institutional strategies, and analysing the minutes and papers of meetings concerned with admissions activities.

2.9 The approach to recruitment, selection, and admissions is effective. There are well-established recruitment activities supported by ongoing operational oversight of admissions data. In particular, it is apparent that applicants have access to a wide range of information prior to application and receive support from trained recruitment staff.

2.10 A targeted approach to recruitment activity is considered through market testing with recruitment information disseminated to staff across the institution. In particular, the provider offers highly individualised support to students including extensive contact from their initial enquiry until their arrival on campus. This support continues through induction where students are given opportunity to develop their academic skills, as well as adjust to their new surroundings. The effectiveness of this approach is reflected in student feedback which demonstrate a high level of satisfaction with the provision of induction activities. The extensive individualised support offered to applicants throughout the admissions process from initial inquiry to induction after enrolment is **good practice**.

2.11 The combined institutions have suitable regulations in place accompanied by effective recruitment, selection and admissions processes. There is widespread evidence of training for staff, a culture of support for applicants, and effective operational oversight of recruitment activity. The Expectation is met and the level of risk 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**

2.12 The Academic Board delegates responsibility to the Teaching and Learning Committee for the management and governance of learning and teaching across the combined institutions and is responsible for the formulation and implementation of the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy. The recently developed strategy is built on the three pillars of learning, teaching and assessment and its objective is to ensure that the education provided to students 'augments their intrinsic characteristics and empowers them to succeed in their subsequent career'. The Teaching and Learning Strategy incorporates three key performance indicators mapped to three-year goals.

2.13 In a quest to be the most relevant business school in the world, the institutions prioritise high quality teaching and a variety of pedagogical approaches. They seek to equip undergraduates with 'transferable skills and competencies, open mindedness, creativity and resourcefulness' and to appoint staff with a view to addressing these diverse student needs and ways of learning. For instance, the Ashridge MBA incorporates the flipped classroom approach, in which students undertake advance reading to allow class time to be spent in discussion; courses are designed to be sequence neutral allowing students from different cohorts to study alongside one another.

2.14 Ashridge enables both formal and informal staff development. Formal training is supported for skills-based development and in-house training is provided where demand is sufficient. Hult also offers staff development and training programmes. These are carried out by the Global Dean working with the respective Campus Deans and involving academic staff by means of annual Faculty Summits and Faculty Meetings.

2.15 The combined institutions' policies and procedures in respect of learning opportunities and teaching practices enable the Expectation to be met in principle.

2.16 The review team examined relevant documentation, including minutes of the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee, the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy approved in February 2017, and academic-related strategies, policies and procedures provided by Ashridge. The team met senior staff, teaching staff, professional support staff and students.

2.17 The Learning and Teaching Strategy was approved by the Academic Board in November 2016. Although members of staff showed awareness of the strategy, it was clear from discussion with them that it had not yet been disseminated widely. Academic staff nevertheless confirmed the institutions' commitment to implement the strategy.

2.18 Both academic and professional staff attested to the broad range of staff development in place, which includes support for attendance at conferences and for study towards doctorates, both at Ashridge and Middlesex University. Staff teach across all three Schools and engage in team teaching which fosters consistency and the sharing of good practice. Staff reported that good practice was shared informally within and across campuses including by means of a webinar available to all colleagues. Regular lunch-time

learning bites are organised by different faculty members on a variety of subjects both academic and professional support staff attested to their usefulness. Staff are also involved in Action Learning Groups/Sets and view this as a valuable activity.

2.19 Peer observation is in operation at Ashridge and is viewed as an effective way of exchanging ideas on assessment and teaching approaches to differing student groups. The performance of Ashridge staff is assessed at least twice a year with their line managers who also conduct formal appraisals based on score card targets. Hult operates reviews of teaching by means of classroom observations which are annual for permanent undergraduate staff and termly for adjunct staff; additional observations take place where there is concern about teaching effectiveness. A new member of adjunct staff is observed within the first few weeks by the Dean or nominee, using a standard template. The Hult campus in London employs student evaluations to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching.

2.20 All permanent and adjunct Hult staff at the London Undergraduate campus are invited to prepare a professional portfolio (teaching portfolio) which includes details of professional development, teaching awards, research and membership of professional bodies. This portfolio forms the basis of a discussion about general professional performance and personal development.

2.21 The review team found evidence of a focused approach to employment, with 88 per cent of graduates of the Hult MBA and 86 per cent of graduates of Hult Master's programmes in 2015 in employment within three months of graduation. Staff attested to there being a clear strategy directed towards equipping students for employer needs. There has been a determined effort to foster both hard and soft skills by the introduction of a competency framework for the MBA which includes four competencies and 16 skills. Students also praised the individualised support that they receive from the Careers Service and welcomed the Capstone, a large-scale consulting project in year three or four of undergraduate programmes. Specific examples of experiential learning with a view to addressing employment needs include the Business Challenge course; student internships with attached credit for Hult students; the International Business Experience module; and the use of live projects on Ashridge MBA modules.

2.22 The combined institutions place a specific focus on ethics, responsibility and sustainability in the curriculum. The Academic Board has undertaken oversight of this by considering how provision meets the United Nations' Principles for Responsible Management Education, and has set targets for learning outcomes relating to societal impact.

2.23 While acknowledging concern on the part of some students over the loss of physical library space, the combined institutions have continued to prioritise the expansion of digital library resources at the expense of physical resource, citing the increased ease of access for students off-campus, and the increased availability of books and journals in electronic form.

2.24 Campus rotation, the opportunity for students to spend one or more terms studying electives in any of its campuses, is a key element of all Hult programmes. The arrangements for campus rotation ensure that 100 per cent of the learning outcomes and 80 per cent of the programme content is the same regardless of where the course is delivered. In 2015-16, 41 per cent of postgraduate students on Hult programmes rotated between campuses at least once. Both staff and students attested enthusiastically to the effectiveness of this opportunity as offering a distinctive opportunity to experience a different geographical and cultural context for study. The continuity of administrative support and learning resources at different campuses contributes greatly to the ease of transition from country to country. The review team accordingly identified the sustained comprehensive support for students who transfer between campuses as **good practice**.

2.25 The combined institutions' VLE provision is being harmonised across the two institutions onto a system based on Canvas and branded as myCourses. Both staff and students expressed very positive views about the advantages offered by this system. Doctoral students made reference to Virtual Ashridge, which has been in place for many years and can provide resources in a variety of formats to cater for different learning styles and preferences. Staff and students attested to the valuable role played by the VLE in enhancing and ensuring consistency of the student learning experience across all campuses. The review team found strong evidence of a high quality provision with comprehensive content and an agile but robust structure. The substantial contribution made by the virtual learning environment to ensuring consistent, responsive and interactive learning support is **good practice**.

2.26 The combined institutions have an effective approach to the review and enhancement of learning and teaching, including staff development for new and established staff. 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**

2.27 The combined institutions have a number of strategies in place which enable student development and achievement. The Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy with its accompanying action plan outlines how students can achieve their academic potential. This strategy is supported by the Learning and Research Resources Strategy, the Faculty Strategy, the Employment Strategy and the Research Strategy which make explicit reference to developing student capabilities.

2.28 In addition to the clear oversight of student development opportunities through student feedback from the use of surveys student achievement is further considered as part of the provider's annual Academic Report. These strategies and development activity allow the expectation to be met in principle.

2.29 The review team assessed the extent to which the combined institutions enable student development and achievement by talking to staff and students, analysing the strategies previously mentioned, reading minutes of Boards of Studies, Academic Standards and Quality Committee, Academic Board, Admissions Committee and Teaching and Learning Committee, and in meetings with students and staff.

2.30 The combined institutions have clear arrangements for enabling student development and for evaluating the effectiveness of development activity. They make scrupulous efforts to gather student feedback in order to assess the impact of development activity. They use this data at a strategic level to evaluate alterations to pedagogy and course structure. The combined institutions collate a range of reports on student achievement and graduate destinations: In 2015-16 there was a completion rate in excess of 95 percent across full-time postgraduate courses. Data gathered from the student survey modelled on the National Student Survey (NSS), and data on graduate destinations are considered as part of the provider's annual academic report.

2.31 The combined institutions ambition to be the 'most relevant business school in the world' is reflected through their deliberate attempts to create a professional environment that supports student development. In particular, the system of academic probation supports students with a grade-point average below 2.00 or who fail to complete at least 50 percent of the course, through offering one-to-one tuition with an Assistant Dean and undertaking regular progression monitoring, in order to support their academic development. Students develop employability skills through a mixture of extra-curricular activity and an embedded culture of employability in many aspects of teaching and learning.

2.32 Students are able to transition smoothly between Hult's international network of campuses in the USA, the Middle East, China and the UK owing to extensive one-to-one support, and common features of provision and facilities in all campuses. Attesting to their global outlook, 88 percent of Hult MBA graduates were employed within three months of graduation in 60 countries. The careful and individualised support which enables students to develop academic, personal, and professional potential in a global environment is **good practice**.

2.33 The combined institutions have effective strategies to enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential, and undertake targeted activity that

enables them to monitor and evaluate these arrangements. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**



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

### **Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student Engagement**

#### **Findings**

2.34 The combined institutions enable students to engage in the enhancement and assurance of their educational opportunities collectively through representation on academic committees, through frequent student surveys, and through a mixture of formal and informal meetings with staff.

2.35 Student participation in strategic meetings is codified in the academic governance structure considered at the Academic Board and confirmed in the committee administration appendix. The membership of Academic Board currently includes an Ashridge student representative and a recent Hult graduate. In addition to the consideration of student feedback at a broad range of committees individual students may provide feedback at course level through Boards of Studies with issues arising from the Boards of Studies considered through the provider's committee structure.

2.36 Student participation throughout the committee structure coupled with the varied and various efforts made to engage students in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience through frequent surveys, informal and formal feedback mechanisms, and a demonstrable responsiveness to student feedback allows this Expectation to be met in principle.

2.37 The review team assessed the nature of engagement with students through meetings with staff and students, analysing the progression of issues raised by students, reviewing minutes of committees including Boards of Studies, Academic Board, programme validation events, Town Hall meetings, Academic Standards and Quality Committee and Curriculum Committees, and by evaluating the avenues through which students can provide feedback.

2.38 Students expressed confidence that they could provide meaningful feedback on their learning experience through a number of formal and informal mechanisms. This was reflected by teaching staff who stated that student feedback was an important consideration in course design. The combined institutions are responsive to student views about the curricula and the learning environment: for instance, the introduction of a 'bank of days' arose from students' wishes to have some flexibility on assignment submission deadlines.

2.39 Students are engaged in both formal and informal mechanisms available to them to provide feedback on their experience at the provider. Student representatives take part in institutional committees and their engagement with the Board of Studies in particular has seen changes made in the approach to teaching and learning, and in the provision of digital facilities where feedback provided on the Master's in International Management led to the introduction of a new virtual learning platform for the programme.

2.40 Overall, by means of a mixture of formal representation, informal feedback mechanisms, and an organisational emphasis on student participation in the learning environment, the provider takes deliberate steps to engage all students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. The Expectation is met and the 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**

2.41 The process for assessment is outlined in the Academic Regulations. The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy aims to ensure that student performance is evaluated and assessed according to the programme learning outcomes, course learning outcomes and individual assessment criteria. The strategy places emphasis on the need for variety, consistency and transparency through the vehicles of assessment. Academic teams are directed to make a concerted effort to weight assessments fairly and appropriately according to the academic level and the number of credits to be awarded.

2.42 The assessment mechanisms of Ashridge and of Hult have been brought together under a single academic framework which has amalgamated the differing assessment practices of each institution with a view to ensuring consistency across provision in all campuses. The assessment regimes are aligned with the UK higher education system, in particular with the FHEQ; quality assurance and threshold standards are aligned to the Quality Code. These arrangements are sufficient to allow the Expectation to be met.

2.43 The review team examined the Academic Regulations, the Learning and Teaching and Assessment strategy and documentation relating to the conduct and planning of assessments. The team also met senior staff, academic staff and students and saw a demonstration of the combined institutions' VLE.

2.44 Comparability of assessment rubrics between the different academic systems is achieved through the collaborative design and use of standard assessment tariffs between faculties. The extensive use of grading rubrics reflects the programme's assessment regime and assists academic staff in achieving consistency. The Curriculum Committee examines every rubric prior to approval taking place. A grade-scale system has been introduced on all postgraduate programmes, replacing the use of percentages, in order to ensure consistency between the UK and USA grading criteria: the system has been introduced to all campuses, followed by workshops for academic staff to address any concerns. Academic staff displayed familiarity with and were supportive of this approach. Students spoke positively about the assessment methods used, demonstrating their understanding of assessment criteria, and confirming that they valued the opportunities for formative assessment.

2.45 Students submit assignments through plagiarism-detection software (Turnitin), which also encourages good practice in academic writing. There is a clear policy in respect of penalties for late submission. Training on how to use Turnitin effectively is provided to staff as well as to students. Students receive training during their induction and orientation activities as well as ongoing support through academic skills sessions. Students expressed the view that assessment standards achieve those expected in a professional environment and that the level of academic rigour has increased since the operational merger.

2.46 Academic staff confirmed the extensive use of online marking and feedback through the Gradebook system, providing feedback to students and enabling second marking and moderation of grades. Moderation during the setting of an assessment task ensures that the

tutor has set a task which is consistent with marking criteria and with the intended learning outcomes. Additionally, moderation after grading serves as a check that marking is aligned to the assessment rubric and has been correct and accurately administered. The review team saw evidence of second marking taking place in samples from Gradebook, and confirmed its confidence that the process is working effectively and in accordance with the Academic Regulations and programme handbooks.

2.47 Procedures for the recognition of prior learning include mapping against intended programme learning outcomes. Relevant information is available through the intranet as well as in student handbooks and programme specifications. Students with recognised prior learning receive initial support from the Admissions Team, and thereafter from the programme Director concerned. The Academic Regulations specify clearly how much transfer credit is allowable for both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Transfer credit is overseen by the Admissions Committee and the decision to grant transfer credit is based on criteria as outlined in the Academic Regulations and programme handbooks.

2.48 The combined institutions have arrangements for assessment which are sound and well understood by staff and by students. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.49 The combined institutions' arrangements for external examiners, including a defined process for nomination, appointment, termination, roles and responsibilities, are set out clearly in the Academic Regulations. Academic Board has ultimate responsibility for external examiners and has delegated the responsibility for their appointment and oversight to the Academic Standards and Quality Committee.

2.50 External examiners are normally appointed for four years, although an exceptional extension of one year can be approved by the Academic Standards and Quality Committee. The Academic Regulations stipulate that every programme should have a sufficient number of examiners to ensure that all assessment at Level 4 and above can be reviewed effectively. In practice, examiners are also used at subject level, such that an examiner is appointed to cover specific areas across more than one programme. Examiners for the doctoral programme are appointed by Middlesex University.

2.51 Formerly, the Ashridge Academic Regulations specified the involvement of external examiners in all degree programmes and there is a longstanding and consistent record of their employment. Hult had not previously been required to engage with the external examiner system, since such a system is not a requirement for the award of USA degrees. Following the operational merger of the two institutions and a successful pilot at the Dubai campus, the external examiner process has been put in place across all Hult programmes.

2.52 Given the large number of subject level external examiners required to review the range of subject areas of Hult programmes, the Academic Quality and Standards Committee decided to appoint a general programme level external examiner. This examiner will have responsibility for some subject areas, but will also be responsible for the overall programme level awards. This arrangement will allow external examiners and the Assessment Board to compare student performance across different campuses.

2.53 The external examining system is now being operated in conjunction with Pearson College and the Lorange Institute as part of the termination of contracts and teach-out arrangements. Pearson has approved the current external examiners and has confirmed that any new appointments will require approval from its new validating institution as well as from Ashridge. At the Lorange Institute, an external examiner has been appointed to ensure consistency of programme content and standards.

2.54 External examiners are required to comment on a representative sample of work across the full grade range for each Assessment Board and in most cases they provide an interim report in writing ahead of the meeting to facilitate discussion. Academic Directors are required to make a formal response to external examiners' annual reports: any recommendations that have been raised in the report and subsequent responses are shared with students through their Learning Zone.

2.55 The processes and procedures in place to ensure the scrupulous use of external examiners suggest that the Expectation is likely to be met, although the processes have yet to operate extensively across Hult programmes.

2.56 The review team tested external examiner arrangements by reviewing documentation relating to induction and guidance, external examiners' reports and responses, assessment board minutes and oversight by Academic Standards and Quality

Committee. While the external examiner system had in general operated successfully, a number of external examiners' reports contained instances of scant and formulaic responses. Students expressed little awareness of external examiners' reports, although the Learning Zone does contain links to reports.

2.57 The institutional oversight of the external examiner process is clearly evidenced through the committee structure, including the summary of all interim feedback at the Academic and Quality Standards Committee and a 'traffic light' system used against a series of criteria in order to identify any salient issues. In addition, the Academic Standards and Quality Committee reviews external examiners' annual reports and the institutional responses to those reports. The complete external examiner annual reports make up one of the appendices of the Academic Report.

2.58 The combined institutions recognise the limited awareness on the part of academic staff at Hult of the purpose and role of external examiners, and have taken steps to address this through the pilot scheme carried out at the Dubai campus and through briefing sessions for academic staff. There is no formalised system for the induction and briefing of external examiners, and no formalised introductory materials such as an external examiners' handbook. Nevertheless, the combined institutions are taking steps to address this by enabling newly appointed external examiners to 'shadow' an existing examiner and to attend assessment boards prior to the start of their period of office. The review team **affirms** the steps being taken to ensure that academic staff and external examiners are fully aware of the nature and purpose of the role of external examiners.

2.59 While the combined institutions have systems which appear sound, they are have not yet been fully tested on campuses outside the UK. The Expectation is met, but the lack of evidence of full implementation of processes indicates a moderate risk.

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

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.60 The combined institutions have a system for the monitoring and review of programmes to ensure that UK threshold academic standards are met. As detailed in Expectation A3.3, the process is outlined in the Academic Regulations and described in the student handbook for assessment boards, and includes the use of external examiners, annual monitoring, review by professional bodies and periodic review. These arrangements are sufficient to allow the Expectation to be met.

2.61 In considering this Expectation, the review team scrutinised the Academic Regulations, the schedule of events for monitoring and review, external examiners' reports, data on student achievement and progression, and other documentation relating to annual monitoring. The review team also met senior staff, academic staff and students.

2.62 The Curriculum Committee has oversight over the annual monitoring process and reports to the Academic Standards & Quality Committee which in turn formally accepts the Programme Directors' Annual Monitoring Report and confirms that programmes are monitored and reviewed appropriately. Under the combined institutions' arrangements from 2016-17 onwards each programme director will create an annual monitoring report detailing any developments or issues occurring over the previous 12 months and including comments and any recommendations arising from external examiners' reports and from student performance data. Student satisfaction data and information on student feedback is also incorporated into the review process, along with an audit of the learning resources available to students, and data on student destinations after graduation. The information supports the annual monitoring process and contributes to the updating of prospectus information. The experience of Ashridge in operating the previous arrangements on which the new arrangements are based suggests that the new approach to programme monitoring is likely to prove successful.

2.63 The review team saw evidence of the effective use of data in annual monitoring. Analytical reports are produced by the Central Academic Team and include an analysis of the grades awarded by each tutor. The annual Graduation Report illustrates student performance data by degree type to show how well a student has performed cumulatively along with information regarding to withdrawal and terminations. The reports also include student retention and completion data as well as student satisfaction data from in-house surveys. Academic staff drew attention to a variety of enhancements that have been implemented as a result of review across the combined institutions, including a leadership development programme for staff, a detailed mapping exercise across the global curriculum intended to ensure a more rigorous alignment with the FHEQ, and a media management course developed following direct feedback from students.

2.64 Although periodic review has not yet taken place across the combined institutions, they have established a schedule for future periodic reviews with a view to maintaining currency and relevance of the curriculum and have well-founded operational arrangements for the conduct of future monitoring and review. The Expectation is met and the 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**

2.65 The provider has accessible mechanisms to enable students to make academic appeals and complaints. These are summarised in the Academic Regulations, which are available to students in the student handbook or through their Learning Zones.

2.66 The Academic Regulations clearly lay out the scope for making complaints and academic appeals as well as the processes for resolving complaints, including timescales for the different stages of appeals and complaints. An appeal which has exhausted the internal process may be taken to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator. Oversight of academic appeals and complaints is in a transitional period: while at present oversight is maintained through a standing item on Academic Standards and Quality Committee, the combined institutions intend that Academic Integrity Committees will undertake oversight by the end of the 2016-17 academic year. These policies and procedures allow the Expectation to be met in principle.

2.67 The review team considered the application of Academic Regulations by meeting staff and students, and by reading minutes papers, and regulations pertaining to appeals and complaints including the Academic Regulations, various Programme Catalogues, student handbooks, Academic Standards and Quality Committee, and the Academic Report.

2.68 The appeals and complaints procedures are apparent through a range of information advice, and extensive student orientation. The reporting of academic appeals enables consideration of enhancement through the committee structure.

2.69 The combined institutions ensure that students making a complaint or an appeal have access to independent advice through staff who are not involved with the matter concerned. Additionally, the combined institutions are reviewing how they can direct students to external review where there are multiple routes for appeal. However, the staff providing advice on appeals or complaints are not independent to the institution. The review team **recommends** that the combined institutions ensure that independent external advice is made available to students wishing to complain or appeal.

2.70 The procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints are accessible, timely, and enable enhancement. The shortcoming in respect of the availability of independent external advice will not require major procedural or operational change. The Expectation is met and the 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**

2.71 Provision leading to awards that are delivered collaboratively with other organisations is limited to two programmes: a Master of Business Administration delivered by the Lorange Institute of Business in Zurich, and a Bachelor of Business Management provided by Pearson College Ltd. These two partnerships had been approved using the Ashridge Academic Regulations which were amended in 2012 to allow validation of the qualifications of other organisations and the award of undergraduate degrees. The validated programmes continue to be administered using the Ashridge regulations. The combined institutions also have in place agreements with Atticus Education for the delivery of the EMBACI programme, and with the Premier League to support the delivery of a Diploma in Higher Education for the Elite Coaching Apprenticeship Scheme.

2.72 The regulations and agreements seen by the review team in principle allow these collaborative partnerships to be managed effectively and to secure academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities.

2.73 The review team examined documents describing provision with other organisations including minutes of validation panels, programme specifications, formal agreements and the reports of external examiners. The team also met academic staff responsible for the management of the partnerships.

2.74 Since the Academic Regulations established in 2016 do not provide for the accreditation or validation of programmes of study provided by other educational institutions, the combined institutions have decided to cease their collaborative partnerships with the Lorange Institute and Pearson College Ltd, and to undertake a teach out of the programmes delivered there. Consequently, agreements have been reached with both of these bodies for the transfer of the programmes concerned to other awarding bodies for all students recruited from September 2016. Students registered before September 2016 will continue to be taught by the partners under the terms of the Ashridge Academic Regulations and all are expected to complete their studies before or by September 2018.

2.75 There are suitable arrangements for ensuring standards and quality of provision delivered at other organisations, including suitable teach-out arrangements. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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



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

## **Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees***

### **Findings**

2.76 The Ashridge Doctorate in Organisational Change (ADOC), a professional doctorate available for part-time study, is the single programme leading to the award of a research degree. It is validated by Middlesex University (the University) for the award of Doctor in Professional Studies (Organisational Change), and is delivered by Ashridge. The programme contains provision for students to elect for a Master in Professional Studies after the successful conclusion of the second of the programme's three modules. Students are registered with both Ashridge and the University, and the programme is managed in accordance with both its Regulations for Professional Doctorates and the Ashridge Academic Regulations. The University is responsible for six-yearly periodic review and revalidation of the programme which last occurred in 2012.

2.77 The arrangements for the validation and management of the ADOC programme in principle provide for secure academic standards and appropriate learning support for students.

2.78 The review team examined documentation describing the delivery of the ADOC programme including annual and periodic reviews, the assessment of students and the reports of external examiners. The team also met academic staff responsible for delivering the programme and students currently registered on the programme or who had recently graduated from it.

2.79 The programme admits students at intervals of two years, enrolling about 20 on each occasion. Most students graduate within 42-58 months: 64 per cent of the first cohort were awarded doctorates. The admissions process is conducted by Ashridge faculty and is selective, involving a detailed written application and an interview. Candidates are expected to be employed or self-employed while undertaking their research and to maintain a high level of commitment to their cohort and study group as the programme requires regular online participation as well as attendance at up to four workshops and a module viva in each study year.

2.80 The students met by the review team commented positively on the support from supervisors and the value of the close and regular contacts with their chosen study groups. Access to learning materials is largely online using both the Ashridge and Middlesex VLE systems. Students repeated the disappointment reported in the student submission in the reduction in the size and facilities of the physical Ashridge library, but confirmed that this was essentially a loss of study space when they attended workshops, and had not hindered their study. Each year group elects at least two student members to the programme Board of Studies which meets twice a year. Minutes are kept of the discussion and decisions of each Board meeting, and these are circulated to members with outcomes. The minutes are included with the Programme Quality/Annual Monitoring Report for consideration by Middlesex University.

2.81 The evidence seen and heard by the team confirmed the commitment and professionalism of staff who teach on the programme and their responsiveness to both

formal and informal feedback from students. Supervisors are appointed by the programme director and approved by both institutions. All supervisors have experience of practice-based doctoral level work and are mentored by an experienced member of academic staff on joining the programme. While some students suggested that a more systematic approach to the development of wider research skills would be helpful, students in general indicated satisfaction with support from supervisors in the development of the action research skills necessary for their own projects.

2.82 The review team concludes that the current collaboration with Middlesex University provides secure academic standards and enables learning support of appropriate range and quality. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

2.83 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All Expectations in this judgement area are met with a low level of risk with the exception of Expectation B7 which is met with a moderate level of risk.

2.84 There are four features of good practice, relating to the support for applicants to programmes, the support for students who transfer between campuses, the contribution made to learning by the virtual learning environment and the support for students' academic, personal and professional development.

2.85 There is one recommendation in this judgement area, relating to the availability of independent external advice to students who may wish to make a complaint or an appeal. The single affirmation relates to the need to ensure awareness of the nature and purpose of the role of external examiners.

2.86 There are sound arrangements for securing the quality of student learning opportunities. The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the provider **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 Information about the combined institutions, known since September 2015 as Hult International Business School, is available through the websites of the two constituent parts: Ashridge ([www.ashridge.org.uk](http://www.ashridge.org.uk)) and Hult ([www.hult.edu](http://www.hult.edu)).

3.2 Each website contains links to descriptions of all the programmes delivered by the combined institutions across its six campuses, and provides outline accounts of programme structures and course content, together with online application routes. More detailed information on programmes, on admissions criteria and on fees and other costs can be obtained by registering an interest, requiring email and telephone contact details. In this way potential applicants can receive programme brochures by email or on paper.

3.3 Once students have accepted an offer of place on a programme full details of programmes and courses are provided in the form of comprehensive programme handbooks and course catalogues available on paper or through the Ashridge and Hult VLEs.

3.4 The provision of academic information is managed and coordinated by the marketing teams at Hult and Ashridge working with the Heads of the three academic Schools, the Global Dean Academic Affairs, the Chief Academic Officer and the President. Particular attention is paid to ensuring all campuses apply the same organisational and academic structures, together with common data management systems, so that students can move easily between them.

3.5 The arrangements put in place by the combined institutions to generate and manage information about learning opportunities are in principle capable of ensuring its accessibility and accuracy.

3.6 The review team explored the quality of information provided by the institution by reviewing its websites, programme brochures and handbooks, and VLEs. The team also met key staff with responsibility for information management and with students to discuss their access to and use of information sources.

3.7 Both the Hult and the Ashridge websites are accessible to the public and potential students and are largely focused on marketing the various programmes, courses and facilities provided by the combined institutions. They do not provide access to the combined institutions' Academic Regulations nor to a register of current collaborative provision.

3.8 Students reported that they were particularly satisfied with information provided by the admissions and induction processes operated by both Hult and Ashridge, which generally involved personal contact and guidance by recruitment and admissions staff and often visits to the campuses including direct contact with academic faculty.

3.9 Once registered, students may obtain comprehensive information from the VLE enabling access to materials, links to members of staff and the submission and return of assignments. By viewing the VLE, the review team was able to confirm the availability of

information about regulations and procedures together with guidance on access to learning support, including routes for complaints, appeals and feedback.

3.10 Students reported that they were particularly satisfied with information provided by the combined institutions' admissions and induction processes. Students met by the team confirmed that the open-door policy operated by the deans of each of the three schools, together with the accessibility of their allocated academic advisors, generally allowed them to obtain answers to questions and solutions to problems very quickly. Students also confirmed that Course Handbooks are comprehensive, accurate and systematically updated. Postgraduate students who had used the rotation system to study at more than one of the international campuses reported that the common arrangements for administration and student support across the whole institution worked well and allowed them to adjust quickly to study in a different country.

3.11 The combined institutions have effective processes to ensure that information provided to its audiences is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The Expectation is met and that the level of risk is low.

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

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

3.12 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The single Expectation in this judgement area is met with a low level of risk.

3.13 There are no features of good practice, recommendations or affirmations in this judgement area.

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

## 4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

### Findings

4.1 The strategic focus of the combined institutions is the full completion of their operational merger. Progress to support this to date has included the creation of a strategy map bridging the two institutions; mapping of programmes and courses across the combined institutions and validation of the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes of the combined institutions.

4.2 The combined institutions characterise enhancement as 'improvement and innovation'. The review team heard that while there is no specific strategy for enhancement of learning opportunities, a range of support structures and mechanisms reflect an approach to embedding enhancement across the provision. These include staff development opportunities, coaching and mentoring schemes for students, using outcomes of research to enhance and add currency to the curriculum. The appointment of a Hult Dean of Academic Quality is intended to establish and integrate quality enhancements across campuses, faculties and programme teams.

4.3 The combined institutions' approach to enhancement is sufficient to allow the Expectation to be met. The review team explored the approach to enhancement by considering documentation relating to the management of improvements to provision and in meetings with senior staff, academic staff, professional support staff and students.

4.4 A number of quality enhancements implemented across the institutions demonstrate that enhancement is embedded through a combination of market-driven and internal improvement. The Curriculum Committee has overseen enhancements arising from the operational merger of the two institutions, including principally the development of a global approach to the curriculum and the establishment of a single academic framework intended to satisfy the requirements of differing national jurisdictions.

4.5 The combined institutions consider the continuing professional development of all staff to be critical to the delivery of effective teaching and learning. Accordingly, it has in place a series of initiatives to strengthen the professional activities of academic and support staff through accredited programmes, professional development opportunities, professional recognition, and peer mentoring and support. Members of staff described positively the initiatives put in place by the institution to develop further their 'practitioner and theory' approaches. Such examples included the introduction of 'learning sets' across faculties; 'lunch bites' for sharing best practice; a 'Day of Disruption' designed to support staff in transforming curricula and research. The review team also heard from staff that the institution places emphasis on its 'Leadership Development Programme' to encourage staff to engage in future trends.

4.6 Students also spoke positively about the experience of the improvements and innovations afforded to them by Ashridge and many felt that they were individually supported from the admission stage through to their ongoing academic studies through a series of support networks and feedback mechanisms. Examples of student engagement activities include: the Hult Prize student competition; the development of learning objectives aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals; campus rotation enabling students to spend a period of study at a campus in another country; a master class led by alumni; and 'Roads to success' events.

4.7 Initiatives in respect of strengthening students' professional development include: bespoke employability workshops; embedding careers education into the curriculum; advice on writing a curriculum vitae; interview preparation and the use of social media. Students also have access to personalised careers guidance and career coaching sessions.

4.8 The combined institutions' primary strategic goal for the enhancement of its provision is to successfully complete their operational merger. Within this goal, they have taken deliberate steps to implement and embed a number of improvements with the aim of furthering the quality and consistency of the student experience. The Expectation is met and the risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**



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

4.9 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The single Expectation in this judgement area is met with a low level of risk.

4.10 There are no features of good practice, recommendations or affirmations in this judgement area.

4.11 The review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the provider **meets** UK expectations.

## Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 21-24 of the [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\) handbook](#).

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

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

### Academic standards

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

### Award

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

### Awarding organisation

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

### Blended learning

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

### Credit(s)

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

### Degree-awarding body

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

### Distance learning

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

### Dual award or double award

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

### e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

**Enhancement**

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

**Expectations**

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

**Flexible and distributed learning**

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

**Framework**

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

**Framework for higher education qualifications**

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

**Good practice**

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

**Learning opportunities**

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

**Learning outcomes**

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

**Multiple awards**

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

**Operational definition**

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

**Programme (of study)**

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

**Programme specifications**

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

**Quality Code**

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

**Reference points**

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

**Self-evaluation document**

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

**Subject Benchmark Statement**

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

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

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

**Threshold academic standard**

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

**Virtual learning environment (VLE)**

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

**Widening participation**

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

QAA1265 - R5118 - May 17

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