



Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of Belfast Bible College Ltd

October 2016

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About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at [Belfast Bible College](#). The review took place from 3 to 5 October 2016 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Fiona Thompson
- Professor Christopher Gale
- Mr Stuart Cannell (student reviewer).

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

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

- makes judgements on
 - the setting and maintenance of 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.

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

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

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

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

² QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us.

³ Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers): www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Educational-Oversight.aspx

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Belfast Bible College Ltd

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Belfast Bible College Ltd.

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

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at Belfast Bible College Ltd.

- The extensive engagement with relevant internal and external stakeholders in relation to the approval of programmes that improves the quality of student learning opportunities (Expectations B1 and Enhancement).
- The proactive engagement with a wide range of staff development activities that ensures the ongoing enhancement of the quality of learning and teaching (Expectations B3 and Enhancement).
- The holistic approach to support within a community environment that enables students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential (Expectation B4).
- The proactive approach taken in seeking and responding to student feedback that enhances the student educational experience (Expectations B5 and Enhancement).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Belfast Bible College Ltd.

By March 2017:

- formalise procedures through the committee structure to ensure more effective oversight of key quality assurance processes (Expectations B8, A2.1, A3.1 and B1).

By April 2017:

- provide formal structured training for student representatives to equip them to fulfil their role in educational enhancement and quality assurance effectively (Expectation B5).

By September 2017:

- develop and implement systematic processes and procedures for assuring the quality of the students' placement experience (Expectation B10).

Financial sustainability, management and governance

Belfast Bible College Ltd satisfactorily completed the financial sustainability, management and governance check.

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

About Belfast Bible College

The mission of Belfast Bible College Ltd (the College) is to enable students of diverse backgrounds to experience life-changing, excellent quality theological education and practical training within the context of a dynamic Christian Community. Its aim is to resource the Church for the mission of God through theological education drawing from five core values which both define and give focus and direction to all that the College does as it seeks to fulfil its mission and vision.

The College, as the only non-denominational theological college in Northern Ireland, was founded in 1942 with the purpose of training men and women for Christian service. Over the intervening period the College has relocated several times, settling in its current location (and sole campus) in Dunmurry, South Belfast in 1982 with 35 full-time students. Numbers have subsequently grown and for the year 2016-17 there are 138 higher education undergraduate students and postgraduate students studying alongside Access Learning students.

At the time of this review, the College offered the following higher education programmes, listed beneath their awarding bodies with 2016-17 full-time equivalent student numbers in brackets:

Queen's University Belfast

- Bachelor of Divinity/Theology (BD/BTh) (8)
- Master of Theology (MTh) (4)
- Graduate Diploma in Theology (7)
- Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) (1).

University of Cumbria

- Certificate in Theology (CertHE) (6)
- Graduate Diploma in Theology (1)
- Diploma in Theology (DipHE) (1)
- BA(Hons) Theology (111).

Currently the College has 6.5 full-time equivalent members of academic staff and seven part-time associate tutors who are also module coordinators. A further four part-time associate tutors assist in the delivery of modules. Academic staff are supported by four administrators.

Major changes since the last QAA review

Since the last QAA Review for Educational Oversight (REO) in 2012, the College has had four different Principals. A new Principal has now been appointed on a permanent basis to lead the College and will be taking up this appointment in December 2016.

The College is a constituent member college of the Institute of Theology at Queen's University Belfast through which it currently offers undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. In September 2015 a strategic decision was made not to recruit to the undergraduate programme. Therefore, the academic year 2017-18 will be the final one of teaching on this programme. However, the College remains a constituent college with the Institute of Theology and continues to teach postgraduate programmes. The phasing out of the programme has seen a reduction in staff levels and an associated reallocation of work.

In the run up to revalidation, the College undertook a critical review of its University of Cumbria undergraduate provision, seeking feedback from staff, students, external examiners and employers, which led to the introduction of a new programme in 2015-16.

Key challenges

One of the key values articulated by the College in its Vision and Strategic Plan (2015-18) is that of holistic theological education that seeks 'to integrate personal growth, academic development, critical self-reflection, learning from others, teamwork, and practical placements'. Within the devolved arrangements for education, Northern Ireland's Assembly has capped higher education fees at a level that limits the College's funding model. This has put increasing pressure on the College to deliver on its commitment to personal investment in students and a strong relational community alongside well-qualified academics.

Increasingly, Government policy around non-EU student entry to study in the UK has impacted upon the College's long-standing strategy of recruiting overseas students. While the College is trying to maintain entry to overseas students, the UK Visas and Immigration regulations governing the issue of visas militates against this.

The extent to which recommendations from the Review for Educational Oversight 2012 have been addressed

The QAA REO in 2012 concluded that confidence could be placed in the management of responsibilities for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. Reliance could also be placed in the accuracy and completeness of information.

The College has addressed all the recommendations following the REO in 2012. The annual monitoring reports in 2013, 2014 and 2015 confirmed that the College had made acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision. The College had used the action plan produced as a result of the 2012 review and subsequent monitoring reports to monitor and inform progress.

In 2012 the review team identified four areas of good practice and made eight recommendations. The two areas of good practice identified in 2012 regarding academic and pastoral support continue to be areas of good practice in the current review.

The 2012 review team made an advisable recommendation regarding the development and embedding of structures and processes for effective oversight. Although progress has been made, the current review team recommends that this is further developed and that the College formalises processes within the committee structure for the consideration and approval of all relevant documentation. The recommendation regarding identifying and disseminating good practice in learning, teaching and assessment has effectively progressed and contributes to the good practice identified in the current review in relation to staff development activities and the ongoing enhancement of the quality of teaching. Further, the recommendation made regarding student representation now contributes to the good practice identified in seeking and responding to student feedback. The review team therefore considers that the College takes appropriate and effective action with regard to progressing outcomes from previous reviews.

Explanation of the findings about Belfast Bible College Ltd

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

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

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

a) ensure that the requirements of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (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 College is not a degree-awarding body. Its primary responsibility is to implement the differing policies and processes of its two awarding bodies, University of Cumbria (UoC) and Queen's University Belfast (QUB), which ensure that qualifications are positioned at the appropriate level of FHEQ and awarded on the achievement of learning outcomes that students can demonstrate through assessment.

1.2 In respect of UoC, the College and the University have a well-established relationship ensuring that the University's processes and procedures are followed and through which the University is assured about the standard of awards delivered in its name. Ultimate responsibility lies with the University, but many of the responsibilities are shared. The University validation process establishes the appropriate academic standards of the awards which are governed by the University's academic regulations. The College discharges its responsibilities to the University for the maintenance of academic standards through a number of agreed mechanisms.

1.3 In the partnership with QUB, all quality assurance processes for the setting and maintaining of academic standards are owned by the University through its Institute of Theology, as are all definitive records of programmes and students. They are managed by University structures, processes and procedures at all levels.

1.4 The arrangements in place to secure threshold academic standards would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.5 The review team tested this Expectation through a consideration of a range of documents including partnership memoranda as well as through meetings with relevant staff including awarding body representatives.

1.6 For UoC, the College produces programme specifications and other programme documentation following UoC templates to ensure consistency and these are considered during programme validation. When designing programmes staff consult the FHEQ, the Subject Benchmark Statement for Theology and the Dublin Descriptors.

1.7 For QUB programmes, the awarding body is responsible through their validation processes for setting threshold academic standards through clear and transparent learning outcomes as well as for ensuring that each qualification is set at the appropriate level of the FHEQ.

1.8 The awarding bodies retain ultimate responsibility for securing threshold academic standards. On the basis of the evidence which indicates adherence to the agreed processes, the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.9 The College is required to adhere to the academic governance arrangements of its awarding bodies which govern the award of academic credit and qualifications for the College's higher education programmes.

1.10 The design of the awarding bodies' governance frameworks would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.11 The team tested this Expectation through meetings with staff, including staff from awarding bodies, and consideration of a range of documents including committee terms of reference and minutes of meetings.

1.12 For UoC programmes, assessment and award boards are held either at the College or UoC and are conducted in accordance with University requirements with attendance of staff from both bodies as well as external examiners.

1.13 For QUB programmes, assessment and award boards are held in the Institute of Theology in accordance with University procedures, and are attended by teaching staff from constituent colleges, University staff and external examiners.

1.14 The review team found that although documentation relating to programme, partnership and academic review are appropriately rigorous and in line with awarding body expectations, formal plans for monitoring the development, consideration and approval of documentation submitted to UoC lay outside the committee structure. This contributes to the recommendation made under *Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review* that the College formalise procedures through the committee structure to ensure more effective oversight of key quality assurance processes.

1.15 The review team concludes that notwithstanding the recommendation noted above there are robust processes in place governing the award of academic credit and qualifications and that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.16 For UoC programmes, the development of the definitive programme information is shared with the College. However, the definitive records for programmes that are accredited by UoC are held within the awarding body. Any changes to the programme made by the College are internally approved by the Director of Education in accordance with its own processes.

1.17 QUB is responsible for the development of definitive programme information in respect to programmes delivered on their behalf by the College.

1.18 The College has in place processes and procedures to allow this Expectation to be met.

1.19 To test the Expectation the review team examined all appropriate evidence, including programme specifications and module descriptors. The review team held meetings with awarding body representatives, senior, academic and support staff and students.

1.20 The review team found that all programme specifications, module descriptors and other relevant documentation were up to date and fit for purpose. The information contained within the programme specifications relate to the following: the criteria for admissions; programme features; aims and level descriptors; assessment strategies and references to the FHEQ and the QAA. Further to this there is also a detailed programme delivery structure. Within the College's postgraduate provision, the Postgraduate Handbook provided to the students contains a summary of all appropriate information. The programme specification for the postgraduate provision also contains information relating to the criteria for admissions, Subject Benchmark Statements, assessment strategies and reference to QAA and the FHEQ.

1.21 The review team found that the College has in place processes and procedures to allow them to maintain a definitive record of each programme and qualification that they teach, in collaboration with their degree-awarding bodies. Therefore, this Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.22 The approval of taught programmes and research degrees is the responsibility of the awarding bodies as stated in the relevant Memorandum of Cooperation and Memorandum of Agreement.

1.23 The College follows UoC's processes for validation and revalidation with validation panels established in line with awarding body processes including external representation. The College uses UoC programme specification and module descriptor templates which provide a structure for the College to articulate how the proposed provision aligns to the FHEQ and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. This process also requires the College to demonstrate how the proposed programme maps across to the University's Threshold Criteria for Validation which is aligned to the Quality Code.

1.24 The College is part of the Institute of Theology, established by QUB to deliver provision on its behalf, and all programmes taught by the constituent colleges are subject to the University's quality assurance procedures.

1.25 The processes and procedures for ensuring the approval process meets the required standards would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.26 To test the Expectation the review team read and considered a range of documents including validation paperwork and approval meeting reports. Meetings were held with relevant staff including awarding body representatives.

1.27 Responsibility for validation lies with the awarding body as detailed in the Memorandum of Cooperation with UoC. The College follows the University's process from the programme initiation stage to final approval using the University's templates. The review team saw evidence of a successful revalidation event for the UoC undergraduate provision in 2014-15, that included external expertise representation on the approval panel, with progress tracked through the Education Development Committee (EDC) and UoC Programme Committee. As well as reference to FHEQ and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements, the review team noted that the College also references the Dublin Descriptors.

1.28 The College delivers the QUB programmes through the Institute of Theology as detailed in their Memorandum of Agreement.

1.29 The review team was confident that approval processes are consistently implemented to 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, and the awarding bodies' academic frameworks and regulations. However, there was no process in place for the formal consideration and approval, through a College committee, of the validation paperwork prior to submission to the awarding body for approval through their processes. This aspect is explored further under *Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review*.

1.30 The review team concludes that there are robust processes for approving provision to ensure standards are set at an appropriate level. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.31 Responsibility for ensuring the achievement of learning outcomes rests with the awarding bodies as set out in the relevant Memorandum of Cooperation and Memorandum of Agreement.

1.32 For the UoC, the assessment strategy is tested through the validation and revalidation process with the programme specification detailing the assessment strategy, and module descriptors outlining module learning outcomes and the module specific assessment approach. The College also uses the awarding body grade descriptors to align practice with the awarding body's requirements. Annual monitoring processes, including use of external examiners, are used to ensure standards are met and that processes align with the assessment regulations of the awarding body.

1.33 For QUB provision, the assuring of academic standards, including assessment, is the responsibility of the awarding body and is managed through the Institute of Theology and its constituent colleges.

1.34 The College follows the assessment policy laid out by each of its awarding bodies. This would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.35 The review team tested this Expectation through meetings with students and staff and through scrutiny of a range of documentation including external examiner reports, annual monitoring processes and minutes of Module Assessment Boards.

1.36 Programme specifications and module descriptors detail both the overarching and individual approaches to assessment and these are tested to ensure fitness for purpose as well as alignment with threshold and University standards, through the programme approval processes managed by the awarding body. The final validation report for the more recent revalidation showed effective scrutiny of the proposed assessment strategy including student comments on the range of assessment tasks. The College has an effective process in place for the approval of assessment tasks, including examinations, by the external examiner.

1.37 The College uses data to analyse performance through the awarding body's own annual review processes and notes attrition rates are low and performance is good. External examiners' reports consider standards and act as an assurance that standards are robust and comparable with other higher education institutions. Any issues raised by the external examiner are managed through the annual review process. Responses to external examiners' comments, with progress on actions, is monitored through the following year's annual monitoring reports. The external examiner report template also provides the opportunity for the external examiner to comment on progress on actions previously raised.

1.38 Module Assessment Boards are managed by UoC with meetings alternating between the College and the University.

1.39 On the basis of the evidence, the review team concludes that the degree-awarding bodies have appropriate procedures to ensure that credit and qualifications are awarded appropriately and that College processes are effective. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (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

1.40 The monitoring and review of programmes is the responsibility of the awarding bodies. As a consequence, the College engages in distinctive processes for annual and periodic reviews.

1.41 The College engages in annual monitoring and evaluation processes through the University of Cumbria's (UoC) Annual Evaluation Review (AER) and Annual Partnership Review (APR) processes. Given the nature and length of the partnership, these processes are fully embedded within the College and provide assurances to the College and to the awarding body of the achievement and maintenance of academic standards. As detailed in the University's Quality Handbook, the AER process begins with module evaluation, including student feedback, which feeds into an annual report following the University template. The process includes analysis of a range of data, including student achievement, as well as evaluation of, and responses to, external examiner reports. A rolling action plan identifies areas for improvement and enhancement. The AER is peer-reviewed by the UoC with feedback provided to the College.

1.42 Confirmation of continued alignment with assessment procedures and adherence to standards is provided by the UoC appointed external examiners through production of annual reports. These reports form part of the College's and the University's AER process.

1.43 Additional monitoring of compliance with University regulations and processes, including effective engagement with the AER process, is provided through the UoC's APR process.

1.44 For Queen's University Belfast (QUB) provision, the assuring of academic standards, including monitoring, is the responsibility of the awarding body and managed through the Institute of Theology. The annual review documentation is produced by the University and the College contributes through inputting into the production of module evaluation forms and through its own analysis of student feedback. Particular issues are raised through the Institute of Theology meetings and through the College's QUB Programme Committee and EDC.

1.45 This approach would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.46 The review team tested the Expectation through meetings with staff, including representation from the awarding body, and through consideration of a range of documentation including annual and periodic review reports and awarding body scrutiny reports.

1.47 The UoC AER process is followed appropriately and effectively and with responses to external examiner reports signed off both by UoC and by College representatives.

1.48 The 2013-14 AER also shows effective use of a process where module failure rates were higher than expected and with follow-up actions identified and monitored. The AER process requires an appropriate engagement with data analysis to identify trends in recruitment, retention and achievement. The AER is peer reviewed in line with UoC processes.

1.49 The partnership is reviewed on an annual basis through the APR process which considers the AER and monitors action from previous years' reports.

1.50 Periodic review of UoC undergraduate provision was undertaken in October 2014. This was a rigorous review process that drew on the past three years' AERs, and was used to help inform the revalidation of the programme.

1.51 QUB is responsible for module review, annual review and periodic review through QUB's Collaborative Provision Group and the Institute of Theology as detailed in the Memorandum of Agreement. The College was externally reviewed by QUB in 2015 which recommended continuing the delivery. The College took the decision to withdraw from teaching the undergraduate programme, with 2016-17 being the final year of undergraduate teaching at the College, but are continuing with postgraduate programme provision. QUB is currently reviewing the provision within the Institute of Theology and minutes of the QUB Programme Committee and the EDC monitor these developments. The annual review process is managed through the University and documented through the Institute of Theology board meetings.

1.52 On the basis of the evidence, which indicates a robust monitoring and review of programmes in accordance with awarding bodies' processes and requirements, the review team considers the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.53 The College is responsible for maintaining the academic standards of the provision it delivers to the standards set by the awarding bodies and through the application of academic frameworks and regulations.

1.54 The College relies mostly upon the expertise of the external examiners appointed by the awarding bodies to provide externality and for confirmation that the academic standards of the degree-awarding body are appropriately maintained.

1.55 These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.56 The review team tested this Expectation through meetings with relevant staff including awarding body representatives and students and also through consideration of a range of documentation including external examiner reports.

1.57 For the revalidation of the UoC undergraduate programme, the College sought external expertise through its External Advisory Group which drew from the fields of education, ministry, mission, industry and commerce.

1.58 The review team noted that recommendations within external examiner reports are formally processed and given serious consideration, particularly through UoC's Annual Evaluation Report which is considered by the University's Programme Committee and then by the EDC.

1.59 For QUB programmes, external examiner reports are considered by the Management Committee of the Institute of Theology and sent to the College. The College considers the report at Subject Boards and Education Committee.

1.60 The review team found that the College makes effective use of external examiners' reports; there is clear evidence that issues identified in reports have been addressed and external expertise is sought as appropriate. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

1.61 In reaching its positive judgement the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook and took into consideration that the College's degree-awarding bodies have ultimate responsibility for the setting of academic standards.

1.62 The review team has noted that the primary responsibility for the setting of standards lies with the College's awarding bodies. A positive judgement in this area demonstrates that the College is aware of its responsibilities for maintaining those standards.

1.63 The review team noted for this judgement area under Expectation A2.1 and A.3.1 that programme design, development and approval are mostly effective, but that formal plans for monitoring the development, consideration and approval of documentation submitted to the University of Cumbria lay outside the formal committee structure. This is addressed under Expectation B8.

1.64 Notwithstanding this, all of the Expectations in this area are met and the level of associated risk is low.

1.65 The review team therefore concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered by the College on behalf of the University of Cumbria and Queen's University Belfast **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 Ultimately, University of Cumbria (UoC) is responsible for setting and maintaining academic standards of the provision delivered on its behalf by the College. UoC sets the criteria against which programme proposals are assessed within a programme approval process and also defines the processes and particular responsibilities within programme design, development and approval.

2.2 Queen's University Belfast (QUB) is responsible for all quality assurance processes as detailed in their Memorandum of Agreement. Within the College there is a QUB Programme Committee (QUBPC) which oversees the College's responsibilities with QUB. The Committee reports to the Education Development Committee (EDC), thus providing a wider forum for sharing good practice and discussion of how best to address any concerns that might arise.

2.3 The arrangements for programme design, development and approval would allow this Expectation to be met.

2.4 The review team tested this Expectation through meetings with staff, including representation from awarding bodies, and with students, and through scrutiny of a range of documentation including programme approval documentation and minutes of relevant meetings.

2.5 For the provision delivered on behalf of UoC, processes for programme design, development and approval are clearly laid out on the UoC website. The College operates effectively within UoC's processes including the University's process for the proposal for new provision such as the MA in 'The Bible and Ministry in the Contemporary World'.

2.6 The review team noted the effective way in which the College used the periodic review process to inform the recent revalidation of their UoC undergraduate provision as well as instigating a planned set of consultation opportunities with students, staff and employers which fed directly into the revalidation process. Feedback from students was collected through the Student Forum with responses provided by the College. A group of employers met College staff to discuss what graduate attributes employers considered a Belfast Bible College student should acquire. This activity has led to the College establishing an External Advisory Group drawing members from the fields of education, ministry, mission and industry, and commerce. College staff and representatives of the College Board were also consulted. All the data was evaluated and informed College thinking about programme development.

2.7 The Educational Development Committee provided a forum for discussions and monitored the progress of the revalidation sub-group.

2.8 The approach taken by the College was noted by the Validation Panel in its final report which also identified areas of good practice including the excellent standard of

validation documentation. Three conditions, two administrative conditions and seven enhancements were set by the panel and these were then considered and responded to by the College team prior to the launch of the revalidated programme. The final revised documentation was submitted in April 2015 and a formal Certificate of Approval to validate the proposal was signed by UoC.

2.9 A similar process, including consultation with relevant stakeholders, is being followed with the development of the new UoC master's degree, to begin in September 2017.

2.10 On the basis of the evidence provided, the review team considered the extensive engagement with relevant internal and external stakeholders in relation to the approval of programmes that improves the quality of student learning opportunities to be **good practice**.

2.11 The review team also considered that the process of revalidation was robust with due regard given to the requirements of the awarding body, was engaged with as a means of enhancing the student experience, and was carefully monitored internally through the Education Development Group. However, there was no record of the final revalidation paperwork, nor College responses to the outcomes of the process being considered and approved formally through the committee structures. This contributes to the recommendation made under Expectation B8 that the College formalise procedures through the committee structure to ensure more effective oversight of key quality assurance processes.

2.12 For the QUB provision in terms of design, development and approval of programmes, the curriculum is reviewed and development issues are identified primarily through Institute of Theology processes as detailed in the Memorandum of Agreement. It was the University, for example, which organised a strategic review of the Institute of Theology in June 2016. College staff and staff from the other constituent colleges are full members of Institute of Theology committees and it is through this structure that the College can propose new modules. The Institute of Theology's confidence in the College's expertise and reputation is evident from the approval readily granted to new modules created by College staff over the years, specifically to address the needs and areas of particular interest of Belfast Bible College students. In the academic year 2014-15, for example new modules related to Disability Theology were approved to form a pathway for postgraduate students interested in this area and linking in with the launch of the Centre for Intellectual Disability and Theology at the College in November 2015.

2.13 On the basis of the evidence provided the review team concludes that there are effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes and that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.14 The College has a newly revised and updated Recruitment, Selection and Admissions Policy in which it outlines its approach to the admission of undergraduate students. The policy contains information on the application process, entry requirements, information for specific applicant groups and the admission appeals process. The College organises a number of open days at which potential students can view the facilities and raise questions with staff relating to programme content. All applicants are formally interviewed by the College by both academic and support staff members. All staff members involved in interviewing students undergo formal training. All admission decisions in relation to QUB are made within the awarding body and the College has no delegated authority. All admission decisions in relation to the UoC are delegated to the College, with the approval of the awarding body.

2.15 The College has a history of recruiting a large number of international students; however, under current government regulations the College has seen a decline in the number of international students recruited.

2.16 When students arrive at the College they receive an induction pack that contains all appropriate information about their programme and the College. Induction takes place in the first week and all students attend a residential study centre where they can meet their fellow students and staff members on an informal basis.

2.17 The College has the appropriate policies and procedures in place to enable this Expectation to be met.

2.18 The review team examined all relevant evidence including the training that staff receive for preparation for conducting interviews, the College's Recruitment, Selection and Admissions Policy and the induction pack that students receive upon arrival at the College. The review team confirmed with staff how they process applications and conduct interviews, and checked with students that they received satisfactory and factually accurate information prior to applying to the College.

2.19 Staff responsible for admission informed the review team that the College ensures that all applicants are interviewed either face-to-face or through videoconferencing facilities if they cannot attend in person. Furthermore, all applicants are required to provide references which are requested immediately upon confirmation of their application. If a student is applying from outside the UK their qualifications may be subject to a check, which is conducted by the College to ensure they are of a sufficient academic standing for the purposes of meeting entry requirements.

2.20 The review team found that there were no issues in relation to the delegated admission decisions in relation to UoC. All students that applied through this route received the appropriate information and had a positive experience. The review team found that the information held on the College's website in relation to this is clear.

2.21 The review team found that the majority of students received appropriate information prior to applying to the College. This information was obtained through email communications with various staff members, information available at open days and public information available on the College website. Furthermore, the information given to students upon arrival at the College was fit for purpose and prepared them for their time at the College. The review team found that students were encouraged to highlight if they had any disabilities during the application phase of their admissions; however, the College stated that this has never occurred. The review team heard that one student did highlight a health issue directly after being inducted into the College, which was subsequently dealt with appropriately.

2.22 The review team concludes that the College has the appropriate processes and policies in place to allow for the fair and transparent recruitment, selection and admission of students. Therefore this Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.23 Within its Vision and Strategic Plan, and Education Strategy the College promotes excellence in teaching and learning across all programmes with the aim of enabling students to acquire both intellectual and interpersonal skills and attributes that will allow them to contribute positively in the community in which they work and live. This is achieved through continuous external review of teaching and learning by way of rigorous assessment of quality, both externally by the College's degree-awarding bodies, and through the annual internal review systems and student feedback, as well as by providing staff with both the training and resources needed to maintain professional standards.

2.24 Undergraduate provision with UoC was comprehensively and systematically reviewed and revalidated in 2014-15. This was undertaken in consultation with staff, students, employers and external examiners in critically assessing the entire programme, and re-shaping it to ensure its currency.

2.25 The agreement with QUB provides for the College to follow University processes in relation to review and enhancement of learning opportunities.

2.26 The procedures and processes in place to articulate and systematically review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.27 The review team tested the Expectation through meetings with staff, including staff from awarding bodies, and students, and by examining a considerable amount of paperwork including policies and minutes of meetings.

2.28 The College invests in staff development to ensure that staff are well qualified, equipped, supported and up to date in order to be able to help students develop and achieve their full potential as independent, critical and creative thinkers. To date this training has been made available by QUB either free of charge, or at a reduced fee.

2.29 Peer review for all lecturers takes place each year and this, along with student feedback, is linked to annual staff appraisal and requests for training/continuing professional development. Staff are encouraged to request training in the light of feedback received from students and peers. Lecture Peer Review forms have been developed that document areas of good practice/improvement. The process is also reviewed, as necessary, by lecturers at Best Practice and EDC meetings.

2.30 Lecturers are Recognised Lecturers of the Institute of Theology at QUB, while some are also QUB Honorary Lecturers. Staff are also approved to teach for UoC. As part of the development of teaching, full-time faculty are, on a rota basis, completing the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Teaching (PGCHET) and gaining Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy status.

- 2.31 Full-time staff are granted a sabbatical after nine semesters' employment to refresh their specialism, which helps to keep their teaching and research currency. On their return from sabbatical staff normally give a public lecture. Staff are also granted one day a week as a study day for research and teaching preparation. All teaching staff undergo periodic review of lecturing by the Director of Education. Programme Leaders review part-time staff teaching in a similar way.
- 2.32 Student feedback is gathered, collated and scored. Module feedback from students is consistently good. This helps to inform internal training provision for lecturers, both full and part-time.
- 2.33 Where staff attend seminars or conferences, for example at the Centre for Educational Development at QUB, they are invited to share good practice with the rest of the full and part-time teaching staff at the Best Practice meetings chaired by the Director of Education. This gives space for full and part-time lecturers to meet and share new ideas for teaching in the next semester.
- 2.34 The review team considers the College's proactive engagement with a wide range of staff development activities that ensures the ongoing enhancement of the quality of learning and teaching to be **good practice**.
- 2.35 A programme handbook is issued to students on programmes leading to a UoC award. While the College handbook covers other areas of campus life the programme handbook has been developed and enhanced in light of experience since the inception of the UoC degree and provides information to students about programme(s), teaching, learning and assessment, as well as student support and guidance. It sets out how students can be involved in helping the College review and enhance teaching and learning opportunities. There is a comprehensive student induction process.
- 2.36 The virtual learning environment (VLE) is used as a repository for information for students. Student issues around information technology are brought to the Library Committee meetings, which the IT Student Committee representative and the IT Support Officer attend. The Senior Librarian reports issues to the EDC for discussion and issues are escalated to the Senior Management Team and Board if there is a need for resourcing.
- 2.37 The College provides and maintains the physical infrastructure necessary to enable students to enjoy a learning environment that is safe, accessible and fit for purpose. Recently, in response to informal student feedback the campus student recreation room was refurbished. All classrooms, the library, canteen and the worship centre are wheelchair accessible.
- 2.38 There are opportunities at the College for informal student-staff conversations and building of relationships where questions and issues can be aired and discussed in a safe environment. Students and staff are all assigned to Fellowship Groups, now led by students, that meet weekly to share experiences and offer mutual support. Student feedback from modules and student leaver surveys express consistent satisfaction with the accessibility of teaching and administrative staff within a small campus. More formal structures for student academic support have been developed and implemented to enable each student to monitor their progress and further their academic development by having planned opportunities to reflect on feedback and engage in dialogue with staff. Since 2013-14 an Adviser of Studies fulfilled the role of personal academic tutor for students on the UoC and QUB programmes. That role continues alongside a recently implemented personal tutor system.
- 2.39 Students are involved in the management and development of learning opportunities. Elected students sit twice a year on open meetings of the EDC. Student representatives sit on open meetings of UoC and QUB programme committees. The UoC

programme also has an embedded Student-Staff Consultative Group (SSCG) and there are robust feedback mechanisms for each module and an annual Staff Student Forum is held for all UOC students to bring issues and ideas to the attention of the College. Issues and ideas raised are followed up by the Programme Leader and outcomes reported to the EDC. Relevant issues are escalated to EDC for action.

2.40 The review team concludes that the College has appropriate policies, procedures and practices in place to ensure 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. The Expectation is therefore met and the associated level of risk 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

2.41 The College enables student development and achievement by a variety of formal and informal arrangements. The College's approach to enabling students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential through maintaining and developing necessary resources is articulated within its Vision and Strategic Plan, and Education Strategy.

2.42 For its University of Cumbria provision systems of strategic and operational planning and quality assurance are well embedded in College and relevant University processes in order to enable student development and achievement. Levels of progression and retention, combined student achievement across University programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate level support this view.

2.43 All students registered and enrolled on a QUB programme at the College have all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of being QUB students including use of QUB facilities and, in addition, the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of being a Belfast Bible College student.

2.44 The College has arrangements in place for enabling student progression, which would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.45 The review team tested this Expectation through meetings with staff including those of awarding bodies, with students and with employers. It was also tested through perusal of a range of documentation including progression and achievement statistics.

2.46 Pastoral support was identified as a feature of good practice at the time of the 2012 Review for Educational Oversight. The College has continued to build and develop a pastoral care element which is distinctive to the College, including weekly combined UoC and QUB Staff/Student Fellowship groups where a recent enhancement has seen students take on leadership roles. Additional support is offered, as necessary, through a recently introduced personal tutor scheme which complements the Advisor of Studies role, which is an important resource for students in facilitating discussion and guidance around academic choices and progression. This formal structure is supplemented by a strong informal ethos through which students can develop good working relationships with staff through one-to-one conversations as well as formal interaction in staff-student committees.

2.47 Students at Risk meetings seek to identify and support those students most at risk, while small class sizes have the advantage of encouraging a level of interaction between lecturers and students which greatly assists in the early identification and resolution of any issues.

2.48 The review team considers the College's holistic approach to support within a community environment which enables students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential to be **good practice**.

2.49 The College employs a professionally qualified Senior Librarian and Assistant Librarian. The Library Committee is responsible for resource strategy within a budget set by the College leadership and Board. The Library Committee reports to the EDC. There is student representation on the Library Committee, which includes information technology

provision. There are robust policies and procedures to ensure good communication between faculty and library staff regarding provision of relevant resources and ensuring availability of key texts for individual assignments.

2.50 A new College website was created in 2015-16. From it students have direct access to the library database, email and information from either awarding body. There is also a link to the College's social media accounts.

2.51 The College has strengthened its careers development and placement planning. Weekly and block placements have been in place at the College since its inception to further develop students' professional potential. An element of the new UOC degree is the formal integration of this placement structure within programmes where students gain work-place experience and achieve academic credit. This is further discussed under Expectation B10.

2.52 The College has taken steps to implement policies, practices and systems that facilitate successful transitions and academic progression. One example of this is the design and introduction of module choice seminars for level 4 and level 5 students in advance of teaching.

2.53 On the basis of the evidence provided, the review team concludes that the College has in place, monitors and evaluates arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential so that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student Engagement

Findings

2.54 The College has several formal mechanisms that it uses to capture student engagement both at an academic and non-academic level. The College operates an internal Student Committee to which students are elected, or chosen if the position is not filled. There are several roles available on the Student Committee and the College provides a detailed list of responsibilities to enable students to make an informed decision as to what role they may wish to undertake. Students that are part of this committee can also then be part of the Accommodation Committee, responsible for issues relating to the halls of residence, or the Library Committee, responsible for issues relating to the library and learning resources.

2.55 The SSCG and Student Staff Consultative Committee are the academic committees where course representatives are invited to discuss academic issues for programmes relating to UoC and QUB, respectively. Students who are elected to be part of these committees have the opportunity to also be part of the EDC.

2.56 Additionally, within provision accredited by UoC, the College holds an Annual Forum between staff and students to give them the opportunity to raise any significant issues about their programmes. This forum is open to all students and staff involved within the programmes, and ensures a wider conversation than otherwise would exist outside the SSCG.

2.57 Further to committee engagement, the College promotes a number of surveys throughout the year including, but not limited to, end-of-module and leaver surveys. This data feeds into the College monitoring processes in a number of ways, with all Module Evaluation Surveys feeding into the Module Evaluation Review.

2.58 The College has appropriate structures and systems in place to allow this Expectation to be met. However, there is a lack of emphasis put on formal training for student representatives to undertake their roles effectively.

2.59 The review team examined all relevant evidence including the student written submission, minutes from all appropriate committees and any further evidence relating to the effectiveness of student representation. The review team questioned staff regarding how they listen to and act upon student feedback and confirmed with students that they feel their voices are heard and acted upon. Furthermore, the review team explored the nature of the College's involvement in relation to preparing student representatives for their respective roles.

2.60 The review team found that the College's processes for formally collecting and acting on student feedback are appropriate. The College collects feedback in relation to each module through module feedback and other surveys. Through the College's committee structure there are plenty of opportunities for students to engage, provide feedback and assist in disseminating information back to the student body. This includes the Educational Development Committee, the Library Committee and Accommodation Committee. Most recently through the Accommodation Committee, students raised an extensive list of current issues that the College is responding to appropriately, which includes replacing all mattresses and installing new kitchen facilities.

2.61 In addition, the College uses Fellowship Groups, which meet on a weekly basis, as a method of collecting and resolving informal issues. From September 2016, each group will be led by two final year undergraduate student and supported by a staff member. The review team saw this as an effective platform to collect and act upon student feedback and also helps to develop leadership skills.

2.62 The review team considers that the proactive approach taken in seeking and responding to student feedback that enhances the student educational experience to be **good practice**.

2.63 None of the student representatives met by the team has received formal training for the positions that they hold. This includes representatives that sit on the internal Student Committee, for which the College has responsibility, and those students acting as representatives for either UoC's SSCG or QUB's Student Staff Consultative Committee. This was confirmed by the College which stated that it provided no formal training for student representatives beyond an informal conversation. The review team concludes that student representatives are not sufficiently prepared to undertake their roles and **recommends** that the College provide formal structured training for student representatives to equip them to fulfil their role in educational enhancement and quality assurance effectively.

2.64 Although formal student representative training needs to be developed and implemented, the College makes good use of student feedback and other mechanisms in resolving issues and enhancing the student educational experience. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.65 The College works closely with UoC to ensure that students have appropriate opportunities to demonstrate achievement of the intended learning outcomes for their award. The assessment strategy for the recently revalidated undergraduate provision provides for a range of tasks designed to measure how effectively students have met the module and programme learning outcomes. Assessment tasks are discussed across the delivery team, approved by the external examiner and assessment deadlines scheduled in order to support student learning. Marking and moderation processes are in line with awarding body requirements and outcomes are considered through the annual and periodic monitoring processes. External examiners comment on standards and assessment processes in their annual reports. Students are carefully and deliberately informed of the structure and variety of assessments through the programme handbook. Feedback is provided to students within the time frame set by the awarding body. Students are provided with information on academic misconduct including plagiarism.

2.66 Consideration of individual module marks is undertaken by the University's Module Assessment Board and confirmation of final classifications through the University Assessment Board. Staff from the College attend the Module Assessment Boards.

2.67 For QUB programmes, processes for assessment, including the design of assessment, are managed by the University, and the constituent colleges of the University's Institute of Theology operate these processes. Students are informed of assessment processes through the undergraduate and postgraduate programme student handbooks and the relevant QUB online resources that students can access.

2.68 The arrangements for assessment would allow this Expectation to be met.

2.69 The review team tested this Expectation through meetings with students, staff and representatives of the awarding body, and through scrutiny of a range of documentation including programme handbooks, module descriptors, revalidation paperwork, external examiners' reports and annual monitoring reports. Minutes of relevant committees including the Module Assessment Board were also examined.

2.70 The College used the revalidation of the UoC undergraduate provision to develop an overarching assessment strategy, including both formative and summative approaches. This built on the outcomes of the periodic review process, including an analysis of achievement data. The varied nature of the assessment tasks has been commended by the external examiners and students.

2.71 The review team met academic staff who articulated their approach to the setting and marking of student work and the way that they supported students to engage with assessment as part of their learning and teaching. Tutors are provided with handbooks for each programme which set out the awarding bodies' expectations and also act as a useful guide for the whole assessment process. Assessment tasks are discussed across the College's delivery team and approved by the external examiner. Clear information is

provided to students through module guides and the VLE, and discussed with them so that there is clarity on what is expected and how it will be marked, including discussion about the use of grade descriptors. The College follows the awarding bodies' approach to marking which includes processes for second marking and the management of irreconcilable differences between markers, as well as sampling by the UoC Programme Leader and scrutiny by external examiners. This process also supports the identification of possible malpractice.

2.72 For QUB provision the marking process is followed as detailed in the staff handbook provided to Associate Tutors. This includes the use of level descriptors, the processes for the moderation of marks, and the process to be followed with regard to academic malpractice.

2.73 The College uses the feedback process to support the learning process. Initial general feedback on an assignment is given during a scheduled teaching session to support student engagement with their next assignment, as part of the College's approach to assessment for learning, followed by detailed written feedback provided by the awarding bodies' agreed deadline. Students are also able to access further feedback in person on request. External examiner reports have highlighted the College's approach to both assessment and feedback practices. The College has recently introduced peer review as part of the formative assessment process, an approach which has been commended by the external examiner.

2.74 Students confirmed that assessment was supported with clear understanding of what was needed to engage effectively with the assignment task, what the criteria were and when and how feedback would be returned. Written feedback was deemed to be helpful and provided within the published timescales and verbal feedback was also available on demand. Some students had experienced peer review of assessments and found that was helpful. Students felt appropriately challenged and valued the range of assessment tasks used to measure their learning.

2.75 Plagiarism is discussed through the Study Skills sessions as well as being detailed in programme handbooks and students confirmed their awareness. Awarding body regulations for malpractice are followed. Incidences of malpractice are relatively few and the College maintains a record of malpractice cases which ensures consistency of approach in line with the awarding bodies' procedures.

2.76 Recognition of prior learning is managed through, and decisions made by, the awarding bodies.

2.77 Module Assessment Boards at UoC are managed effectively with external examiners providing detailed comments on each module. Module and programme performance is monitored through these Boards as well as through the annual monitoring and periodic review processes. Statistics available to the review team for 2015-16 indicate that progression and achievement remain high. QUB's Institute of Theology Subject Examination Board is managed direct by QUB.

2.78 The review team considers, on the basis of evidence seen and through meetings with staff, awarding body representatives and students that the College takes a rigorous and robust approach to assessment. Programme approval is used to establish a holistic assessment strategy that enables students to demonstrate their achievement of learning outcomes within a supportive framework that reflects assessment for learning practice. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining

Findings

2.79 For its UoC provision, the College is able to nominate external examiners who are then appointed and managed by the University. With regard to QUB, the University has responsibility for all aspects of the external examiner process with some College staff sitting on committees in the Institute of Theology which appoint the external examiners and consider their reports.

2.80 UoC external examiner reports help to ensure the continual alignment of the College with the University's Academic Regulations and Academic Processes and Procedures. These include level and qualification descriptors which align to the FHEQ and national credit frameworks.

2.81 External examiners submit their reports to UoC which are forwarded to the College and considered by the Programme Leader. Specific issues are addressed through Programme Committee with relevant issues being escalated to the EDC. An annual report is prepared which is included in the Annual Evaluation Report and forms the basis for an action plan.

2.82 The College explains the role of external examiners to students in their programme handbooks and makes reports available to them through the College's VLE.

2.83 The selection and recruitment of external examiners by the awarding partners, and the consideration of external examiner reports at programme level, would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.84 The review team tested the Expectation through meetings with staff, including representatives of the awarding body, and with students, and through scrutiny of a range of documentation including external examiner reports, monitoring reports and minutes of meetings.

2.85 The review team found evidence through their reports that external examiners have been and continue to be positive about the quality of teaching and learning on programmes.

2.86 The review team noted that recommendations made within external examiner reports are formally processed and given serious consideration, particularly through UoC's Annual Evaluation Review (AER), which is considered by the University's Programme Committee and then by the College EDC.

2.87 Examples of how the reports have been used include: to inform enhancement of the programme; to introduce an assessed study skills module; to note best practice and integrate it more widely; to enhance creative ideas and diversity of assessments; and to introduce new developments such as student guidance on reflective practice.

2.88 In addition, the review team found that feedback, recommendations and ideas from external examiner reports formed a very useful and significant source for critical appraisal of the UoC undergraduate programme during the revalidation process.

2.89 While external examiner reports are made available on the VLE, not all students are aware of where and how to access the reports. The College also includes the name, position and institution of external examiners in module and programme information.

2.90 On the basis of enquiries, documentation and discussion, the review team found that within its delegated responsibilities the College makes scrupulous use of external examiners. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review

Findings

2.91 The College follows the processes for annual and periodic review as laid out by their awarding bodies. Data on student performance and feedback from students, staff and employers feeds into the monitoring and evaluation processes with an overarching action plan to maintain oversight of the monitoring and critical review of provision.

2.92 UoC operates a process for AER and Annual Partnership Review (APR) with the latter being a means for the awarding body to assure itself of the quality of the provision at the College. In addition, provision is subject to periodic review. The last periodic review was in 2014 and the College used this to inform revalidation.

2.93 Queen's University Belfast (QUB) is responsible for module review, annual review and periodic review through its Collaborative Provision Group and the Institute of Theology as detailed in the Memorandum of Agreement.

2.94 The College has processes in place to allow this Expectation to be met.

2.95 The review team tested the Expectation through consideration of a range of documentation including annual evaluation and programme reports, the periodic review report, action plans and minutes of relevant meetings. In addition, the approach to monitoring and review was discussed at meetings with relevant staff including representation from the awarding body.

2.96 Evaluation and enhancement are built into the annual review process which includes AER and APR as defined by the University. UoC has established a strong and well-established partnership with the College in which appropriate procedures have been well embedded.

2.97 The AER and APR are robust and comprehensive documents that have a strong emphasis on critical self-reflection and enhancement alongside feedback from students, employer and placement providers, College staff and the University.

2.98 The AER is considered through a peer review process at UoC with a scrutiny report produced by UoC which provides feedback to the College. This is then used to produce the final AER. Critical self-reflection begins at module level with student feedback which is then further analysed at programme level, reviewed by the UoC University Programme Leader and considered at the UoC Programme Committee. External examiner reports are an integral part of the annual review process and their comments are noted on how to enhance and develop student learning opportunities. The AER also includes data analysis on student recruitment, retention and achievement with the peer scrutiny report noting if this has been done appropriately and in sufficient detail with opportunities for the awarding body to identify any further information or analysis required.

2.99 The APR process is very detailed ensuring that the College complies with University requirements and expectations from both a quality assurance and enhancement perspective.

2.100 The periodic review process, which is supported by the UoC University Programme Leader, is rigorous and detailed providing opportunities for critical reflection informing both the revalidation of provision and approaches to learning, teaching and assessment. This provides full analysis, over a period of four years, of student data. The review undertaken in 2014-15, in preparation for the recent revalidation of the undergraduate provision, shows good retention and achievement. The review team reviewed similar data for 2015-16 and, from a completing cohort of 36 students, 67 per cent graduated with a 2.1 or a First, and 31 per cent gaining a 2.2. One student achieved an interim award of DipHE.

2.101 The University of Cumbria Programme Committee, which includes student representation, provides regular opportunities for discussion about the programme including consideration of student feedback via formal mechanisms including module feedback and the Student Staff Open Forum.

2.102 The design, implementation and development of processes for monitoring and review of QUB programmes lies with the University and is managed by the Institute of Theology.

2.103 For QUB the College is required to submit to the Institute of Theology a Module Assessment pro forma at the close of each semester for every module taught. The pro forma is intended to ensure critical reflection on all aspects of the module and informs the development and enhancement of the next teaching of the module. This form also draws on student module feedback.

2.104 The review team reviewed data provided by the College on QUB student achievement in 2015-16 with nine students gaining a First or 2.1 (out of 11 - the remaining two gaining a 2.2) and five students gaining a Graduate Diploma with four commendations and one distinction. The review team is confident that appropriate measures were in place to support students as the undergraduate provision was taught out.

2.105 The review team noted the detailed and rigorous nature of the plans used by the College to identify and monitor actions arising through annual, periodic and QAA review processes. However, it was noted that responsibility for the formal monitoring of these plans stood outside the committee structures.

2.106 The review team considered that the processes for annual programme, partnership and periodic review were appropriately rigorous, in line with the awarding bodies' requirements, and provided assurance of standards and identification of areas for enhancement and improvement. However, the processes for development, consideration and approval of relevant documentation, as well as the monitoring of progress against agreed actions, lay outside the College's committee structure and it is **recommended** that the College formalise procedures through the committee structure to ensure more effective oversight of key quality assurance processes.

2.107 On the basis of the evidence provided the review team concludes that there are robust processes in place, notwithstanding the lack of formal approval through committees, for the monitoring of provision that assures and enhances the quality of the student experience and learning opportunities, and complies with awarding body requirements. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is deemed to be 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

2.108 The College has an internal Student Complaints Procedure that is referenced within appropriate material, such as programme handbooks. The procedure outlines which committees are responsible for each specific complaint and makes clear the stages involved along with an indicative timescale. A student can raise a complaint to the awarding body once the College procedure has been exhausted. The review team heard that many of the general complaints are resolved on an informal basis within the Fellowship Groups that meet on a weekly basis which generally comprise ten students and a staff member.

2.109 The College is not responsible for dealing with formal academic appeals for either of their awarding bodies. It is the responsibility of the awarding body to handle and resolve all academic appeals. This is done by UoC through their Module Assessment Boards and University Assessment Board and by QUB through the Institute of Theology.

2.110 The College has the appropriate procedures and processes in place to allow the Expectation to be met.

2.111 The review team examined all appropriate evidence including the Complaints Procedure. The review team confirmed with staff their understanding of complaints and academic appeals and further checked with students what they would do if they wished to raise a formal complaint or academic appeal.

2.112 Students met by the review team did not have a full understanding of the formal procedures that existed for raising a complaint. However, students felt that if they wanted to do so they could approach their tutor. If a student wished to raise an informal complaint, they would go to their student representative or Course Tutor or discuss it within their next Fellowship Group. The College confirmed that they had not had a significant formal complaint raised in the previous three years.

2.113 At the time of the visit the review team heard that there has not been a formal academic appeal within the previous three years. The students that the review team met were not fully aware of the academic appeals procedure within their respective awarding body although felt confident enough in approaching a member of staff to find out what the procedure was if needed.

2.114 The College has in place appropriate procedures and follows the procedures and policies of each of their awarding bodies appropriately. Therefore, the review team concludes that this Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.115 The College's main partnerships with regard to delivering learning opportunities are with employers who provide work placements for students. The College aims to support students fulfil their potential through ongoing vocational guidance and practical training opportunities.

2.116 Students on the UoC undergraduate programme undertake both weekly and block placements. Following the 2014 revalidation of the programme the level 5 compulsory module is now assessed at level 6 and will run for the first time in 2017-18. The weekly placement are now a module assessed for credit at both level 4 and 5. These ran for the first time during 2015-16 and 2016-17 respectively.

2.117 There are processes in place for students and placement providers which seek to ensure that students are prepared for, and supported during, a placement.

2.118 Placement providers are not involved in summative assessment but provide a report on the progress the student has made and have well-understood mechanisms for warning the College if the placement is not proceeding well.

2.119 The provisions in place both by the awarding body and the College in relation to managing higher education provision with others would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.120 The review team tested the Expectation through meetings with staff, students, and employers and through scrutiny of a range of documents.

2.121 The College has appointed a Placement Coordinator who, together with the Course Tutor, is responsible for all aspects of the placement including liaison with employers. At present, the Placement Coordinator is also the Course Tutor in two of the three modules in which placements occur and, from 2017-8, will be Course Tutor for all three relevant modules.

2.122 During Orientation Week, which follows induction, the Placement Coordinator meets students both as a group and individually to assess the best allocation of both the weekly and block placements. During 2015-16, 46 students undertook block placements, which since their introduction in 2011-12 have seen students being placed worldwide.

2.123 The module in the newly revalidated UoC degree involves supervision of the placement by the Placement Coordinator through regular contact with both students and employers, giving an opportunity to resolve any issues that may arise. However, given the move to credit-bearing placement provision the review team felt that the current processes needed to be further developed to articulate the support and assurance mechanisms required to provide an academically rigorous placement experience. This includes arrangements for the approval of placements, the approval of learning agreements and for monitoring student engagement while on placement to ensure both the continuing validity of the student learning experience within the programme of study, and the opportunities provided that enable students to demonstrate successful achievement of the module

learning outcomes. To mitigate this, the review team **recommends** that the College develop and implement systematic processes and procedures for assuring the quality of the students' placement experience.

2.124 The review team considers that there are procedures in place for managing the provision of higher education with others, but they need strengthening to ensure an academically rigorous placement experience. This gives rise to the recommendation above. The Expectation is therefore met but the associated level of risk is moderate because of the informality of the current processes and procedures.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Moderate

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

2.125 The College offers postgraduate provision on behalf of QUB as a constituent college within the Institute of Theology. The College does not offer research degree provision with the University of Cumbria.

2.126 QUB is fully responsible for the regulations, monitoring, codes of practice, admissions, public information, appointment and training of supervisors for PhD students.

2.127 The College holds an extensive list of key theological texts within the library that are key for students to conduct in-depth research. Academic staff members within the College are extremely well qualified in acting as supervisors. The College set up a Centre for Intellectual Disability, Theology and Ministry in November 2015 to assist in creating further research opportunities for students who wish to focus their studies in this area and to align with current staff research activity. Through this Centre a number of postgraduate students have been able to conduct research, with a further potential PhD student starting in February 2017.

2.128 The arrangements put in place by QUB and the implementation of the College's limited responsibilities would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.129 The review team examined all appropriate evidence including information surrounding the setup of the Centre for Intellectual Disability, Theology and Ministry and how it could support an effective research environment. The review team questioned academic and support staff to ensure that the PhD students were sufficiently supported throughout their time at the College and confirmed this with the current PhD student.

2.130 The majority of opportunities offered to PhD students are organised through the awarding body. The review team heard that PhD students can take advantage of teaching opportunities within the College, supported by QUB which provides formal support through an organised training course. This provides an overview of teaching strategies, assessment for learning, teaching in small groups and learning objectives for programmes.

2.131 The current PhD student spoke in positive terms about their supervisor and the quality of supervision. They expressed satisfaction with the resources provided and that there is sufficient support and guidance to assist in successfully completing their research.

2.132 Overall, the College creates an appropriate research environment, in line with their delegated responsibilities, to allow students the opportunity to achieve successful academic, personal and professional outcomes from their research degrees. Therefore, this Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.133 In determining its judgement on the quality of student learning opportunities at the College, the review team considered the findings against the criteria as outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All Expectations in this area are met with low risk, with the exception of Expectation B10. The review team considers that Expectation B10 is met but that there is a moderate risk to student learning opportunities.

2.134 The review team identified a number of areas of good practice in the approach taken by the College to managing the quality of student learning opportunities. These were the extensive engagement with relevant internal and external stakeholders in relation to the approval of programmes that improves the quality of student learning opportunities; the proactive engagement with a wide range of staff development activities that ensures the ongoing enhancement of the quality of learning and teaching; the holistic approach to support within a community environment that enables students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential; and the proactive approach taken in seeking and responding to student feedback that enhances the student educational experience.

2.135 There are three recommendations in this judgement area: that the College formalise procedures through the committee structure to ensure more effective oversight of key quality assurance processes; provide formal structured training for student representatives to equip them to fulfil their role in educational enhancement and quality assurance effectively; and develop and implement systematic processes and procedures for assuring the quality of the students' placement experience.

2.136 The recommendations in this area relate to areas where there is a need to amend or update details in documentation; where there is insufficient emphasis or priority given to assuring quality; or where there are weaknesses in a part of the governance arrangements. The moderate risk attached to Expectation B10 does not present any serious risks to the management of this area.

2.137 The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities provided by the College **meets** UK expectations.

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Findings

3.1 The College updated its website in 2015 to ensure the clarity of information that is available to potential students and the public. This was done primarily in response to feedback received from staff and students. The College views its website as the hub for all definitive public information about the College, its programmes and how to apply to the College. Programme information on the website is checked annually and is reviewed by Programme Leaders and then signed off by the Director of Education before being sent to each of the awarding bodies for final approval.

3.2 The responsibility for checking and releasing information into the public domain, including the dissemination of information through social media platforms, lies with the Recruitment, Selection and Admissions Coordinator. The College is bound by the regulations set out in the Social Media Policy belonging to the UoC for their respective programmes.

3.3 Prospective students and members of the public can obtain information about the College through the newly developed prospectus and website. The website details key information in relation to all relevant programmes and general information about the College. Along with this the College hosts several open days throughout the year to provide key information.

3.4 The College has the systems, processes and procedures in place to allow the Expectation to be met in theory.

3.5 The review team examined all appropriate evidence relating to the use and production of information including all evidence relating to the development and implementation of the new VLE and information that students would receive prior to studying. The review team questioned staff responsible for the checking and updating of information and how frequently this occurs and confirmed with students that they were satisfied with the information they received prior to commencing their studies.

3.6 The College has a newly developed Recruitment, Selection and Admissions Policy, supported by the Admissions Cycle Flowchart 2016. The admissions process is outlined within these two documents and details the information students receive at key stages of the application process.

3.7 Each student within the College has access to their respective awarding body's and the College's VLE to access programme content and relevant policies and procedures. The College has recently trialled and now implemented a new VLE for all programmes. All academic staff have been trained in the use and understanding of this software.

3.8 The College provides all relevant and appropriate information to current students in relation to their programme and other relevant policies and procedures. Students receive all key information within their programme specifications, with further detail in relation to their programme held within each module descriptor. This information is also located on the newly

developed VLE. Additionally, all students receive a General Student Handbook that contains more general information about the College.

3.9 During 2014 the College implemented a new student management information system for their own internal use. However, the ultimate responsibility for student records and the recording of results of qualifications falls to each awarding body. Once students have successfully completed their studies, it is the responsibility of each of the awarding bodies to send any certificates to the students.

3.10 All students that the review team met stated they were satisfied with the information they received prior to applying to their programme, the information they received throughout the admissions process and the information they received throughout their orientation week at the beginning of their first semester. Furthermore, the review team noted that the website provides clear and concise information about all programmes, outlines in detail what is included and what assessments students will undertake throughout their time at the College. Additionally, the website clearly explains the relationship the College has with each of the awarding bodies and that currently the College's undergraduate provision with QUB is being taught out.

3.11 Staff confirmed with the review team their full understanding of the sign-off procedures within the College in relation to programme information, which is checked by the appropriate programme teams and subsequently signed off by the Programme Leader or the Director of Education, before being signed off by the awarding body. Public-facing information and all other relevant information that would be under the College's remit is checked by the Recruitment, Selection and Admissions Coordinator with sign-off happening between the Director of Education or Principal, when appropriate.

3.12 The majority of the staff that the review team met stated that they had received training in the use of the new VLE and felt that there was sufficient support in place through additional training and IT support. The majority of the students felt that the new VLE was extremely beneficial as coursework could now be submitted electronically and it was also user-friendly. Students who studied programmes accredited by QUB felt they would not need to make use of the new VLE as all of their programme-content was available through their awarding body's VLE; however, they may need to use this occasionally.

3.13 The new VLE is to be a repository for all relevant processes and procedures that students may want to have access to. This includes external examiner reports and minutes for key meetings held within the College. At the time of the review visit this had not been fully realised; however, the structure was clearly in place for this information to be fully uploaded.

3.14 The review team concludes that the College has in place clear systems, processes and procedures to ensure that the information it produces for its intended audiences is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. Therefore, this Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

3.15 In determining its judgement on the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the College, the review team considered the findings against the criteria as outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The review team considers that the Expectation in this area is met and that the risk to student learning opportunities is low.

3.16 The College produces a variety of information in different forms and for different audiences which are generally sound and trustworthy. The College makes good use of its updated website and recently developed VLE to convey information about its taught programmes, although it relies more on Queen's University Belfast materials in the case of postgraduate research programmes.

3.17 Overall, the review team concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities provided by the College about its provision **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 College's strategic approach to enhancement is articulated within the Strategic Plan for 2015-18 which clearly states the College's aim to enhance the quality and range of learning opportunities. Enhancement activity is also extended to the staff experience. The Strategic Plan notes the use of internal review systems to determine subsequent enhancements.

4.2 The College states that there is a strategic focus on planned actions that are embedded systematically in clear processes of quality assurance in order to improve the quality of student learning opportunities. This supports the ethos within the College that expects and encourages enhancement of student learning across all areas of higher education provision.

4.3 The College uses annual review processes as well as student feedback (both formal and informal) to identify opportunities for enhancement.

4.4 The processes at the College would allow the Expectation to be met.

4.5 The review team tested the Expectation through discussions with students and staff, as well as scrutiny of a range of documentation including minutes of student staff meetings, committee meetings, external examiner reports and annual evaluation reports.

4.6 The review team found that there is a culture of enhancement and a desire to improve the student experience driven and facilitated through the operation of the EDC. The College also uses external review processes, such as those undertaken by QAA, as well as internal review processes to identify opportunities for enhancement and establish processes for their development and implementation.

4.7 A number of examples were provided to the review team as evidence of the approach which includes identifying, supporting and implementing developments. These include Best Practice sessions that are held each semester and used by staff to showcase new initiatives in learning, teaching and assessment and peer assessment, which has been introduced as a consequence of staff research through the PGCHET. This approach was piloted through one module, feedback gathered from students and the process commended by the external examiner. The outcomes of this pilot were discussed at a Best Practice session and the approach rolled out to other modules.

4.8 Following consultation with students in 2015-16, and during discussion through the Community Life Committee and at Senior Management Team meetings, it was agreed that Fellowship Groups, in order to develop students' leadership skills should be led by level 6 students from academic year 2016-17 and a Guide for Fellowship Group Leaders has been produced and support put in place for new leaders. This initiative has been well received by students and staff.

4.9 The College has fully implemented the recommendation made following the Review for Educational Oversight in 2012 with the roll out, in 2016-17, of a VLE across all years for UoC validated provision. The College took a carefully planned approach, monitored through the EDC, and drawing on external input through software providers. One member of

staff undertook training and piloted use of the VLE through one module in 2015-16. Staff and student training was put in place so that all could engage effectively with the VLE from the start of the current academic year with ongoing support from the software provider. The review team was shown the extent to which the VLE is now being used and both students and staff were very positive about this enhancement and felt supported in being able to use it effectively.

4.10 As outlined in Section B1, the College approached revalidation of the UoC undergraduate provision from an enhancement perspective drawing on internal and external stakeholder input. This approach led to an increased focus on employability, with placements being integrated into modules, and improvements to modules, including content and contact hours. This proactive approach to consultation was noted by the approval panel for the awarding body.

4.11 The review team noted that students not only recognised and valued the College's commitment to continual improvement but also understood their role in identifying improvements both formally and informally.

4.12 The review team considers that enhancement is a strategic focus, it is embedded within the College's activities and the evidence indicates a culture of consultation to support improvements to the student and staff experience. On the basis of the evidence seen and the discussions with staff and students, the review team identified two features of good practice which sit under Expectations B3 and B5 and which contribute to the review team's conclusion that that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.13 In determining its judgement on the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the College, the review team considered the findings against the criteria as outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The review team considers that the Expectation in this area is met and that the risk to student learning opportunities is low.

4.14 The approach to enhancement stems from strategic documentation which supports the ethos within the College that expects and encourages enhancement of student learning across all areas of higher education provision. Staff engage with a range of activities that ensure the ongoing enhancement of the quality of learning and teaching. Student engagement in enhancement is embedded through effective student representation structures and through good use of formal and informal feedback. Systems and processes, including revalidation process, within the College support enhancement.

4.15 Overall, the review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

Glossary

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

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

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

Academic standards

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

Award

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

Awarding organisation

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

Blended learning

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

Credit(s)

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

Degree-awarding body

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

Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

Dual award or double award

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

e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning

Enhancement

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

Expectations

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

Flexible and distributed learning

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

See also **distance learning**.

Framework

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

Framework for higher education qualifications

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

Good practice

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

Learning opportunities

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

Learning outcomes

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

Multiple awards

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

Operational definition

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

Programme (of study)

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

Programme specifications

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

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.

QAA1791 - R5100 - Jan 17

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