



# Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of the Centre for Alternative Technology

December 2017

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## About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at the Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT). The review took place from 12 to 14 December 2017 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Tommie Anderson-Jaquest
- Dr Libby Pearson
- Mr Harry Williams (student reviewer).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Key findings

### Judgements

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

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

### Good practice

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

- The innovative design and development of adaptable programmes that provide a wide range of practical and professional skills and academic rigour for students that are aligned with the Centre's mission and values (Expectations B1 and Enhancement).
- Well-organised and flexible learning experience that enhances the provision of learning opportunities for students (Expectation B3).
- The recognition of individual student capacities and the availability of specialist resources that support their academic, personal and professional development (Expectation B4).
- The wide range of assessment activities including live projects that use bespoke resources to engage and challenge students (Expectations B6 and B4).
- The strong community engagement that promotes an innovative and positive environment for all stakeholders in the strategic enhancement process (Expectations Enhancement, B3 and B4).

## About the provider

The Centre for Alternative Technology (the Centre/CAT) is an education and visitor centre demonstrating practical solutions for sustainability. The Centre, which is based in Machynlleth, Powys, Wales covers all aspects of green living including environmental building, eco-sanitation, woodland management, renewable energy, energy efficiency and organic growing. It has a 40-year history of delivering education in the field of sustainability to people of all ages.

All the higher education delivered by the Centre is based in its Graduate School of the Environment (GSE) and is validated by either the University of East London (UEL) or Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU). Its mission is concerned with the search for globally sustainable whole and ecologically sound technologies and ways of life. The Centre has a holistic approach to its work, integrating ideas and practice relating to land use, buildings, energy production and use, diet and health, waste management and recycling.

Since the QAA December 2016 review, the GSE has formed a partnership with a new validating university, Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) to develop a new course in the general area of sustainable food and land use. The Centre has also introduced a new course, validated by the University of East London, entitled Sustainability in Energy Provision and Demand Management (SEPDM).

Partly as a result of the introduction of these two new courses, the intake to the MSc Sustainability and Adaptation suite of courses will rise to over 120 this year, above 72 last year, 40 the previous year and just 22 in 2014. The Centre believes that the intake will grow modestly on its 2017 level once the MArch is established.

Key challenges facing the Centre include maintaining robust student recruitment, student funding and developing the new partnership with LJMU.

In December 2013, the Centre underwent a QAA Review for Specific Course Designation which identified four features of good practice, with one advisable and five desirable recommendations. Subsequent annual monitoring reports in 2015 and 2016 noted that the Centre had fully addressed the recommendations and developed the good practices.

## Explanation of findings

This section explains the review findings in greater detail.

### 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 Centre has partnership agreements with two awarding bodies, Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) and the University of East London (UEL), and uses these arrangements for the award of its degrees. The partnership agreements clearly outline the designated responsibilities of both LJMU and UEL for ensuring that threshold standards are maintained in all the Centre's Graduate School of the Environment's (GSE) postgraduate degree programmes - in respect to the validation, approval and review of programmes. The awarding bodies determine that the requirements of the FHEQ, relevant Subject Benchmark Statements and any professional, statutory and regulatory bodies are met.

1.2 For these programmes, the Centre is jointly responsible for programme development and the production of definitive programme information to ensure that aspects of Expectation A1, including alignment with the FHEQ and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements, are adhered to and referenced. CAT's Head of School has operational responsibility for the delivery of the programmes and reports on a regular basis to the Centre's Academic Council. The Quality Assurance manual and the Academic Council

agenda and minutes confirm that this responsibility is exercised. The Centre therefore has developed an effective internal system for setting and maintaining academic standards that comply with the threshold academic standards set by its validating bodies, which would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.3 The review team scrutinised documentation including the Learning and Teaching Strategy; Quality Assurance Manual; programme specifications; module handbooks; approval documentation; external examiner reports; annual review monitoring reports; and met both staff from the Centre and a representative of one of the awarding partners as well as students.

1.4 The documentation confirms that the Centre is delivering and assessing each programme in accordance with the respective awarding partner's regulations and that it is meeting its requirements for monitoring and review. Discussions with staff and students and a review of related documentation confirm that the Centre's internal processes are robust, that academic staff are well prepared for their role in validation responsibilities and that all qualifications are positioned at the appropriate level and named in accordance with the titling convention outlined in the FHEQ.

1.5 The review team concludes that the Centre has appropriate internal processes to follow and adheres to its delegated responsibilities of its awarding bodies enabling the Expectation to be met.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.6 The establishment of transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks for the award of academic credit and qualifications for programmes delivered by the Centre are regulated by LJMU and UEL in accordance with the respective awarding body's overarching regulations and academic frameworks. In response, the Centre has developed a strategic approach in this regard and has developed a well-established internal framework for the monitoring of academic standards and developing regulations, policies and procedures that conform to the validating body guidelines. The Centre therefore has appropriate systems in place to enable the Expectation to be met.

1.7 The review team scrutinised documentation including the contractual arrangements with the awarding bodies; minutes of the Academic Council; validation documentation; Programme Committee minutes for each programme; staff-student liaison committees (SSLCs); Centre regulations and policies; the Learning and Teaching Strategic Plan; annual monitoring reports; external examiner reports; and met staff and students.

1.8 The policies and regulations issued to the Centre demonstrate that the awarding bodies maintain the academic frameworks and regulations that govern the awards they deliver.

1.9 In response the Centre has developed transparent governance frameworks and committee structures to ensure academic standards are maintained, which includes an overarching Academic Council that has oversight of the quality of learning opportunities. The Council has both student and awarding body representation and gives priority to the resolution of issues and the production of compliance documentation relating to maintaining the academic standards of its validating partners.

1.10 In practice, the structures and processes supporting the Centre's postgraduate programmes demonstrate a clear understanding of academic and assessment regulations. Staff involved in curriculum design demonstrated how they have worked in accordance with the awarding bodies' regulations, which confirmed that the Centre is meeting their requirements in this regard. Staff and students gave a clear overview of the design and structure of the programmes, academic and assessment regulations, external inputs, monitoring and review procedures, and staff understand the different requirements of each awarding body/organisation.

1.11 The approach to quality processes and oversight ensures that academic standards are appropriately set and maintained. The review team confirms that the Centre is meeting the requirements of each awarding body in its academic governance arrangements, which provides a transparent and comprehensive framework supporting the implementation of the regulations governing awards of academic credit. The review team concludes that the Expectation has been met and the 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**

1.12 The programmes are validated, approved and reviewed by the awarding bodies who maintain a definitive record of each programme approved for delivery by the Centre. The Centre has appropriate systems in place and these are clearly outlined in the Quality Assurance Manual, with reference to the awarding body policies and regulations. This would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.13 The review team scrutinised documentation including the Centre's Quality Assurance Manual; programme specifications; module specifications; student handbooks; agendas and minutes of the Academic Council, programme team meetings and student staff liaison meetings; annual monitoring reports; programme and module modification/approval documents; external verification and examiners reports; and met staff and students.

1.14 The approval documentation issued to the Centre demonstrates that awarding bodies keep a definitive record for each programme and are responsible for ensuring that there is an unambiguous understanding about the nature of their respective programmes that have been formally approved for delivery through the Centre.

1.15 This is articulated in a definitive record for each programme, which is then used as the reference point for the delivery of the programme by teaching staff, for its assessment by internal and external examiners, and in subsequent monitoring and review both internally and by the respective awarding bodies. For example, Review and Enhancement Process (REP) reports are completed by UEL for each programme annually. In the case of LJMU, the programme is still in its infancy and monitoring is scheduled to commence in 2018. The definitive record is also used as the basis of the record of study and enables information on the programme of study to be made available to students at the start of their programme and throughout their studies.

1.16 The records confirm that the Centre is delivering and assessing each programme in accordance with awarding body regulations and that it is meeting their requirements for monitoring and review. Discussion with staff and students, along with a review of sample transcripts issued to students, confirm the Centre is managing appropriately the provision of records of study for students and alumni.

1.17 The review team concludes that the Centre is meeting the requirements of each awarding body in its delivery of approved programmes. The Expectation is therefore met and the level of risk is low.

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



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

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

**Findings**

1.18 Responsibility for ensuring that all programmes have been validated or revalidated in alignment with the awarding bodies are managed under the contractual arrangements/partnership agreements for postgraduate provision and managed through the respective awarding body's Academic Partnerships Office.

1.19 The Centre has in place processes for programme approval that work appropriately and comply with the academic frameworks and regulations of its awarding bodies. The Governance frameworks in place and Quality Assurance Manual clearly define the validation and quality assurance processes. The Centre therefore has appropriate systems in place to enable the Expectation to be met.

1.20 The review team considered all the documentary evidence provided by the Centre including the Quality Assurance Manual and policies that have relevance to this Expectation, and met with senior and teaching staff as well as students.

1.21 The approval documentation provides evidence that the Centre makes extensive use of external stakeholder input and appropriate use of Subject Benchmark Statements during programme design and approval. Where there is no relevant Subject Benchmark Statement for the bespoke offerings, the Centre develops its programmes with reference to a broad range of related benchmarks. This enables programme design and development of programmes that are adaptable and provide a wide range of practical and professional skills and academic rigour for students that are aligned with the Centre's mission and values. Programme approval tests that standards are set at the appropriate level.

1.22 Staff who participate in programme design and approval demonstrated a thorough understanding of the degree-awarding bodies' processes and how these are used to test that academic standards are set at the appropriate level and how they have ensured that learning outcomes are aligned with the relevant descriptors, and appropriate documentation shows how modules for each programme are mapped to the learning outcomes.

1.23 The review team concludes that the Centre is meeting the requirements of each awarding body in the design and development of approved programmes, and that the Expectation has been met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.24 The awarding bodies are ultimately responsible for maintaining academic standards on validated programmes and meeting the Expectations set out in Part A of the Quality Code. The Centre takes responsibility for ensuring that all procedures, rules, regulations, assessment and credit requirements of the awarding bodies are implemented and that internal structures for maintaining academic standards are robust and meet the Expectations of the Quality Code.

1.25 The processes and documentation in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.26 The review team tested this Expectation through meetings with senior and teaching staff, professional support staff, and students. The review team also examined documentation relating to the Centre's provision of information and the internal systems in place for ensuring that academic standards are met and maintained.

1.27 The Centre delivers its own postgraduate programmes that are validated by UEL and LJMU. The Graduate School of the Environment (GSE) produces programme specifications, module guidelines, and student handbooks for every programme. All documents are subjected to periodic review at internal and external level: for example, the Centre's comprehensive review of postgraduate programme specifications undertaken in July 2017 and the UEL-CAT Collaborative Review undertaken in April 2017.

1.28 The Centre has developed a robust internal system of quality management to ensure that UK threshold academic standards and those of the awarding bodies are met. Oversight for quality management rests with the Head of School who is also the Registrar, in consultation with Programme Leaders and the CEO. Internal responsibilities for strategic and operational matters are vested in two bodies: the Programme Leaders' Group (the equivalent of an SMT) who oversee all strategic and operational matters in the GSE and the Academic Council, which has designated responsibility for quality matters and ensuring that policies and procedures align with awarding body regulations and Quality Code expectations. At the second level, Programme Committees for each validated programme implement the Academic Council's decisions and manage operations. SSLCs, operating in each programme, ensure that student interests remain paramount in the GSE's academic provision.

1.29 The Centre produces an Annual Quality Report that identifies issues, actions taken, and progress made in respect of assuring that academic standards have been met. On the basis of gaps identified, senior managers, in consultation with other stakeholders, produce an action plan. In a similar vein, staff members develop and monitor a number of different action plans aimed at resolving quality issues: for example, the Strategic Plan, the Enhancement Strategy, external examiner reports, and QAA Annual Monitoring Reviews. Analyses of these materials are used to generate findings for UEL's REP reports that the

Centre must complete every year for each programme. UEL audits all reports and makes recommendations to be actioned by the Centre. The Centre, in turn, implements an action plan to ensure all gaps have been closed, thereby ensuring that threshold academic standards have been met. The partnership with LJMU has just begun but the reporting process is expected to be very similar.

1.30 The Centre, in collaboration with its awarding partners, has processes in place for assuring that internal systems for maintaining UK threshold academic standards on its validated programmes are robust and fit for purpose. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.31 The Centre fulfils its delegated responsibilities for programme monitoring and review in accordance with the respective awarding body academic regulations and procedures. The policy and procedures are clearly outlined in the Quality Assurance Manual and describe the framework within which monitoring and review of programmes is undertaken to ensure appropriate standards are being maintained. The Centre, in conjunction with its awarding bodies, monitors its programmes to check that UK threshold standards are being met through annual monitoring and periodic review. External examiner reports on academic standards feed into the annual reports.

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

1.33 In order to assess the effectiveness of the Centre's procedures for monitoring and review, the review team examined the Quality Assurance Manual and related policy documents, committee minutes, external examiner reports, and UEL annual monitoring reports. The team also met with staff and students.

1.34 The annual monitoring process uses statistical student performance and achievement data to inform any enhancements to the programme. External examiners comment on the suitability of assessments set in relation to UK threshold standards as well as on student performance. University liaison tutors are responsible for observing that the programmes are delivered in accordance with what was approved (using the definitive record of the programme as the reference point), that academic currency is subsequently maintained and that programmes continue to meet the UK threshold standards and the awarding bodies' own academic standards.

1.35 The reports confirm that the Centre has a clear framework for the monitoring and review of programmes that feeds into annual overview reports as part of a higher education quality cycle and that it actively participates in the periodic reviews process.

1.36 The review team found that the Centre, with the oversight of the Universities, operates effective monitoring and review processes that demonstrate UK threshold standards are achieved and the academic standards of the awarding body are maintained. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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**

1.37 Awarding bodies are ultimately responsible for maintaining academic standards on validated programmes and meeting the Expectations set out in Part A of the Quality Code. The Centre takes responsibility for ensuring that all procedures, rules, regulations, assessment and credit requirements of the awarding bodies are implemented and that internal structures for maintaining academic standards are robust and meet the Expectations of the Quality Code.

1.38 The processes and documentation in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.39 The review team tested this Expectation through meetings with senior and teaching staff, professional support staff, and students. The review team also examined documentation relating to the Centre's provision of information and the internal systems in place for ensuring that academic standards are met and maintained.

1.40 The Centre delivers its own postgraduate programmes, which are validated by UEL and LJMU. The GSE produces programme specifications, module guidelines, and student handbooks for every programme. All documents are subjected to periodic review at internal and external level: for example, the Centre's comprehensive review of postgraduate programme specifications undertaken in July 2017 and the UEL-CAT Collaborative Review undertaken in April 2017.

1.41 The Centre has developed a robust internal system of quality management to ensure that UK threshold academic standards and those of the awarding bodies are met. Oversight for quality management rests with the Head of School who is also the Registrar, in consultation with Programme Leaders and the CEO. Internal responsibilities for strategic and operational matters are vested in two bodies: the Programme Leaders' Group (the equivalent of an SMT) who oversee all strategic and operational matters in the GSE and the Academic Council, which has designated responsibility for quality matters and ensuring that policies and procedures align with awarding body regulations and Quality Code expectations. At the second level, Programme Committees for each validated programme implement the Academic Council's decisions and manage operations. SSLCs operate in each programme ensuring that student interests remain paramount in the GSE's academic provision.

1.42 The Centre produces an Annual Quality Report that identifies issues, actions taken, and progress made in respect of assuring that academic standards have been met. On the basis of gaps identified, senior managers, in consultation with other stakeholders, produce an action plan. In a similar vein, staff members develop and monitor a number of different action plans aimed at resolving quality issues: for example, the Strategic Plan, the Enhancement Strategy, external examiner reports, and QAA Annual Monitoring Reviews. Analyses of these materials are used to generate findings for UEL's REP reports that the Centre must complete every year for each programme. UEL audits all reports and makes

recommendations to be actioned by the Centre. The Centre, in turn, implements an action plan to ensure all gaps have been closed, thereby ensuring that threshold academic standards have been met.

1.43 The Centre shares responsibilities for staff development with its awarding bodies. Senior managers ensure that staff members have access to sufficient development activities, engage in peer reviews and undertake appraisals. UEL provides additional development opportunities, including training and participating in collaborative conferences (see also Chapter B3).

1.44 The Centre, in collaboration with its awarding partners, has processes in place for assuring that internal systems for maintaining UK threshold academic standards on its validated programmes are robust and fit for purpose. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated 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

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

1.46 The Centre effectively follows the requirements of its awarding bodies to maintain academic standards. These processes are supported by the Centre's own internal procedures and guidance. There are no specific areas of good practice and no recommendations or affirmations.

1.47 The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies at the Centre **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 Strategic oversight of programme design, development and approval for the Centre's postgraduate programmes is held jointly with the validating bodies, UEL and LJMU. The Centre's strategic approach and organisational mission is such that the Centre leads on programme design by virtue of its bespoke offerings and wide-reaching expertise. The Centre operates within the quality procedures of the validating body for approval and modification of programmes and modules. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.2 To assess the effectiveness of these practices and procedures the review team analysed the Centre's documents and associated supporting evidence such as approval documentation, programme specifications and minutes of the Academic Council. It met with a representative from UEL, senior, academic and support staff and programme leads for the higher education provision.

2.3 The approval documentation shows that the Centre makes extensive use of external stakeholder input and appropriate use of Subject Benchmark Statements during programme design and approval. Where there is no single relevant Subject Benchmark Statement for the bespoke offerings, the Centre develops its programmes with reference to a broad range of related benchmarks. This enables programme design and development of programmes that are adaptable and provide a wide range of practical and professional skills and academic rigour for students that are aligned with the Centre's mission and values. Programme approval tests that standards are set at the appropriate level.

2.4 The Centre is wholly responsible for the delivery of modules, assessment-setting and first marking, and undertaking regular reviews to ensure continued academic currency and professional relevance. Aspects such as the minor modification of programmes are shared between the Centre and the awarding bodies.

2.5 The Centre's approach to this responsibility is centred on its quality management processes and is published on its website and set out in its Quality Assurance Manual.

2.6 Students are encouraged to develop their creative practice throughout their programme and are afforded the ability to engage with leading-edge practitioners and working to real-time projects and schedules. The programmes are underpinned by competency in analysis and research through flexible approaches to learning, taught by project, enabling students to develop an evolving skill-set in their chosen fields with complementary critical and self-reflective skills. As such the Centre is a niche provider and has established a wide-reaching reputation for its bespoke offerings to enable the fostering of creativity through programme design, development and approval. The Centre encourages innovation alongside a culture of continuous improvement of its provision. Programmes have been clearly designed to reflect developments in the subject area and practice, and embrace new technologies or innovative modes of delivery and study, including those which offer



flexibility to students taking the programme. In view of this, the review team identified the innovative design and development of adaptable programmes that provide a wide range of practical and professional skills and academic rigour for students that are aligned with the Centre's mission and values to be **good practice**.

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

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

**Findings**

2.8 The Centre shares responsibility for the recruitment and admission of students with its awarding partners. The Centre's admissions policy outlines its approach to the recruitment and admissions process and provides information relating to entry requirements and assessment of accredited learning. Applications are made directly to the Centre; interviews, portfolios of work, and other selection activities are used to assess the suitability of applicants. Oversight of the admissions and recruitment process is maintained and operationally based at programme level, with institutional oversight maintained by the Centre's Academic Council. Marketing activities and materials inform both the public and prospective students as to the Centre's higher education provision.

2.9 The processes in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.10 The review team tested this Expectation through meetings with senior and teaching staff, professional support staff, and students. The review team also examined documentation relating to recruitment, selection and admission processes.

2.11 The Centre shares responsibility for the recruitment and admission of students onto its higher education programmes with its awarding partners. This is driven by the strategic priorities of the Centre, as articulated in its Strategic Plan, and the learning and teaching strategy. Applicants formally apply for a specific programme by completing an online application. The Centre assesses the suitability of an applicant through interviewing candidates and examining portfolios of work. Once an application is received the Centre's student support team ensures that all applicants meet English language requirements, are eligible to study in the UK, and possess suitable academic or professional experience.

2.12 In the case of the MSc Sustainability and Adaptation programme suite, Student Support Officers are authorised to offer applicants a place, on behalf of the Programme Leader, if the applicant clearly meets the academic entry requirements published on the programme validation documentation. If the applicant does not meet the academic requirements for the programme but does provide evidence of relevant experiential learning, Student Support Officers will consult the Programme Leader and make an offer if deemed suitable.

2.13 Additional requirements, as a result of professional body accreditation requirements, mean the selection process for enrolment onto the MArch: Sustainable Architecture is more complex. Here, applicants are required to submit a portfolio of their work and attend an interview with the programme team. Unsuccessful applicants may appeal admissions decisions through the Centre's student complaints policy and procedure.

2.14 Once the admissions process has concluded the Student Support Team becomes responsible for managing the student registration and enrolment process. Student Support Officers are responsible for maintaining communication with new students and, in that role, issue introductory materials including a welcome letter, module calendar, and the recommended pre-reading.

2.15 Having overall responsibility for the recruitment and admissions process is the Centre's Head of School in conjunction with the relevant Programme Leader. The Centre's Academic Council entry requirements are in line with each programme's validation agreement. Operationally, the Programme Leader meetings and the Centre Managers' Forum monitor recruitment progress against previously agreed programme-specific targets.

2.16 The Centre uses its website as the primary method of communicating with the public and prospective students. Marketing materials must be approved by the Head of School prior to publication to ensure they are accurate and fit-for-purpose. Other sources of information include the Centre's postgraduate prospectus which lists the courses available to students, and information on applying, fees, and funding postgraduate study. The Centre also runs open days aimed at ensuring prospective students have the information they need to make an informed decision. In meetings during the review visit, the team was made aware of the appointment of a full-time Graduate School Marketing Officer with the responsibility for coordinating all student recruitment and marketing activities.

2.17 The Centre, in collaboration with its awarding partners, has processes in place for the recruitment, selection, and admission of students. 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 (B3): Higher education providers, working with their staff, students and other stakeholders, articulate and systematically review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices, so that every student is enabled to develop as an independent learner, study their chosen subject(s) in depth and enhance their capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking.**

### **Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching***

#### **Findings**

2.18 The Centre adopts a strategic approach to learning and teaching and enhancing learning opportunities for all students. It aims to ensure that every student is enabled to develop as an independent learner, to study her/his subject in depth and to enhance capacities for analytical, critical and creative thinking and has systems in place to monitor systematically the effectiveness of the learning and teaching strategy and initiatives introduced.

2.19 The processes in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.20 The review team tested this Expectation through meetings with senior and teaching staff, professional support staff and students. The review team also examined documentation relating to learning and teaching approaches and processes.

2.21 The Centre adopts a flexible approach to learning and teaching that accommodates students from diverse backgrounds, with differing levels of academic and subject experience. Students may register initially to study on a full-time or part-time basis, fulfil programme requirements through blended learning or complete the programme as a distance learner. If personal circumstances change, students have the right to change their mode of study, providing they follow the Centre's registration procedures and comply with awarding body regulations.

2.22 The GSE provides students with clear and current information regarding programme learning outcomes and the levels of support available to them which take individual modes of study fully into account. Inductions for all programmes take place at the beginning of each term, and enrolment packages are distributed to all new students. All students have access to the virtual learning environment (VLE) and the GSE website, programme handbooks and module guides. In addition, each student is assigned to a personal tutor, and a personal development plan has been introduced for all students. As of September 2017, all students have personal development planning tutorials.

2.23 The GSE offers students a variety of opportunities to meet module and programme learning outcomes. For example, open assignment briefs and projects allow students flexibility of topic choice and approach. Online forum discussions facilitate opportunities for learning. The Centre also provides opportunities for every student to acquire practical skills and to expand capacities for analytical, critical and creative thinking as an independent learner. Students are encouraged to undertake projects and pursue areas of interest outside of their specialist programme areas: for example, working in the CAT visitor centre, attending non-academic short courses and participating in building projects on the CAT site. The well-organised and flexible learning experience that enhances the provision of learning opportunities for students is **good practice**.

2.24 The Centre places a high priority on assuring the quality of lecturers delivering on each programme. The Head of School and Programme Leaders ensure that lecturers are appropriately qualified: for example, teaching staff members either have PhD plus a Higher

Education Academy qualification or are highly experienced practitioners in their field.

2.25 The Centre has introduced a staff development strategy to ensure that lecturers and support staff keep up-to-date in their specialist subject areas and that teaching approaches remain effective and fit for purpose. The GSE also ensures that all staff members participate regularly in peer reviews, undertake staff development activities and engage in annual appraisals. In addition, lecturers are expected to engage in scholarly and research activity. The Centre also provides some funding for continuing professional development activities. Staff members may take short courses free of charge twice a year to develop new skills and top up existing ones. Participation in external practice or academic engagement beyond CAT is encouraged.

2.26 The Centre takes student feedback about the learning experience very seriously. Every student can monitor her/his progress and has regular opportunities to reflect on feedback and engage in dialogue with staff. In addition, students provide feedback on learning and teaching as student representatives, in surveys, in Programme Committee meetings, in SSLC meetings and in the Academic Council. Summaries of the main feedback received in respect of each module are published in the Module Handbook issued in the following term.

2.27 The Centre systematically reviews its teaching and learning practices in order to enhance the learning opportunities it provides for all students. Feedback is obtained from a variety of internal and external sources. Senior managers produce an Annual Quality Report, which reviews the year's academic provision, including learning and teaching activities and produces an action plan to improve results. The Centre also completes detailed annual reports required by its awarding bodies: for example, the REP report required by UEL that incorporates sections on learning and teaching. External examiners provide detailed feedback on teaching and learning in each programme.

2.28 On the basis of information gained from a large number of resources, senior managers also produce and monitor detailed action plans and make recommendations for improvement that are discussed in major committees: in particular, the Academic Council, the Programme Leaders' meetings (equivalent to SMT), the Programme Management Committees and SSLCs.

2.29 The Centre has an enhancement strategy that aims to ensure that 'continuous' improvement of all stakeholders constitutes an intrinsic feature of GSE's approach to learning and teaching. There is strong community engagement that promotes an innovative and positive environment for all stakeholders in the strategic enhancement process (see good practice under Enhancement).

2.30 The Centre, in collaboration with its awarding partners, has processes in place for assuring and enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in ways that facilitate, support and enhance the academic development of all students. Robust monitoring systems are in place to ensure that approaches to teaching and learning remain effective and fit for purpose. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

**Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement**

**Findings**

2.31 The GSE's strategic approach for enabling students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential combines a 'loose fit' strategy rooted in general operational planning implemented to secure Learning and Teaching and Enhancement strategic aims, with a 'tighter fit' individualised strategy aimed at accommodating different student learning styles and capabilities and developing individual academic, personal and professional skills. Effectiveness is monitored through feedback provided by students, critical reviews undertaken by senior management, and feedback provided by external examiners, awarding bodies and organisations such as QAA.

2.32 The processes in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.33 The review team tested this Expectation through meetings with senior and teaching staff, professional support staff, and students. The review team also examined documentation relating to the strategies and systems in place for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of approaches and resources used to enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.

2.34 The Centre's strategic approach to developing individual potential commences prior to enrolment. Potential students have access to detailed programme information on the website and in the prospectus. Open days provide candidates with a clearer idea of what to expect from the programmes offered. Prospective students also learn of opportunities by attending summer festivals and green exhibitions.

2.35 Students accepted on Centre programmes receive a welcome pack. In compliance with UEL's Induction Policy, for example, student inductions take place at the start of every registration period.

2.36 The Centre aims to ensure that students registered on GSE programmes understand that no single learning approach can meet the needs of all students. To that end, senior managers and lecturers stress the importance of adopting an individualised approach to learning from the very beginning of the programme. Lecturers set work during the first few weeks of programmes to assess individual knowledge and aptitude for programme content. Life Postcards and a first essay entitled 'Why CAT why me now?' help to accomplish these aims. Additional support and training is given to students with special learning needs. The recognition of individual student capacities and the availability of specialist resources that support their academic, personal and professional development is **good practice**.

2.37 The Centre's framework for the successful transition and academic progression of students and developing their personal and professional potential is founded on the close-knit relationship that exists between academic staff, students and support staff. During teaching weeks, senior managers create a family atmosphere, where staff and students spend time together informally as well as academically. Students can meet personal tutors at least once each month, and Programme Leaders monitor tutorial activities. Students also have open access to Student Support Officers. Students away from campus have access to personal tutors through Skype. In addition, from September 2017, each student will produce a personal development plan to be discussed with the tutor twice each year. There is a

strong community engagement that promotes an innovative and positive environment for all stakeholders in the strategic enhancement process (see good practice under Enhancement).

2.38 The Centre also provides opportunities for all students to develop personally and professionally. For example, students may become student representatives for their particular programme or become student members of the Academic Council. They may also participate in staff-student meetings and individual Programme Committee meetings held on a regular basis. In respect of professional skills development, they may participate in various workshops, engage in a variety of 'learning by doing' projects, gain experience working in the CAT Visitor Centre and undertake a variety of short courses. In addition, the Centre's unique location provides a multitude of opportunities for students to undertake a wide variety of projects aimed at creating a more sustainable environment, including building work carried out on the site. CAT has forged strong links with external experts over the 40 years of its existence and receives feedback from employers on the programmes offered. Opportunities also exist to learn from external speakers, who have professional experience in the field, in informal sessions following events. There is a wide range of assessment activities including live projects that use bespoke resources to engage and challenge students (see Expectation B6).

2.39 Student feedback about their academic, personal and professional experiences in the various programmes plays a key part in developing Centre initiatives aimed at enhancing the learning environment. New programmes, such as the MSc Sustainable Food and Natural Resources, the MSc Sustainability in Energy Provision and Demand Management and the MArch: Sustainable Architecture have expanded academic and vocational opportunities for students. Focus placed upon acquisition of practical knowledge gained through hands-on experience has improved prospects for the personal and professional development of students on all programmes at all levels.

2.40 The Centre ensures that all students registered on GSE programmes have access to a wide range of learning resources. On site, the Centre maintains a collection of hardcopy reference materials for student use. Throughout the term, lecturers provide subject-focused information on the GSE's VLE for all students. GSE students have the same library access and borrowing rights as UEL and LJMU students. Moreover, all UK-based GSE students can join the Society of College, National and University Libraries, which enables them to access the nearest university library. They can also use the inter-library system to access any published book.

2.41 The Centre has effective processes and procedures in place for enabling students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. Effective systems are in place for monitoring and evaluating arrangements and the adequacy of resources. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.42 The Centre aims to engage students, individually and collectively, in quality assurance and enhancement processes through student representation on Centre committees and continual feedback mechanisms. Student representatives are elected from each programme at the start of each academic period. Student representatives are invited to attend Programme Committee meetings, the Centre's Academic Council, and meetings of the SSLC. In other ways the Centre aims to engage students through online surveys and student-staff feedback meetings. Student engagement is monitored through the SSLC, Academic Council, and the engagement of students at quality assurance committees.

2.43 The processes and documentation in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.44 The review team tested this Expectation through meetings with senior and teaching staff, professional support staff, and students. The team also examined documentation relating to student engagement in quality and enhancement processes, including the student submission.

2.45 The Centre promotes student engagement through student surveys, student representatives, and via their attendance at formal meetings. Student representatives are invited to attend Programme Committee meetings, the Centre's Academic Council, and meetings of the SSLC. SSLCs are made up of student representatives and members of academic staff. SSLCs aim to deal with concerns at a local level providing a formal channel of communication between students and the Centre. They meet four times during the academic period to consider any business relating to the student learning experience.

2.46 Student representatives are elected per cohort of each programme with specific representation of the Centre's large distance-learning cohorts. Though student representatives are not provided with formal training, an informal induction to their role is completed during their first appearance at a Programme Committee meeting. In addition, newly elected student representatives are provided with support from more experienced representatives throughout the academic year. The Centre, as an incentive and reward for engaging with quality assurance processes, provides student representatives with a free short course recognising the time dedicated to the role.

2.47 Student surveys provide the opportunity for the Centre to collect quantitative data relating to information, assessment, and teaching on courses. To this end, the Centre has developed its own annual campus-wide higher education survey and separate student destinations survey. In addition, module evaluations allow students to feed back on programme content and teaching styles. During the review visit, the team heard the Centre aims to work iteratively with students, responding to student feedback rapidly to improve the student experience. Students confirmed the Centre operates in a transparent manner and is very responsive to student feedback.

2.48 The Centre monitors the effectiveness of student engagement initiatives via the Joint Staff Student Committee, Programme Committees, Academic Council, and the engagement of students at other quality assurance groups. Students also have access to



external examiner information and reports via the Centre intranet and VLE. Students are able to access the Centre's quality manual and other documentation used by those responsible for managing quality via the VLE.

2.49 The Centre has effective processes and procedures for engaging all students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their 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**

2.50 The Centre's two awarding partners outline procedures for assessment in relevant programme documentation. The Centre's Academic Council has responsibility for the assessment and examination of the academic performance of students. Assessment for each module is defined in the module outline provided to students on the commencement of their programme. The relevant awarding partner retains overall responsibility for its programmes but the setting, marking, moderation, and provision for feedback associated with assessment is delegated to the Centre. Accreditation of prior learning (APL) is permitted on programmes offered by the Centre in collaboration with its awarding partners, the process is contained in each programme handbook and follows the relevant University partner procedure.

2.51 The processes and documentation in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.52 The review team tested this Expectation through meetings with senior and teaching staff, professional support staff, and students. The review team also examined documentation relating to teaching, learning, and assessment.

2.53 Overall, the evidence reviewed demonstrates the arrangements in place to be effective. The Centre operates within the assessment frameworks of its awarding partners, UEL and LJMU. Assessment strategies, marking procedures, and grading criteria are considered as part of each awarding partner's validation processes. Though the academic standards for the awards arising from the Centre's programmes are set by the Centre's awarding bodies (the University of East London and Liverpool John Moores University), the Centre is responsible for setting assessment and maintaining academic standards. Internally, the Centre's Academic Council has responsibility for the assessment and examination of the academic performance of students.

2.54 Student handbooks are approved by the Centre's awarding partners and outline the programme structure, teaching/learning and assessment strategies, and provide information relating to pastoral support. The programme learning outcomes articulated in the student handbooks are clearly linked to the programme aims and are expressed in terms of knowledge, understanding, cognitive skills, practical skills and graduate skills. There is a clear commitment to preventing and responding to cases of academic misconduct at all levels of the Centre. Students are informed and have seminars on plagiarism during the induction process and throughout their programmes. The Centre uses plagiarism-detection software to identify potential academic misconduct cases which then falls under the Centre's academic integrity policy and procedure.

2.55 Assessment policies, regulations and processes are available to students, both enrolled and potential, on the website, VLE, and via the student handbooks. Assessments are set by the Centre's staff and are designed to assess the module and programme learning outcomes. Assessment briefs provide students with information regarding assessment methods, assessment criteria, and grading criteria. During the review visit, the review team found a considerable focus on live projects and an innovative approach

to design and in assessment strategies. Staff and students all readily provided examples of this in practice, including consultancy projects with work presented to international clients. The wide range of assessment activities including live projects that use bespoke resources to engage and challenge students is **good practice** (see also Expectation B4).

2.56 The Centre is committed to providing feedback on assessed work within the requirements of its awarding partners; either 20 working days for the University of East London or 15 working days for Liverpool John Moores University. During the visit, the review team heard that the Centre aims to return all assessed work, regardless of awarding partner, within 15 working days, to ensure parity of learning experience. Additionally, comments from both campus-based and distance-learning students were complimentary on the comprehensiveness of the feedback on assessed work. Comments from external examiners relating to feedback on assessed work have been consistently positive.

2.57 Although the Centre's awarding partners retain overall responsibility for their programmes, the setting, marking, moderation, and provision for feedback associated with assessment is delegated to the Centre. Assessments are marked by academic staff according to the marking scheme included in each module guide. Any assessed component that contributes to an award, at any level, is then subject to internal and external examiner moderation. The Centre will moderate a small portion of assessed work, this is normally either 10 scripts or 10 per cent of scripts, whichever is larger. Annual standardisation events across different programmes ensure that academic staff mark assignments fairly and consistently. The Centre's awarding partners convene Examination Boards (UEL) and Boards of Examiners (LJMU) to receive marks and make awards based on the outcome of assessment.

2.58 The Centre's approach to the accreditation of prior learning (APL) is described in the Centre's admissions policy. Although the APL process is administered by the Centre the decision as to whether an APL application is accepted or rejected lies with the relevant awarding partner. During the visit, the review team heard that for the most part applications for APL are primarily used by students wishing to transfer internally between programmes. In this case, the programme leader will provide advice to the concerned student and conduct a mapping exercise to ensure the equivalence of credits. The Centre's approach to considering APL requests at the point of application and enrolment is articulated in the Centre's admissions policy.

2.59 Overall, the Centre operates equitable, valid and reliable processes that provide students with appropriate opportunities to demonstrate the achievement of the learning outcomes for the award of credit or a qualification. 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 (B7): Higher education providers make scrupulous use of external examiners.**

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

**Findings**

2.60 The Centre and its awarding bodies share responsibilities for ensuring that scrupulous use is made of external examiners. Awarding bodies exercise ultimate responsibility for maintaining academic standards on their validated programmes. The Centre is responsible for using the advice provided by external examiners to improve the quality of GSE's academic provision. Programme Leaders respond directly to external examiner reports. In addition, the GSE produces annual REP reports that contain analyses of external examiner reports, including recommendations for improvement.

2.61 The processes in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.62 The review team tested this Expectation through meetings with senior staff, teaching staff, professional support staff and students. The review team also examined documentation relating to the Centre's use of external examiners' comments and reports.

2.63 The Centre posts annual external examiner reports for each programme on the VLE, within the Quality Management folder of key documents for each programme. The GSE ensures that students are made aware of external examiner reports. Student handbooks contain information drawn from most recent external examiner reports. In addition, students are consulted about the findings in Programme Committee meetings. Main points from external examiners' reports are made available to students in the Centre's annual reports submitted to its awarding bodies: for example, UEL REP reports produced for each programme and in the Centre-wide action plan developed in conjunction with the Centre's Annual Quality Report (see discussion under A3.4).

2.64 The external examiner's positive report of 2015 on the Centre's Renewable Energy and the Built Environment programme confirms that the Centre had implemented many substantial improvements in response to her suggestions and recommendations over the previous four years.

2.65 The Centre, in collaboration with its awarding bodies, has processes and procedures in place for ensuring that scrupulous use is made of external examiners. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated 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**

2.66 The awarding bodies' regulations and procedures provide the framework for programme monitoring and review to enable strategic oversight of processes. The Centre has appropriate systems in place to ensure these processes are applied systematically and consistently as outlined in the Quality Assurance Manual.

2.67 These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.68 The review team scrutinised external examiners' reports, Academic Council and Programme Committee minutes, awarding body monitoring reports, and met staff and students.

2.69 The Quality Assurance Manual confirms that the Head of School has overarching oversight of the Centre's monitoring and review of programmes. The Programme Leaders hold responsibility at both module and programme level to ensure a high level in line with UK threshold academic standards and the expectations of professional accreditation bodies, as in the case of the MArch programme. The information gained from this monitoring and review is applied to enhancing the content and delivery of the programmes and is reported to the Head of School via reports sent to the Academic Council from the Programme Committee meetings and associated committees as outlined in the Quality Assurance Manual.

2.70 The annual REP report undertaken in liaison with UEL in respect of each programme draws together responses and feedback on the programme from the Module Evaluation forms and from minutes of the programme team, and reviews these alongside statistics on enrolment, completion and progression to develop an action plan for further development of the programme. The primary reference points for such reviews are the external examiner reports. The accreditation by the Architects Registration Board of the Professional Diploma in Architecture and the Master of Architecture: Sustainable Architecture provide points of reference to professional standards.

2.71 The reports confirm that the Centre is meeting requirements for monitoring and review by executing a consistent and systematic approach to the review process in accordance with awarding bodies' regulations. Discussion with staff and students indicated that the Centre is managing appropriately the provision and that it is meeting the requirements and has a system in place for minor modifications of modules and programmes.

2.72 The review team concludes that the Centre is meeting the requirements of each awarding body in its monitoring and review of programmes and that the Expectation has been met with an associated low level of risk.

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

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

**Quality Code, Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints**

**Findings**

2.73 The Centre has an established student complaints process through which students may submit non-academic complaints directly to the Centre. Complainants can appeal to the relevant awarding partner or, given that the Centre is a member of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator's (OIA) Higher Education scheme, students can request an external review of their complaint via the OIA once internal processes have been exhausted. Admissions appeals are covered under the Centre's complaints policy. Academic appeals remain the responsibility of the Centre's awarding partners. Students can avail themselves of support from the Centre's student support team in submitting either a student complaint or academic appeal.

2.74 The processes in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.75 The review team tested the Expectation through meetings with senior and teaching staff, students, and student representatives. The team also examined documentation relating to student complaints and academic appeals in the context of the respective awarding partner's academic framework.

2.76 The Centre has an established process for resolving non-academic student complaints. The process through which a student can submit a non-academic complaint is articulated within the Centre's complaints policy. Admissions appeals are covered under the Centre's complaints policy. The formal complaints process is split into four distinct stages - early resolution, formal conciliation, a formal review by the Senior Management Team, and the formation of a complaints review panel.

2.77 Students are encouraged to resolve their complaint within 10 working days through informal channels; for example, via student representatives, prior to submitting a formal complaint. In the event the complainant exhausts the internal complaints process, they can register an appeal with either the appropriate awarding partner or the OIA.

2.78 Students who believe their work has been marked unfairly, inconsistently, or not in accordance with the standards and level required by the awarding body have the right to appeal against the process through which the mark or final outcome has been determined. Unlike student complaints, it is the Centre's awarding partners that receive and adjudicate academic appeals in collaboration with the Centre's management and programme leadership.

2.79 Students follow an induction process to the Centre that outlines its approach to teaching and learning and provides additional information surrounding student support mechanisms. This includes an introduction to the Centre's policies and procedures, including those relating to student complaints and academic appeals (via the Centre's awarding partners). Students are assigned personal tutors as named individuals they can turn to for support in addition to the Centre's student support function.

2.80 The Centre monitors student complaints and academic appeals through various mechanisms, principally via the Academic Council. The Head of School is responsible for reporting annually to the Academic Council on formal complaints received in addition to

reporting complaints to the Centre's awarding partners via their annual monitoring processes. During the review visit, the team heard that due to the small number of complaints registered it has been difficult to identify themes. Additionally, the annual report received from the OIA on complaints received and their outcomes is reported and discussed at the Centre's Senior Management Team.

2.81 The Centre, in collaboration with its awarding partners, has effective procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints. 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 (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**

2.82 The Centre does not collaborate with anyone other than its awarding bodies, therefore this Expectation does not apply.

**Expectation: Not applicable**

**Level of risk: Not applicable**



**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**

2.83 The Centre does not offer research degrees; therefore, this Expectation does not apply.

**Expectation: Not applicable**

**Level of risk: Not applicable**

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

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

2.85 There are four features of good practice relating to the innovative programmes, the well-organised flexible learning, the recognition of individual student needs, and the availability of special resources and the wide range of assessments.

2.86 The review team found no areas of affirmation and made no recommendations.

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

### 3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

#### **Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision**

##### **Findings**

3.1 The Centre has established processes in place to ensure the information they produce is fit for purpose, accessible, and trustworthy. The Centre's VLE and website are the two primary channels through which the Centre communicates with prospective students, members of the public, current students, and staff. The Centre uses both hard copy and digital media in order to inform prospective and current students about the Centre's distinctive higher education offer. Additionally, the Centre works closely with its awarding partners to ensure that the information they publish is accurate and appropriate.

3.2 The processes in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

3.3 The review team tested the Expectation through meetings with senior staff, Programme Leaders, students, and professional support staff. The team also examined documentation relating to the publication and management of published information for students, staff, those involved with managing quality processes, and the public.

3.4 The Centre has established processes in place to handle the production and publication of information relating to its higher education. Information relating to the Centre's academic provision, including module narratives and programme specifications, is produced by the relevant programme team in collaboration with the appropriate awarding partner and approved by the Centre's Academic Council and the Head of School. Otherwise, marketing information is produced by the Centre's marketing team and specifically, the newly appointed Graduate School Marketing Officer, and approved by the Head of School. During the visit, the review team heard the Centre has recently introduced an internal audit process to ensure the continuing appropriateness of published materials.

3.5 Information for prospective students and the public, such as the Centre's new Strategic Plan, is principally found on the Centre's website. The Centre also has a student charter that articulates what the Centre expects of current students and what current students can expect of the Centre; this is provided during induction and is also available on the Centre's website. Other sources of information include the Centre's postgraduate prospectus, which lists the courses available to students, and information on applying, fees, and funding postgraduate study. The Centre also runs open days aimed at ensuring prospective students have the information they need to make an informed decision.

3.6 Applicants are required to complete an online application form that captures their personal details, qualifications, and relevant experience. Prior to their enrolment, students are forwarded a 'Welcome Pack' that includes a teaching calendar, overview of assessment and the learning outcomes for the coming academic session, as well as recommended pre-course reading. Once enrolled, students follow an induction process. This includes an introduction to the site, the Centre's academic and student support facilities, and an overview of Centre policies.

3.7 The Centre provides all students with course-specific student handbooks that provide full details of their programme of study. Student handbooks outline the programme

structure, teaching/learning and assessment strategies, and provide information relating to pastoral support. Students may request student status letters from the Centre or a transcript following completion of their studies.

3.8 The Centre's VLE is the main repository for teaching and learning materials. By default, the Centre records all learning activities, including lectures and seminars, and uploads these to the Centre's VLE allowing distance-learning students to access the same learning materials as campus-based students. Though some students experienced programme compatibility-related issues, the review team heard an overwhelmingly positive view of the Centre's use of technology in the delivery of teaching and learning. Additionally, the Centre uploads its quality assurance manual and committee papers to a dedicated area on the VLE accessible by both students and staff. Reports from the Centre's programme review activities are also uploaded to the VLE.

3.9 Overall, the review team concludes that the Centre produces information that is fit for purpose, accessible, and trustworthy. Therefore, the 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

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

3.11 The Centre has well-established processes in place to ensure that information about learning opportunities is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

3.12 The review team concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the Centre **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 Centre has developed an Enhancement Strategy focused upon achieving 10 aims that serve as strategic drivers. Each year, senior managers produce an Enhancement Strategic Action Plan that sets out actions to be taken to meet each objective. Aims are underpinned by an academic infrastructure that enables the Centre to operate a robust but simple committee structure, capable of evaluating the effectiveness of learning and teaching initiatives and developmental activities. Enhancement initiatives are integrated in a systematic and planned manner, drawing upon issues and discussions produced in the Annual Quality Report and its accompanying Action Plan.

4.2 The processes in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

4.3 The review team tested this Expectation through meetings with senior and teaching staff, professional support staff and students. The review team also examined documentation relating to the enhancement of student learning opportunities.

4.4 The Academic Council has overall responsibility for enhancement, but the Programme Committee is charged with implementing decisions. SSLCs, which meet once a month when teaching takes place, provide additional opportunities for discussing operational aspects associated with enhancement initiatives.

4.5 Students are involved actively as partners in enhancement projects, and many enhancement initiatives have been introduced as good practice in response to student feedback. For example, as a direct result of student feedback, delivery of the 30-credit core module in the MSc Sustainability and Adaptation suite of programmes was lengthened over two terms to allow students more time to complete the work to a good standard. As noted at Expectation B1, there is good practice in the innovative design and development of adaptable programmes that provide a wide range of practical and professional skills and academic rigour for students that are aligned with the Centre's mission and values.

4.6 The Centre's commitment to enhancing opportunities for students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential has been woven intrinsically into the fabric of its self-evaluation documents (each produced separately). As noted previously, all students have access to personal tutors, personal development plans, direct engagement with staff as part of the CAT family, opportunities for undertaking a variety of practical as well as academic projects and the space to do so, direct interaction with external experts, employers and guest speakers, and opportunities to influence directly the Centre's plans for module and programme development through direct representation in major committees. The strong community engagement that promotes an innovative and positive environment for all stakeholders in the strategic enhancement process is **good practice**.

4.7 The Centre has adopted a strategic approach to enhancement and has well-defined processes in place for evaluating the effectiveness of enhancement initiatives. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated risk is low.

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

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

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

4.9 There is one feature of good practice. The Centre has a clear enhancement strategy and an infrastructure that supports the enhancement process at all levels. The process is interwoven into all documents and addressed at all meetings. Full use is made of student feedback, external examiner reports and external expertise.

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

## Glossary

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

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

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

### Academic standards

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

### Award

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

### Awarding organisation

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

### Blended learning

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

### Credit(s)

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

### Degree-awarding body

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

### Distance learning

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

### Dual award or double award

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

### e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning.



### **Enhancement**

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

### **Expectations**

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

### **Flexible and distributed learning**

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

### **Framework**

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

### **Framework for higher education qualifications**

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

### **Good practice**

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

### **Learning opportunities**

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

### **Learning outcomes**

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

### **Multiple awards**

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

### **Operational definition**

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

### **Programme (of study)**

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

### **Programme specifications**

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

### **Quality Code**

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

### **Reference points**

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

### **Self-evaluation document**

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

### **Subject Benchmark Statement**

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

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

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

### **Threshold academic standard**

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

### **Virtual learning environment (VLE)**

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

### **Widening participation**

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

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