QAA

This review method is ESG-compliant

Educational Oversight Review

Aga Khan University (International) in the United Kingdom Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations

January 2025

Contents

About this review

This is a report of an Educational Oversight Review (EOR) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at the Aga Khan University (International) in the United Kingdom Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations.

EOR consists of a number of components. The Full component is a review of a provider's arrangements for maintaining the academic standards and quality of the courses it offers against the 12 Sector-Agreed Principles contained within the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (2024) (the UK Quality Code). A Full component review will assess a provider against the core requirements of the Home Office in relation to educational oversight and the UK Quality Code as a common UK framework. Further information about the Full component of EOR can be found in the [Educational Oversight Review Guidance for Providers](#).

The review visit took place from 28 January to 30 January 2025 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Dr John Byrom (Reviewer)
- Dr Harry Williams (Reviewer)
- Ms Sarah Mullins (Student reviewer).

The QAA Officer for this review was Dr Julian Ellis.

In Educational Oversight Review (Full component), the QAA review team:

- determines an outcome against each of the Sector-Agreed Principles outlined in the UK Quality Code
- identifies features of good practice
- makes recommendations
- identifies areas of enhancement activity
- determines an overall judgement as to whether the provider is fully aligned with the Sector-Agreed Principles of the UK Quality Code.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission. A dedicated section explains the method for [Educational Oversight Review](#) and has links to other informative documents. QAA reviews are evidence-based processes. Review judgements result from the documents review teams see and the meetings they hold, and draw upon their experience as peer reviewers and student reviewers.

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The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) provide the framework for internal and external quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area. QAA's review methods are [compliant with these standards](#), as are the [reports we publish](#). More information is available on our [website](#).

This review was conducted in compliance with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG).

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Executive summary

The Aga Khan University (International) in the United Kingdom Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations (AKU-ISMC; the Institute) was established in 2002 as an integral part of the Aga Khan University (AKU; the University), which is part the Aga Khan Development Network a network of private international agencies devoted to human development. AKU also has campuses in Pakistan and Kenya.

The mission of the Institute is to produce graduates who make a meaningful contribution to their societies through professional achievement and through service. In doing so it aims for strength in research and excellence in teaching. The Institute has a specific role to foster scholarship, teaching, and dialogue about Muslim civilisations and their heritage within the contemporary world. It is a research-focused institution driven by the belief that academic enquiry and education can enable understanding and positive social change. The Institute has partnerships for research and education, including a dual master's degree with Columbia University although this will be ending shortly with the last intake in September 2025. The Institute has a Memorandum of Understanding with Samuel Hall East Africa (SHEA) covering staff exchange and opportunities for graduate traineeship.

At the time of the review, the Institute had 21 students across two cohorts of the master's and dual master's awards, with 36 staff members, including nine managerial, 15 academic (of which three are part-time), and 12 professional services.

The main external challenges facing the Institute include increasing student recruitment and the expansion of its master's programme so that it includes a broader range of students from Europe and North America. This has resulted in the Institute reviewing both its marketing strategy and contents of the master's programme. The Institute has also introduced a Doctor of Philosophy programme and is looking to recruit a small number of students from 2025.

In reaching conclusions about the extent to which AKU-ISMC meets the Sector-Agreed Principles, the QAA review team followed the evidence-based review procedure as outlined in the guidance for Educational Oversight Review (July 2024, updated January 2025). The Institute provided the review team with a self-evaluation and supporting evidence. During the review visit, which took place 28 January to 30 January 2025, the review team held a total of seven meetings with the Dean, Senior Management Team, students, faculty staff, professional support staff, and external stakeholders, including alumni.

In summary, the team found one example of good practice and identified five recommendations for improvement.

Conclusions

The QAA review team reached the following conclusions about the higher education provision at Aga Khan University (International) in the United Kingdom Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations.

The QAA review team determines that Aga Khan University (International) in the United Kingdom Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations:

- **requires action to be fully aligned** with Sector-Agreed Principle 7 of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

Good practice

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

- The use of the Aga Khan University's Network of Quality, Teaching and Learning (QTL_net) to enhance teaching and learning practice, including the potential for cross-campus collaboration, and the resultant positive impact on the student learning experience (Sector-Agreed Principle 11).

Recommendations

Where the provider requires action to be fully aligned with the Sector-Agreed Principles of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, the QAA review team makes the following recommendations:

- Ensure that the published policies and processes for programme approval and modification are followed and implemented fully and rigorously **(Sector-Agreed Principle 7)**.

For recommendations that relate to areas for development and enhancement that do not impact on the Sector-Agreed Principle being met, the QAA review team makes the following recommendations:

- Take steps to ensure that students are enabled and encouraged to actively engage in all aspects of assuring and enhancing the quality of the student learning experience **(Sector-Agreed Principle 2)**.
- Further enhance the use of data to inform and evaluate the quality of the student experience and close the feedback loop **(Sector-Agreed Principle 4)**.
- Take further steps to strengthen the accuracy of published information **(Sector-Agreed Principle 9)**.
- Increase awareness among staff and students of the formal complaints and appeals policies and procedures, including appeals related to admissions, to ensure greater transparency and accessibility **(Sector-Agreed Principle 12)**.

Financial sustainability, management and governance

The financial sustainability, management and governance (FSMG) check has been **satisfactorily** completed. The outcome of the FSMG check for Aga Khan University (International) in the United Kingdom Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations is that **no** material issues were identified.

Explanation of the findings – Sector-Agreed Principles

Principle 1: Taking a strategic approach to managing quality and standards

> **Providers demonstrate they have a strategic approach to securing academic standards and assuring and enhancing quality that is embedded across the organisation.**

Findings

1   The Aga Khan University (AKU) is regulated and accredited by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) in Pakistan. Responsibility for the setting and ongoing maintenance of academic standards at the Institute is the responsibility of AKU as the awarding body. AKU provides a comprehensive qualifications framework which ensures that its higher education programmes align with the expectations of HEC in Pakistan while continuing to follow the local requirements of the countries in which AKU institutes, such as AKU-ISMC, operate. The Institute follows the academic policies and regulations of the University including, for example, the AKU Academic Quality Framework, Credit Qualifications Framework, and Curriculum Development Policy.

2   AKU's University Academic Council acts as the senior academic body with responsibility for the approval and implementation of policy relating to academic matters. Operationally, the Registrar's Office at AKU is responsible for ensuring the integrity of student academic records; maintaining the university's database of student registrations, grades, and academic progression; issuing transcripts; providing secretariat support to the university's academic committees; and assisting in the interpretation and application of the university's regulations. During the review visit, the team found that regulations and policy documents were readily and publicly available on the AKU website.

3   Responsibility for managing the Institute is delegated to the Dean, who is supported in this role by a Senior Management Team (SMT). The SMT is chaired by the Dean and is the final internal decision-making body on academic matters. The SMT is supported by three sub-committees: the Education Committee; the Research Committee; and the Publications and Public Engagement Committee, which is responsible for suggesting strategies for publications and outreach engagement and supporting and coordinating events organised by the Institute. Further opportunities for internal discussion come in the form of the AKU-ISMC Faculty Forum. The forum is where strategic developments raised at the Education Committee are discussed by academic staff. In addition, there is the staff forum, which is where all staff can discuss relevant matters to ensure a broad representation of staff views are collected and considered. An example of this being the AKU-ISMC strategic plan currently being developed, which was discussed at length at a Staff Forum held in September 2024. More recently the forum has been expanded to include students (see paragraph 11).

4   The Institute has two higher education programmes approved: Master of Arts in Muslim Cultures (delivered as both a single programme and a dual programme with Colombia University) and a Doctor of Philosophy programme leading to a doctorate in either History or Political Science. At the time of the site visit, the master's had two student cohorts. The doctoral programme, while recently approved, was in abeyance at the time of the review and had not recruited any students since its launch.

5   Responsibility for programme design, development and approval is shared between AKU and AKU-ISMC with AKU responsible, as the awarding body, for approving all new

programmes and any modifications in line with AKU's Curriculum Development Policy. In practice, it is AKU that sets the strategic direction, with staff on the ground at AKU-ISMC responsible for operational delivery. As the delivery centre, the Institute is responsible for curriculum delivery and student assessment, with external input from external examiners based at UK Higher Education Institutions. A review of external examiner reports by the team during the site visit found no substantive issues, with external examiners commenting positively about the academic standards and master's student experience.

6   AKU and the Institute make extensive use of external reference points in the setting and maintenance of academic standards. The Master of Arts in Muslim Cultures is awarded by AKU and therefore overseen by HEC in Pakistan. The Institute has also ensured that the master's curriculum is aligned with comparable programmes in the UK through use of Subject Benchmarks and adhering to the UK Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning in Higher Education. There is further external expertise available to AKU and the Institute through the AKU-UK Governing Body, which is composed of senior representatives from associated Aga Khan entities and a small number of independent members.

7   Overall, the review team considered that the Institute takes a strategic approach to securing academic standards and assuring and enhancing quality that is embedded across the organisation. The Institute therefore **is aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle.

Principle 2: Engaging students as partners

> Providers take deliberate steps to engage students as active partners in assuring and enhancing the quality of the student learning experience. Engagement happens individually and collectively to influence all levels of study and decision making. Enhancements identified through student engagement activities are implemented, where appropriate, and communicated to staff and students.

Findings

8   There are formal and informal mechanisms for students to engage individually and collectively in the quality of their educational experience through Student Council, Student Representative participation in committee meetings, informal meetings with the Dean and student surveys. There is no overarching student engagement strategy outlining student engagement activity, however the 'Teaching and Learning Framework' makes clear the role of student engagement in learning and teaching (see paragraph 70). The opportunities for students to engage in Student Council, as student representatives and in student surveys are outlined in the Prospectus and encouraged by the Institute.

9   Students are provided with opportunities to engage individually through student surveys, including the Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) and the Library User Survey. SET takes place at the end of each course, and is managed centrally at AKU with the outcomes shared with the Dean, Director, the Head of Educational Programmes and the relevant course instructors. The SET process was discussed with staff and students during the review visit. It was noted by staff that while earlier participation rates had been low, deliberate steps by the Institute to improve participation rates have been introduced, requiring SETS to be completed during the final course session, and this resulted in higher participation. In meeting with students, the review team were told that the SET process was effective but that students would welcome more space for comments on the form. The Library User Survey evaluates user satisfaction, as outlined in the Library Strategy. This is an annual process that was paused after 2019 until the most recent iteration in 2025. The survey measures engagement and satisfaction across the services on offer and staff told the review team that the evaluation of responses will be used to enhance future support.

10   In addition to formal surveys, the Institute provides informal opportunities to provide feedback, and students are invited to 'coffee with the Dean' each semester. These informal meetings offer the opportunity for general discussion of the student educational experience. The Dean noted that these meetings have proved useful in collecting qualitative feedback. Students confirmed that these meetings took place and were a good opportunity to provide feedback in a forum that allowed for immediate responses to queries raised.

11   The formal monitoring, evaluating and enhancement process at programme level is through the self-assessment process and report (see paragraph 29). The 2024 light touch report outlines a number of enhancements that have been made to student engagement since the previous QAA review in 2020, including an increase in Student Council meetings, student representation at the Education Committee and students being added to the membership of the Staff Forum.

12   The students confirmed to the review team that student representatives are elected at the beginning of the academic year and the Manager of Educational Programmes provides support. When discussing the intentions to increase student participation within the committee structure, staff showed awareness of the requirement to support students in this role and ensure they have a full understanding of the committees and their role within this.

13   A key forum for student discussion is the Student Council, which meets twice per semester. The membership includes Student Representatives, the Head of Educational Programmes, and the Manager of Educational Programmes. The terms of reference cover the aims of Student Council, including representing students in matters affecting their educational experience. The review team noted that actions can be dealt with in the meeting or taken to the Education Committee for further discussion. The Student Council meeting minutes outline feedback and concerns raised by students relating to various aspects of their educational experience, including requests for more academic skills support, queries in relation to thesis supervision and discussion related to the teaching and learning experience. Some actions are noted within the minutes, although this did relate mainly to the requirement for further discussion with relevant staff rather than agreed changes. There are no updates from earlier actions noted in the minutes. While the review team recognise that this would now be a new cohort of students, the team would encourage the Institute to close the feedback loop during these meetings through updates on earlier actions. The Student Council meeting minutes are shared on the virtual learning environment making them easily accessible for students and staff.

14   Students are members of the Education Committee, which aims to share information about educational programmes, review matters raised in Student Council, discuss pedagogical good practice, and provide advice for the SMT and Faculty Council. The Education Committee Terms of Reference confirm student membership for 'open' agenda items only. The review team queried the rationale in relation to 'open' and 'closed' agenda items and were informed that 'closed' items relate to discussions that may include personal data, such as individual students' grades. However, the Education Committee meeting minutes for May 2024 include a Student Council meeting update as the only 'open' agenda item, while 'closed' agenda items include discussions around the Ethics Committee, the Artificial Intelligence Policy, and the doctoral programme. Similarly in another Education Committee meeting example, 'open' agenda items relate mainly to student feedback and 'closed' agenda items include discussions such as changes to modules and the programme, which do not relate to sensitive data and where student input and consultation may have been valuable. While the team appreciate that some discussion within the committee meetings can include personal data and therefore be 'closed', on the evidence presented it was not clear why some 'closed' business discussing policy and programme developments was not open to student representatives to attend. The review team therefore **recommend** that the Institute takes steps to ensure students are enabled and encouraged to actively engage in all aspects of assuring and enhancing the quality of the student learning experience.

15   The Student Submission states that students can find it difficult to have their voices heard because of a perceived resistance towards students giving views on details about the structure of the programmes. During the visit, the review team met with students who provided mixed comments in relation to action by the Institute resulting from student feedback. Students did confirm that most of their concerns had now been addressed in relation to concerns regarding the teaching and learning on a specific course. The review team noted that student satisfaction with student engagement mechanisms could be improved with increased communication and closing of the feedback loop (see paragraphs 13 and 26). The review team consider that the intention by the Institute to continue to increase the opportunities for students to engage within the committee structure should support this further and ensure that students feel that their voices are valued.

16   Overall, the review team concluded that, while the review team recommend that the Institute ensures students are enabled and encouraged to actively engage in all aspects of assuring and enhancing the quality of the student learning experience, it is clear that the Institute provider does takes steps to engage students as active partners in assuring and enhancing the quality of the student learning experience through surveys, student

representative structures and formal and informal support. The Institute therefore **is aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle.

Principle 3: Resourcing delivery of a high-quality learning experience

> **Providers plan, secure and maintain resources relating to learning, technology, facilities and staffing to enable the delivery and enhancement of an accessible, innovative and high-quality learning experience for students that aligns with the provider's strategy and the composition of the student body.**

Findings

17   The Institute's approach to resourcing of the student experience is supported by its most recent (2024) operational plan, which includes a dedicated budget for areas such as accommodation, cultural events and field trips and is in addition to the cost of staff, facilities and other aspects of student support. The review team looked at the Institute's processes relating to the annual reviews of resources and budgets and found operational plans involve analysis of the circumstances each year including, for example, student recruitment numbers. The Institute's approach to budgeting is further supported by evidence from minutes of the SMT. These demonstrate that operational plans are given active consideration and are considered within an appropriate forum to enable the effective planning and management of budgets relating to staffing and the student experience.

18   The Institute is housed within a purpose-built accessible building. Teaching spaces consist of a range of classrooms and other spaces, including break-out spaces (outside and within the library) that students can reserve for study, including groupwork activity. Students can access leisure facilities within the building, including a cafeteria and several outside garden areas, as well as a range of other catering, retail and leisure establishments nearby. The residential accommodation is available at nearby Victoria Hall (including provision for two students with physical disabilities). The review team confirmed the suitability of the physical facilities by a tour of the building.

19   The Institute utilises a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) as a key learning resource. During the visit, the review team received a demonstration of its functionality, which involved an academic staff member and a student outlining use of different aspects of the platform. This included an overview of programme-level information, as well as individual course pages, which act as a 'roadmap' to students as they progress through a module, and facilitate assessment and the return of feedback. All assignments are submitted through plagiarism-checking software. Students also indicated their satisfaction in respect of how the VLE is utilised to support their learning.

20   The Institute shares a library with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, which is located in the same building. The library offers a physical collection and access to other resources through inter-library loan and through membership of a library consortium.

21   The Institute currently employs 36 staff members: nine managerial, 15 academic (of which three are part-time), and 12 professional services. The review team considered the CVs of academic staff, which demonstrated that staff have a wide range of relevant research and other scholarly experience across the constituent disciplines of the Institute. All academic staff are qualified to doctoral level. Staff benefit from the support offered on teaching scholarship by the University's Network of Quality, Teaching and Learning (QTL_net). This support takes various forms, including face-to-face training at the Institute and Teaching and Learning Enhancement workshops offered by AKU. Through QTL_net's TEACH certificate, staff are enabled to apply for Associate Fellowship or Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy (HEA) (see paragraphs 72 and 73).

22   Overall, the review team concluded that the Institute's approach to the planning and maintenance of resources relating to teaching and learning was sound to support the delivery of a high-quality student learning experience. The Institute therefore **is aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle.

Principle 4: Using data to inform and evaluate quality

> Providers collect, analyse and utilise qualitative and quantitative data at provider, departmental, programme and module levels. These analyses inform decision-making with the aim of enhancing practices and processes relating to teaching, learning and the wider student experience.

Findings

23   The Institute uses data to inform and evaluate the quality of the student learning experience. All student data is principally collected, stored, and managed by the AKU Registrar's Office. Data and documentation used locally is stored by the Institute using a cloud storage service, with copies maintained by the AKU Registrar. AKU and AKU-ISMC have established policies and procedures dealing with the handling and storage of data. The Institute specifically has a Data Protection Policy and Privacy Policy, both of which are available through its website. These align with overarching AKU institutional policy and procedure regarding data storage and handling. Staff receive training on the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and the panel saw evidence of staff being encouraged to complete this training during the review process.

24   Student data, in particular student attainment and satisfaction, forms a key part of quarterly reports on student performance to the Dean. These reports feed into the primary decision-making body at the executive level of AKU-ISMC, which is SMT, and typically include an overview of educational programmes, short courses and summer programmes and changes and updates to the support functions. The panel reviewed a sample of SMT minutes and confirmed use of data particularly in relation to management decisions. An example of this includes the use of data in the decision to change the length of the master's programme. A further example being the use of data in conversations and, ultimately, decisions, with respect to the future of the dual master's degree with Columbia University. The review team also reviewed a sample of the Dean's Reports covering the period from February 2022 to October 2024 that fed into meetings of the AKU-ISMC's Governing Body, which further confirmed the use of qualitative and quantitative data in decision-making within the governance structures at AKU-ISMC.

25   There are opportunities for students to provide feedback on their educational experience. Given the small number of students at the Institute, staff encourage and invite students to communicate directly any feedback and typically operate an 'open door' policy. Students can feed back anonymously through the SET process, which takes place at the end of each course/unit. To ensure that students are given the opportunity to complete the SET, teachers are required to provide time in-lesson for students to complete the survey, typically in the last session of the course. The SET process is centrally administered by AKU and the role of the Institute is to analyse the outcome after the student surveys have been completed (see paragraph 9).

26   In meetings with students and student representatives, the team heard that while AKU and AKU-ISMC does encourage students to engage with the SET process, feedback following the process can be limited. Further, examples of changes made because of student feedback through SET were also limited in other meetings with staff. This notwithstanding, the team did see some evidence of student consultation, particularly in relation to the provision of language courses and the establishment of traineeships with external organisations (subsequently introduced with SHEA). Exploring the current arrangements for 'closing the feedback loop', particularly with respect to the SET, the panel heard that there was currently no person or role tasked with properly interrogating SET data. However, the Institute, recognising this as an area for development, has recently appointed

a new data-focused member of staff whose role it will be to properly evaluate lessons coming out of the SET process. Beyond SET, the review team also explored how AKU-ISMC monitored the effectiveness of its student support functions, namely the Aga Khan Library. During the review visit, the review team found that while the library does collect data on item usage and failed accessions, other data collection activities are limited. Cognisant of the Institute's small provision and informal approach to engaging with students, the review team consider that the student evaluations could be used more fully, including to close the feedback loop. Therefore, the team **recommends** that AKU-ISMC further enhances the use of data to inform and evaluate quality of the student experience and close the feedback loop (see paragraph 13).

27   While the team encourages AKU-ISMC to build on existing practice and use the data it collects more strategically to further enhance the student experience, overall, the team concludes that the Institute uses data to inform and evaluate the quality of the student learning experience. The Institute therefore **is aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle.

Principle 5: Monitoring, evaluating and enhancing provision

> **Providers regularly monitor and review their provision to secure academic standards and enhance quality. Deliberate steps are taken to engage and involve students, staff and external expertise in monitoring and evaluation activity. The outcomes and impact of these activities are considered at provider level to drive reflection and enhancement across the provider.**

Findings

28   The Institute's approach to monitoring, evaluation and enhancement is grounded in University policies including the Academic Quality Framework and the Network of Quality, Teaching and Learning Revised Strategic Plan 2020-2025, which are further underpinned by policies relating to peer review and self-assessment. The first step of the process is the completion of a self-assessment report, which is reviewed by the AKU Quality Assurance Review Committee (QARC) and, once approved, moves to the next step: external peer review. The Academic Quality Framework establishes a series of strategic principles relating to monitoring and evaluation, which include the need for documented evidence, externality and transparency, as well as the involvement of academic staff, professional services staff, and students. The QTL_net Revised Strategic Plan 2020-2025 is a detailed and comprehensive document which is applicable University-wide and includes several key activities relating to the monitoring of provision, including of academic entities such as the Institute, as well as of individual programmes.

29   The Institute's approach to self-assessment at the level of the programme and the expectations of the University are set out online with a template provided for reports. The process of self-assessment notes that programmes should be reviewed on a five-yearly basis, with guidance on the involvement of external personnel. The review team consider that suitable procedural documentation is therefore available to enable programmes to be reviewed effectively by the Institute. As the sole programme offered by the Institute at that time, the Master's in Muslim Cultures did not have a self-assessment review in 2020, as the QAA review scheduled at this time was considered by the University to be sufficient. However, a self-assessment review was planned for 2025 building on a 'light touch' internal review conducted in 2024 which had considered several aspects of the provision. Given the Institute offers a single programme, the review team expects that this year's review will involve in-depth scrutiny relevant to its delivery at the Institute, consistent with the published guidance and the report template.

30   The team considered the steps taken to engage and involve key stakeholders in monitoring and evaluation activity and found examples of communication with staff were apparent in the form of the Dean's emails, as well as through Faculty Forum meetings and the workings of the Education Committee. The review team considered evidence relating to changes in the delivery of the master's programme, to examine how monitoring, evaluation and enhancement worked in practice. The minutes of the Education Committee document the rationale behind changing the programme back from one to two years' duration, thereby demonstrating that discussion was taking place among staff at the local level before further approval by the University.

31   The involvement of students in monitoring and evaluation activity was demonstrated through the regular meetings between the Dean and students, a practice which was viewed positively by the students (see paragraph 10). However, the student submission and the meeting with students indicated to the review team that communication could potentially be improved. For example, the review team were unclear as to why students were not able to participate in some of the 'closed business' items of the Education Committee relating to the

provision of teaching and learning (see paragraph 14).

32   The review team considered further the mechanisms that are used at the Institute to monitor and evaluate provision on an ongoing basis. Students complete an evaluation (SET) following the conclusion of each course, which is then returned to the University for processing. The outcomes of the SET are shared with the Dean, Head of Educational Programmes and the relevant Instructor. The review team also heard from senior staff that changes were made to the content of the curriculum, following comments from students, during the delivery of a specific course, rather than waiting for receipt of the SET results. The review team considered this a positive example of the Institute's ability to respond promptly to student feedback to enhance the student learning experience.

33   The review team heard that the practice of producing course reports was being reintroduced to support monitoring and review. The reports would be sent to Head of Educational Programmes and then fed into both course and programme evaluation. The team learnt that while course reports had been reinstated in the current academic year, given the timing of the review visit at the very end of a semester, there were no examples to consider. However, the team considered a course report template, which provided reassurance that the Institute was actively ensuring that suitable processes were being implemented, and encourage the Institute to ensure that individual course reports are fully integrated into future monitoring and evaluation activity at both the course and programme level.

34   The Institute's approach to external examination involves the appointment of a single individual on a two-year basis, with the possibility of an extension. Review of the current external examiner's CV shows suitability for the role, while scrutiny of the associated reports shows a positive evaluation of the teaching, learning and academic standards at the Institute over several years.

35   Overall, the review team concluded that the University frameworks and procedures are available to enable monitoring and evaluation, such as guidance and templates relating to programme review and student evaluation. The Institute has then adapted its processes at the local level, as outlined above. This has involved using the 2020 QAA review as a means of enhancing quality, underpinned by input from the external examiner and the results of SETs. The review team formed the view that the Institute's approach was sufficiently effective to secure academic standards and enhance quality. The Institute therefore **is aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle.

Principle 6: Engaging in external review and accreditation

> Providers engage with external reviews to give assurance about the effectiveness of their approach to managing quality and standards. External reviews offer insights about the comparability of providers' approaches and generate outcomes that providers can use to enhance their policies and practices. Reviews may be commissioned by providers, form part of a national quality framework or linked to professional recognition and actively include staff, students and peers. They can be undertaken by representative organisations, agencies or professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) with recognised sector expertise according to the provision being reviewed.

Findings

36   AKU is a higher education institution based in Pakistan operating under the oversight of the Pakistani Higher Education Commission (HEC). The Institute has undergone several external reviews by the QAA. This includes two Higher Education Reviews (Foreign Providers), published in September 2016 and January 2021. Both reviews led to positive outcomes, with a small number of recommendations and good practice being identified by the review teams. Action plans developed from these activities have led to enhancements in the student learning experience.

37   In addition, the Institute underwent two monitoring visits in December 2021 and December 2022. The reports from both monitoring visits confirm that no material changes had taken place since the last Higher Education Review (Foreign Provider). Reports from these activities confirmed that AKU-ISMC continued to make enhancements to its higher education provision. For example, the monitoring visit in December 2021 found that the provider had made progress with student engagement in quality by amending 'terms of reference for the Education Committee to ensure student participation in discussions relating to their learning experiences'.

38   The Institute's involvement in Educational Oversight Review (EOR) is further evidence of commitment to external review. In preparation for the EOR process, the Institute prepared a self-evaluation, participated in meetings with the appointed review team, and assembled a body of evidence allowing external peer reviewers to come to a view on their alignment with Sector-Agreed Principles.

39   At the time of the review, the Institute has students enrolled on a singular course, its Master's in Muslim Cultures. This programme is not subject to accreditation by, for example, a PSRB. During the review visit, the team met with senior staff and teaching staff who clarified that, due to the highly specific nature of the Institute's programme, while their higher education programmes do not currently have programme-level accreditation this may be something that the Institute will explore in the future.

40   Overall, the review team concluded that the Institute's approach to external review and accreditation was proportionate and allows it to assure itself about the effectiveness of its approach to management quality and standards. The Institute therefore **is aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle.

Principle 7: Designing, developing, approving and modifying programmes

> **Providers design, develop, approve and modify programmes and modules to ensure the quality of provision and the academic standards of awards are consistent with the relevant Qualifications Framework. Providers ensure their provision and level of qualifications are comparable to those offered across the UK and, where applicable, The Framework of Qualifications for The European Higher Education Area.**

Findings

41   The Institute has two higher education programmes approved: a Master's in Muslim Cultures and doctoral programme leading to a PhD in either History or Political Science. At the time of the review, the doctoral programme, while recently approved, was in abeyance and had not recruited any students since its launch.

42   The key policies referring to the design, development, approval and modification of programmes and modules are published on the AKU website. The AKU Curriculum Development Policy outlines the process by which programmes can be developed, approved, and modified. This policy applies to all AKU entities including the Institute. The process for developing a new programme is split into several stages, which include: conceptualisation and market research; production of a detailed proposal which includes a curriculum plan; approval from AKU University Academic Council; financial and sustainability review; approval from University Executive Committee; and final approval from AKU Board of Trustees and any relevant professional bodies/regulatory authorities.

43   There is some externality in the programme/course development process by the inclusion of the Registrar's Working Group (RWG), whose role it is to scrutinise the consolidated detailed proposal. The RWG is an AKU committee that reports to the AKU Registrar and so, while it is external to the Institute, it is not external to AKU. Given the international nature of the Institute and its curricula, the team considered more could be done to integrate external views on its activities. During the panel visit, senior and academic staff outlined a desire to increase the level of externality in their programme development processes, and the panel would encourage the Institute to follow up on this.

44   All documents produced from the design, development, approval and modification processes are held by the Institute, with access restricted largely to members of SMT. A copy of all documentation is also held by the AKU Registrar.

45   The review team examined how the design, development, approval and modification of programmes and modules worked in practice, through the evolution of the Master's in Muslim Cultures programme. In 2019-20, the master's was changed from a 90-credit two-year programme in the UK system (where 1 UK credit equals 10 study hours, totalling 900 hours) to a 30-credit one-and-a-half-year programme (under the AKU credit framework). In 2024-25, the master's was changed into a 45-credit two-year programme. The AKU definition of credit or credit hour is: 1 credit equals 50 hours of work (including class and independent study time). In practice, this means that students enrolled on the Master's in Muslim Cultures were expected to dedicate either 900 study hours (up to 2019), 1,500 study hours (2020-2024), or 2,250 study hours (2024 to date).

46   According to the AKU Curriculum Development Policy, any change in duration of a programme would constitute a major modification. Major modifications are typically started at Institute level and escalated to AKU as the awarding body. Part of this process requires

AKU-ISMC to produce supporting documentation including: an updated course and programme specification as well as evidence of staff and student consultation. During the visit, the team heard that while recent changes to the master's had been approved in the appropriate manner by University Academic Council, and the team saw some evidence of this, the supporting documentation required by the AKU Curriculum Development Policy was not produced. Further, the review team asked for evidence of student consultation relating to changes to the master's programme and the Institute was unable to provide any. Additionally, students and student representatives with whom the panel met during the review visit did not recall being consulted on recent changes to the master's programme. Senior staff confirmed to the panel that although the Master's in Muslim Cultures programme has changed several times in the last five years, key programme documentation including the programme specification was only updated to reflect the change in the master's from a 90-credit two-year programme (which ran until 2019) to the 30-credit one-and-a-half-year programme (run between 2020 and 2024). The programme specification serves as the central point of reference for the delivery of the master's programme and was available to both staff and students. Given the published specification was several years out of date, the team identified risks for staff and students knowing what modules formed part of the approved programme of study. The team considered that the risks were material and had the potential to negatively impact the student educational experience. More broadly, the team considered the failure to follow AKU policy amounted to a serious breach of the Institute's own quality assurance procedure and **recommends** that the published policies and processes for programme approval and modification are followed and implemented fully and rigorously.

47   Overall, the panel found that while AKU-ISMC does have clear processes and procedures by which it designs, develops, approves and modifies its programmes and modules, these are not always followed rigorously. Examples of this include several major modifications to AKU-ISMC's only higher education programme with enrolled students (Master's in Muslim Cultures) that did not follow the procedure outlined in the AKU Curriculum Development Policy. Consequently, the review team concluded that the Institute is **not aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle.

Principle 8: Operating partnerships with other organisations

> **Providers and their partners agree proportionate arrangements for effective governance to secure the academic standards and enhance the quality of programmes and modules that are delivered in partnership with others. Organisations involved in partnership arrangements agree and communicate the mutual and specific responsibilities in relation to delivering, monitoring, evaluating, assuring and enhancing the learning experience.**

Findings

48   The Institute delivers its Master's programme in Muslim Cultures as a dual award in partnership with Columbia University, with degrees from both providers, delivered over two years, with students undertaking the first year in New York and the second year at the Institute in London. Prospective students are informed about the nature of the programme before application through a brief entry in the Institute's prospectus and through webpages. Other partnerships relating to the provision of summer school courses and a competitive graduate traineeship programme with SHEA do not award academic credit.

49   The review team examined the documentation underpinning the management and operation of the Columbia partnership, noting that the original Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) covered the seven-year period from 2019 to 2026. The MoU sets out in further detail how key aspects of the partnership are to be managed and operationalised, including the structure of the degree programmes, financial support for students, and other key aspects relating to governance. The nature of student admission arrangements is captured in the collated annual admissions reports, which show that initial admission decisions are the responsibility of the University of Columbia partner, but with input from staff of the Institute, who agree offers for those transferring to the second year of the programme in London. Responsibilities for the award of credit are clearly delineated between the Institute and its partner, with each handling the delivery and award of 30 credits where 1 credit equals 50 hours of work, including class and independent study time (see paragraph 45).

50   To further understand the Institute's approach to the management and governance of partnerships, the review team scrutinised extracts relevant to the operation of partnerships taken from the Institute's Risk Register. This includes four examples relating directly to the management of partnerships, with clear ownership of each risk outcome detailed. Also clear in the Annual Risk Reports is recognition of a range of risk activities that relate to the management of partnerships, and which can potentially affect the Institute. The review team formed the view that potential risks emanating from partnership activity was actively and appropriately managed by the Institute.

51   It was also clear that the Institute ensures up-to-date records are kept, shown by a reminder to staff about updates to the Contracts Register. The review team also examined documentation relating to the Partnerships Approval Process, which sets out three 'tiers' of partnership: macro-level (tier one), institutional (tier two) and individual (tier three). While this document is dated 2024 and was therefore not operational at the time of the agreement with Columbia in 2019, the review team considered that this would help the Institute when effectively launching and managing any future partnerships.

52   The review team considered the Institute's decision in the latter half of 2024 to withdraw from the master's partnership with Columbia. The MoU sets up that a 120-day notice period is needed if either party wishes to end the agreement, while also requiring signatories to ensure that all enrolled students are able complete their studies. The review

team considered evidence which showed how the decision was considered internally at the Institute, including the financial implications of continuing with the partnership arrangement. Discussion at an SMT meeting was clear about the reasons for phasing out the dual degree with Columbia, as was documented in a faculty consultation, before approval by the University Academic Council. During the visit, the review team further investigated how the decision-making and consultation process had been managed. It was clear that students had only been advised that the dual degree would no longer run once the decision had been taken and had gone through all decision-making stages, resulting in some dissatisfaction from the students met by the review team. While the review team consider it would have been preferable if communication with the student body of the decision had taken place earlier, the team were reassured that no current students, including those whose studies were currently suspended, would be disadvantaged by the end of the agreement, and that there was no evidence of any breach of the MoU.

53   Overall, the review team concluded that the Institute's approach to the management of partnerships is proportionate, with effective mechanisms in place to ensure proper governance and operation, thereby ensuring a suitable learning experience for students. The Institute therefore **is aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle.

Principle 9: Recruiting, selecting and admitting students

> Providers operate recruitment, selection and admissions processes that are transparent, fair and inclusive. Providers maintain and publish accurate, relevant and accessible information about their provision, enabling students to make informed choices about their studies and future aspirations.

Findings

54   The Institute's Admissions Policy sets out the mission and values of the provider, noting the importance of diversity in enriching the educational experience. The minimum admissions requirements are clearly stated, alongside a brief outline of the admissions process.

55   The master's application process is open twice during the year. Students complete an online application, providing relevant documentation, including certificates, proof of English proficiency and references and are invited to interview. This process is clearly outlined on the provider website. The application and interview outcomes are then considered by the Master's Admissions Committee, which is responsible for the selection and admissions for master's students. Recommendations are then made to SMT, and these are formally approved through the Registrar's Working Group.

56   Doctoral applicants also apply online and are asked to provide relevant documentation including a CV, a letter of motivation, an outline of their intended dissertation project, a letter of recommendation and proof of qualification. Applicants are also expected to undertake a language ability test and an admissions test. The AKU-ISMC PhD Admissions Committee then discusses the research topics of applicants to assure a fit with Faculty expertise. In the case of the master's and doctoral programme, the review team found the Institute operates recruitment processes that are transparent, fair and inclusive.

57   In most cases the review team found prospective students can access clear and robust information about the provider and the programmes of study on the provider website, at open days, in the Prospectus and in the PhD Leaflet. The programme information and application process are clearly outlined on the website and in the Prospectus, alongside information relating to academic support, student voice and accommodation, and the PhD Leaflet contains information including course details, fees, entry requirements for postgraduate study and information about the application process.

58   In meetings with staff the review team heard about an informal approach to checking the accuracy of public information. Changes are requested by the programme team and accuracy of current information is confirmed to the Marketing and Communications Manager. While the team can confirm that in most cases robust and detailed information is available on the website in relation to the programmes and the provider, the review team did note a small number of issues in relation to accuracy and currency of information. For example, there was a link to a programme specification for the 90-credit two-year programme last taught in 2019, rather than the updated 45-credit programme (see paragraph 45). Therefore, while the programme details on the webpage are correct, the linked document is not. Also, some information could be misleading, such as the statement that 'The PhD in History and PhD in Political Science degrees are accredited by the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan and validated by The UK Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and are the equivalent of a UK PhD degree'. The review team therefore **recommend** that the Institute takes further steps to strengthen the accuracy of published information.

59   The Student Submission suggests that the pre-entry support for visa and immigration

for international students could be enhanced. There is limited information available on the Institute's website, however a Student Visa Workshop was provided for students, which the team found to be detailed and signposts to relevant information. The meeting with the professional support staff confirmed that students are supported with visa applications and information is provided during the application and admissions process.

60   The Admissions Policy includes a link to the AKU-ISMC Admissions Appeals process. The process clearly says that appeals should relate to entry criteria and administrative or procedural error only, rather than disputing an admissions decision. The Institute's Self-Evaluation Document noted that students were unable to appeal admissions decisions, however it was confirmed during the review visit that appeals related to the admissions procedure or violation of the Charter are considered (see paragraph 81).

61   There is a Credit Transfer Policy, which outlines the process for transferring credits, clearly articulating what can and cannot be transferred. The policy outlines the process, with an advising committee led by the Dean. The Credit Transfer Policy has not yet been utilised by students and therefore the review team were unable to review this in practice. The provider also has a clear Deferred Admissions Policy, which sets out that students can defer for one year by a written request.

62   The review team conclude that the provider runs sound recruitment, selection and admissions processes that are transparent, fair and inclusive. While the review team have recommended that processes are further strengthened to ensure accuracy and currency of some information on the website, overall the team consider that the Institute **is aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle.

Principle 10: Supporting students to achieve their potential

> **Providers facilitate a framework of support for students that enables them to have a high-quality learning experience and achieve their potential as they progress in their studies. The support structure scaffolds the academic, personal and professional learning journey, enabling students to recognise and articulate their progress and achievements.**

Findings

63   The Institute website, Prospectus and PhD Leaflet provide information on the support available for students. Students are supported throughout the application process by the Manager of Educational Programmes, who also provides information related to the visa process. Student induction, as evidenced by the Induction Schedule, includes sessions to introduce key members of staff, the library and counselling services and workshops for academic writing, as well as social activities to introduce students to London.

64   A key mechanism for supporting students to achieve their potential is the Academic Advisor. The Academic Advisor Role Descriptor notes this is an active role that guides the student to define and develop realistic educational career plans. The role covers pastoral, academic and career-related support and Academic Advisors meet with their students during orientation and at least once a semester. Meetings are recorded for monitoring purposes, however both staff and students confirmed that other contact and meetings take place as needed. The students were positive about the support provided through the Academic Advisor role and the accessibility of staff. In addition to the pastoral support provided by the Academic Advisor, students have access to counselling services free of charge through Only Connect.

65   Academic skills support is available through resources on the VLE and dedicated central support sessions delivered through AKU. The Library Strategy Paper includes a strategic aim around teaching, learning and research which also mentions building information literacy and supporting students with academic skills. Students noted the support available with academic writing, but did suggest more face-to-face sessions would be beneficial.

66   The Institute also has activities outside of the curriculum that support academic and professional development, including monthly internal research seminars, the Annual Arabic Pasts Conference and the joint AKU-ISMC and Institute of Ismaili Studies (ISS) Graduate Conference. The review team heard from staff and students that fieldtrips are also available, as are various examples of activities and cultural events that include students, however the students did note that in recent years there appears to have been a reduction in trips and activities.

67   Students with additional support needs can access support through the Manager of Educational Programmes, who facilitates an individual needs-based assessment, supported by the Registrar's Office, based on the student's medical/disability records. The Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities Policy outlines the support services and articulates the offer of an assessment of study and support needs. This results in a report with detailed recommendations. Examples of potential adjustments are outlined in the policy, such as support accessing lecture resources and adjustments to assessment arrangements. An anonymised example was provided of a Disability Needs Assessment Report which outlines the student requirements and recommends relevant accommodations such as more time and a quiet testing environment, and this process was confirmed by relevant members of staff.

68   Financial help is also available and is assessed by AKU's Financial Assistance Committee. The Financial Assistance Process presentation to students explains the financial support available and the process for applying for this. Students can also access loans for laptops if needed, as evidenced in the Student Laptop Loan Application. The review team considered that the help available to students demonstrates a commitment to support students financially.

69   The review team conclude that the provider does facilitate a framework of support for students through the Academic Advisors, academic skills support, access to counselling and financial help. The Institute therefore **is aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle.

Principle 11: Teaching, learning and assessment

> **Providers facilitate a collaborative and inclusive approach that enables students to have a high-quality learning experience and to progress through their studies. All students are supported to develop and demonstrate academic and professional skills and competencies. Assessment employs a variety of methods, embodying the values of academic integrity, producing outcomes that are comparable across the UK and recognised globally.**

Findings

70   The Institute's approach to teaching, learning and assessment is set within a broader 'Teaching and Learning Framework'. This policy document shows that there are four key themes of quality, access, relevance, and impact in respect of the University's suggested approach to education. These themes are expanded upon in the framework, alongside other aspects of the Institute's approach to teaching, learning and assessment, such as the attributes expected of AKU graduates and approaches to student engagement. The review team formed the view that the Framework acts as a suitable guide for staff of the Institute in the provision of teaching and learning. The Institute's provision is characterised by a notably high academic staff-student ratio, which is currently almost one to one.

71   Scrutiny of academic staff CVs by the review team showed that staff of the Institute are suitably qualified to deliver teaching and learning (see paragraph 21). There is evidence of strong research and scholarly experience among the faculty, all of whom are qualified to doctoral level. Academic staff are drawn from varied backgrounds which are consistent with the disciplines covered by the master's programme. The academic staff base consists of Assistant Professors (including early career researchers), Associate Professors and full Professors, supported by tutors in the delivery of language courses. Staff also benefit from collaborations with other parts of the University, including the opportunity to teach in other locations overseas, thereby further developing their teaching and scholarship practice, particularly in respect of international students who form most of the Institute's student body.

72   The Institute's approach to teaching scholarship is clear through the work of the QTL_net and associated activity. The QTL_net sits within the broader University structure, with staff travelling to London to provide support and training. Various teaching tips and stories are available on the QTL_net website, enabling academic staff to consider and reflect on the practice of teaching and learning. A full programme of events is also advertised. Staff are actively encouraged to apply for Associate Fellowship and Fellowship of the HEA through the TEACH programme which the provider offers to staff. Additional opportunities are available for the ongoing professional development of both academic and professional services staff of the Institute. Examples cited during the visit included training on safeguarding and careers and mentoring. Academic staff benefit from a research allowance which enables them to present at conferences or undertake associated scholarly activity, including fieldwork. Professional services staff can also undergo additional training relevant to their role.

73   Staff have also been encouraged and trained to act as 'critical friends' of colleagues as they prepare their applications for Fellowship. Alongside this, the Institute's 'Teaching Squares' programme enables four colleagues, working as a group, to observe and learn from the teaching practice of others and to provide mutual support and advice. The review team found the use of the AKU Network of Quality, Teaching and Learning (QTL_net) to enhance teaching and learning practice, including the potential for cross-campus collaboration, and the resultant positive impact on the student learning experience an **example of good practice**.

74   The review team considered the nature of careers and employability support for students and found that careers activity for students is currently shared with the co-located Institute of Ismaili Studies. The review team met with alumni who told the team that academic advisors and academic staff had also discussed aspects of employability with them while studying at the Institute, and it was further noted that practical skills-based elements feature in the curriculum, such as instruction in programming languages as part of the Digital Humanities core course. The review team concluded that these aspects are likely to be useful to students' future careers.

75   Assessments are double-marked (and dissertations are blind double-marked), consistent with the published policy. During the visit, the review team considered the Institute's approach to assessment in further detail during meetings with staff and students. The Education Committee acts as a forum to ensure that varied assessments are designed before being issued to students. In addition, students are apprised of the importance of academic integrity and the role of generative artificial intelligence at induction, through published guidelines, and through themed workshops during the programme. The review team considered that the Institute's approach to assessment and securing academic standards was robust and rigorous.

76   The Teaching and Learning Framework reiterates the importance of prompt feedback on assessment. Students confirmed that feedback on assessed work was timely and useful. The demonstration of the VLE also showed how the system is utilised to upload assignments and return marks. The review team examined samples of assessment feedback, both formative and summative, and concluded that the Institute's approach to the management of assessment, including the provision of feedback, was appropriate. This was further confirmed by scrutiny of the external examiner reports, which students can access on the VLE, although the review team concluded that the Institute may wish to consider the further use of the external examiner, specifically in the assessment-setting process.

77   Overall, the review team concluded that the provider offers a high-quality approach to teaching, learning and assessment which is grounded in robust teaching scholarship principles. The Institute therefore **is aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle.

Principle 12: Operating concerns, complaints and appeals processes

> Providers operate processes for complaints and appeals that are robust, fair, transparent and accessible, and clearly articulated to staff and students. Policies and processes for concerns, complaints and appeals are regularly reviewed and the outcomes are used to support the enhancement of provision and the student experience.

Findings

78   The provider encourages concern resolution through informal mechanisms where possible, including through access to key staff such as the Academic Advisor, who has a pastoral support element within their role and meets with the student at least once a semester. Other mechanisms include Student Council or 'coffee with the Dean', which provides an opportunity for concerns to be raised and effectively addressed (see paragraph 10).

79   The provider has a clearly articulated, robust and transparent process for dealing with student complaints, as outlined in the AKU-ISMC Student Complaint Procedure. The document clearly outlines the scope of the policy, noting what is not included, such as complaints related to admissions, appeals against academic decisions and academic integrity. The informal and formal processes are outlined clearly, including the steps and responsibilities. The timelines for each step are clear and transparent, and the ability to appeal the outcomes is noted. No formal complaints have been recorded within the last five years; therefore, the team were not able to review this practice or the approach to enhancement of provision as a result of complaints.

80   The Board of Student Academic Appeal Policy outlines the processes for appeals. Two categories for appeal are outlined, an appeal related to final grades and an appeal related to the application of university regulations. The policy notes that appeals related to an academic grade should be discussed with the course instructor initially, before escalating to the Head of Educational Programmes, and finally the Dean if still unresolved. All timelines are clearly outlined. No formal academic appeals have been recorded and therefore the team were not able to review this practice.

81   The provider noted that there is a current appeal in progress with the Registrar that relates to the admissions process. The senior staff stated that the appeal did not follow the AKU-ISMC Student Complaint Procedure as this procedure clearly notes it relates to current rather than prospective students, and it was not appropriate for the Board of Student Academic Appeals as it does not relate to final grades or application of academic university regulations. There is an ISMC Admissions Appeals Policy, which provides the opportunity to appeal an admissions decision as a result of procedural error, however this process was not formally followed. The process within this policy would be that the appeal is dealt with informally initially by the provider, with escalation to the Registrar if the student is unsatisfied, and therefore the provider has inadvertently followed this procedure. The status of the ISMC Admissions Appeals Policy is unclear and the provider noted that appeals processes are being harmonised across AKU to ensure future clarity.

82   Relevant policies and processes are available on the provider website and on the VLE, however both the Student Submission and the student meeting suggest limited awareness of the opportunity to follow formal processes in relation to both complaints and appeals. The Student Submission suggests a level of dissatisfaction in relation to the ability to formally raise a concern and when asked about formal processes during the review visit, students

were unaware of the relevant policies. In meeting with the review team, the students stated that if they had a complaint or appeal they would consult the Student Handbook and speak with relevant members of staff to access these policies if needed, however, there is no discussion of complaints and appeals processes within the AKU Graduate Programmes Student Handbook, beyond a link to the Board of Student Academic Appeals in a list of university policies at the end of the handbook. Therefore, the review team **recommend** that the provider increase awareness among staff and students of the formal complaints and appeals policies and procedures, including appeals related to admissions, to ensure greater transparency and accessibility.

83   The review team concluded that the provider has appropriate complaints and appeal policies and procedures in place. These are robust, fair and transparent and accessible in that they are openly available. The team did find a lack of clarity in relation to appeals against admissions decisions and some limited awareness of the complaints and appeals policies and procedures, which could be improved**.** However, overall, the review team considered the Institute **is aligned** with the Sector-Agreed Principle.

Enhancement initiatives

Commentary on institutional approach to enhancement

84   The Institute's approach to Quality Enhancement is largely informed by the approach of Aga Khan University (AKU). AKU has created a number of networks to enhance the quality of learning and teaching among its academic entities, such as the Institute. Based upon networks such as the Network of Teaching Quality and Learning, the objective is to build a culture for quality improvement, improve capacity to support enhancement and to create greater consistency in its approaches to enhancement.

85   The Institute does not have a formal Quality Enhancement Plan, but it does have specific goals and initiatives aimed at improving student learning experience outcomes and overall effectiveness. The team found evidence of enhancement in the student learning experience in relation to engaging students as partners and in the teaching, learning and assessment. In particular, the review team found the use of the AKU QTL_net to enhance teaching and learning practice, including the potential for cross-campus collaboration, and the resultant positive impact on the student learning experience an example of good practice.

86   The Institute's main academic committees oversee the development, review, and recommendation of policies and procedures for institutional effectiveness. Faculty and professional staff are engaged in monitoring, evaluating and enhancing learning provision. The team found some evidence of consultation with staff in relation to the development of the new master's programme and for students' informal meetings with the Dean. There was evidence enhancements have been made to student engagement including more formal, recorded Student Council meetings, student representation at the Education Committee and students being added to the membership of the Staff Forum. However, the review team also consider that more could be done to involve students in a wider range of discussions to enhance the student voice and improve the student learning experience, as reflected in the recommendation for the Institute to take steps to ensure that students are enabled and encouraged to actively engage in all aspects of assuring and enhancing the quality of the student learning experience (see paragraph 14).

87   While the team found the Institute uses data to inform and evaluate quality of the student learning experience, for example using student attainment and satisfaction data as a key part of quarterly reports on student performance, there is more that could be done to enhance the student learning experience as recommended by the team. For example, more could be made of the existing Student Evaluation of Teaching and library surveys to enhance student support and learning resources. The appointment of a new member of staff to focus on data analysis was a positive move. By using a combination of qualitative and quantitative data, the Institute would be better able to assess the impact of its initiatives and this is why the review team recommended the Institute does more to enhance the use of data to inform and evaluate quality of the student experience and close the feedback loop (see paragraph 26).