

Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of Inchbald School of Design

May 2016

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About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Inchbald School of Design. The review took place from 16 to 19 May 2016 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Robert Saynor
- Mrs Amanda Greason
- Mr Benjamin Hunt (student reviewer).

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

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

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

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

In reviewing Inchbald School of Design the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland. The [themes](#) for the academic year 2015-16 are Student Employability, and Digital Literacy,² and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 3. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 6.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.³ A dedicated section explains the method for [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).⁴ For an explanation of terms see the [glossary](#) at the end of this report.

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

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

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

⁴ Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers): www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Educational-Oversight.aspx

Amended judgement - September 2017

In May 2016, Inchbald School of Design underwent a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) which resulted in judgements of 'requires improvement to meet UK expectations' for the setting and maintenance of the academic standards.

As a consequence, it was agreed with the Home Office to consider the progress made by the School to address the 'requires improvement' judgement through an extended monitoring visit.

The review team evaluated the actions that had been undertaken by the School against their action plan since the original review, and considered new and revised policies and procedures, along with additional supporting evidence.

The review team was satisfied that for each of the original recommendations had been acted upon in a serious and effective way and that the College was meeting UK expectations for the judgement area which had been unsatisfactory at the original review.

Amended judgement

As a result of this extended monitoring visit, the School's judgements are now as follows:

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

The review can therefore be signed off as complete.

A report from the extended annual monitoring visit is published on the QAA website, at: www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/provider?UKPRN=10003284

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Inchbald School of Design

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Inchbald School of Design.

- The maintenance of the academic standards of the awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding body **meets** UK expectations.
- The setting and maintenance of the academic standards of the awards offered by Inchbald School of Design **requires improvement to meet** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at Inchbald School of Design.

- The small group studio approach, the input of practising professionals and the use of live projects, which enhances the student learning experience (Expectations B3 and Enhancement).
- The comprehensive support for students and alumni which enhances employability (Expectation B4 and Enhancement).
- The comprehensive internal verification and moderation processes that effectively support assessment decisions (Expectation B6).
- The wide-ranging and effective external partnerships which enhance the student learning experience and provide effective preparation for graduate employment (Expectations Enhancement, B3 and B4).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Inchbald School of Design.

By October 2016:

- put in place comprehensive academic regulations for Garden Design and Architectural Interior Design diplomas and communicate these to staff and students (Expectation A2.1, B9)
- ensure that students are made aware of how to access external examiner reports (Expectation B7).

By February 2017:

- confirm the positioning of the Garden Design and Architectural Interior Design diplomas at the appropriate level on the FHEQ (Expectation A1)
- formalise the committees dealing with oversight of academic standards to ensure that all have terms of reference, defined membership, and are systematically recorded (Expectations A2.1 and A3.1)
- revise the definitive programme records for Garden Design and Architectural Interior Design diplomas to reflect the format used for validated provision (Expectation A2.2)

- clearly articulate assessment processes for Garden Design and Architectural Interior Design diplomas to ensure alignment of programme learning outcomes (Expectation A3.2)
- ensure that external academic views are formally sought in the development and approval of Garden Design and Architectural Interior Design diplomas (Expectation A3.4)
- ensure that discussions of external examiner reports are formally recorded by the School (Expectation B7)
- implement formal recording processes for the conferment of final assessment outcomes for diploma awards (Expectation B6).

For July 2017:

- implement a formal process of validation, approval and periodic review for Garden Design and Architectural Interior Design diplomas (Expectations A3.1 and B1)
- implement a formal and systematic annual monitoring process for Garden Design and Architectural Interior Design diplomas (Expectations A3.3 and B8)
- appoint external examiners for Garden Design and Architectural Interior Design diplomas (Expectations B7 and A3.4).

Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms** the following actions that the Inchbald School of Design is already taking to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to its students:

- the establishing of an expert group of current external practitioners to assist in the further development and formal approval of the Garden Design and Architectural Interior Design diplomas (Expectation B1).

Theme: Student Employability

Inchbald School of Design (the School) has a strong ethos geared towards employability that permeates throughout its provision and practice. All students are provided with a learning environment that develops the creative, technical and personal skills required by the garden and interior design professions and affords them an education that leaves them well-prepared to enter employment.

The curricula in place have been purposely designed with employability as an achievable end point. The careers advice service provides guidance for entry to the professions and actively promotes its graduates to prospective employers. The School has a well-developed international reputation for the quality of its provision and calibre of graduates. This is coupled with excellent links to employers who provide work placements and curriculum advice. The School also has strong links with relevant professional and statutory bodies.

The employability ethos is further promulgated through a delivery model that is positively enhanced through small group studio classes and with significant input from teachers who are practising design professionals. The assessment process is also designed to test student readiness for employment, and learning outcomes reflect the necessary student skills. Internships and work placements are readily available and provide a testing ground for students at various points in their study programmes. Many students gain full-time employment following such periods of industry experience.

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

About Inchbald School of Design

The School was founded in 1960 and is dedicated to the education of professional practitioners in Interior and Garden Design. The School is located in central London on two sites: the Interior Design Faculty at Eaton Gate and the Garden Faculty at Eccleston Square. The School is close to renowned galleries, museums and professional facilities and these are a valuable practical resource for students. Students are recruited from the UK and overseas, and across a wide age range and disparate professional and educational backgrounds.

In 1999, the School added to its core diploma programmes by developing postgraduate and master's awards validated by the University of Wales. Online versions of these awards were validated in 2010. Validation of these programmes was transferred to Glyndŵr University in 2014 and a 1 year top-up degree programme was also approved. Additionally, the School has offered 1 year (3 years part-time) diplomas in garden design and interior design for over 50 years, these awards being made on behalf of the School.

Graduates from the School are widely regarded throughout the profession as very knowledgeable, with an in-depth understanding of design and its applications. One student stated that '...Inchbald as a School of Design caters for students of any background, age and nationality, all of which have one thing in common...creative and imaginative minds'. Many of them as students and as alumni have been part of international exhibitions and have won awards at such events as the Chelsea Flower Show.

The School underwent a Review for Educational Oversight, by QAA, in May 2012. The review team identified four areas of good practice and two advisable recommendations. The findings from this were summarised in an action plan compiled by the School and this was subject to QAA annual monitoring visits in 2013, 2014 and 2015. The latter of these recorded a commendable progress judgement.

There are 144 students studying programmes at the School. Of these, 90 were studying by online instructions and 54 by on-campus study. Of the total, 24 (six online) were studying on Glyndŵr University-validated provision. For the on-campus students, 54 are full-time and six are part time.

There are 33 academic staff, six of whom perform a dual senior academic/administration role and 28 are part-time, mainly practitioner experts from the industry. Part-time tutors are drawn from a variety of relevant professional backgrounds and are actively engaged in design work in their respective fields. Students confirm that the skills, experience and expertise of tutors are central to their own development as designers.

Explanation of the findings about Inchbald School of Design

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

1 Judgement: The setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards and the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies

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 School's agreement with Glyndŵr University (the University) was established in 2014 when a validation event approved a range of undergraduate and postgraduate provision. The current awards are in the areas of a BA (Hons) at level 6, and Postgraduate in Architectural Interior Design and Garden Design. The first cohort of students on the postgraduate award graduated in 2014, and the first cohort of BA (Hons) in Architectural Interior Design commenced in 2015-16.

1.2 This provision is managed through policies and procedures agreed with the University and set out in a collaborative guide. The undergraduate and postgraduate validated programmes were jointly developed with the University and tested for academic cohesion and levels of achievement by reference to external benchmark statements and thresholds, the Quality Code and University regulations.

1.3 The validated provision is clearly set at FHEQ level 6 (for the 1-Year top-up degree programmes) and level 7 (for the postgraduate programmes). Programme learning outcomes clearly reflect the relevant FHEQ descriptor and module learning outcomes are clearly set to ensure that students are able to meet the required academic standard. Successful completion of the awards is subject to students attaining these learning

outcomes through assessed work. The programmes also incorporate relevant elements of the Art and Design Subject Benchmark Statements.

1.4 The School-validated diploma courses are adequately presented in programme specifications which contain programme learning outcomes. The diploma programme handbooks include the associated module learning outcomes. However, explicit reference is not made to the FHEQ level at which the diploma programmes are set although the review team was assured by the School that these are set at level 5.

1.5 The School has consulted sector-specific reference points in the design of its diploma provision to include the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) and the British Institute for Interior Design (BIID). Subject Benchmark Statements in art and design and architectural design also inform the design of its diplomas.

1.6 The arrangements which the School has in place to meet the requirements of the University for its validated provision and the way in which the School's diploma provision meets the relevant FHEQ levels and reflects professional and Subject Benchmark Statements would enable the School to meet this Expectation.

1.7 The review team tested the School's approach to securing the academic standards of its provision by examining a range of documentation including the University validation process; reports of the 2014 validation of the School's degree and postgraduate level provision; the School's response to the validation conditions; programme specifications for both the University provision and the School's diplomas and module specifications for the diploma provision. It also met staff from the University and the School and students representing all provision including online programmes.

1.8 The validation panel confirmed that the University-validated undergraduate and postgraduate provision meets the FHEQ descriptors for levels 6 and 7 respectively and has been informed by relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. The panel also considered the extent to which the School-validated diploma provision would provide students with progression to the validated degree-level programme. The review team was informed that prior to 2014, when the School had an agreement with the University of Wales for validation of a postgraduate master's programme, the University of Wales had approved the School's diploma provision as providing progression to postgraduate-level study. In that sense it was confirming that the School's diploma provision was set at FHEQ level 6.

1.9 There is a lack of clarity over the positioning of the Schools' diploma provision on the FHEQ. The panel for the Glyndŵr University validation of the degree-level provision, considered whether students from the School's diploma provision would be able to progress to the undergraduate validated courses. The University set a condition which required the School to demonstrate how its diploma provision could provide this progression through evidencing the diploma's location on the FHEQ. The School's response to this condition reiterated the previous awarding body's assertion that the diploma provision was set at level 6 and suggested that this would therefore enable students to progress on to the validated undergraduate courses. It also responded that applicants for the School's diplomas must have studied at level 4 or have equivalent industrial experience before being admitted to the course. The School and staff from the University stated that it was their belief that the diploma provision was now set at level 5 although it was unable to inform the review team of any revisions it had made to the diploma to confirm this positioning. The University regards the diploma as providing a progression route to the undergraduate provision providing that students gain additional industrial experience before such progression would be possible.

1.10 The School diploma programme specifications and module descriptors show evidence of the programme learning outcomes being aligned with appropriate FHEQ level 5 descriptors. Discussions with teaching staff revealed that they have a clear understanding of

the different academic demands of levels 5, 6 and 7 and reflect this in their teaching and assessment. The review team was assured through discussions with staff and through examination of programme and module specifications that the School understands its responsibilities for ensuring that its diploma provision is set at a relevant level of the FHEQ. It would benefit, however, from a more explicit process through which it formally records its deliberations which lead to this positioning. The review team **recommends** that the School confirms the positioning of the Garden Design and Architectural Design diplomas at the appropriate level on the FHEQ.

1.11 In summary, the approach taken by the School to its responsibilities with regard to all provision enables it to meet Expectation A.1. There is evidence that the School's own diploma provision is set at an appropriate level on the FHEQ; however, this requires further work to formally position it for future development. Therefore, the level of associated risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Moderate

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

1.12 Academic standards for the University-validated provision is assured by the School through the application of the University's academic framework and regulations. However, there is no explicit regulatory framework for the School's own diploma provision. The School uses the academic regulations of the University to guide the regulatory framework for the diplomas making relevant adjustments where required. Student handbooks contain appropriate reference to elements of these academic regulations.

1.13 The School has a committee structure which consists of a Management Committee, Faculty Committees, an Assessment Committee and a Staff Student Consultative Committee. These committees discuss matters pertaining to academic standards for all programmes.

1.14 Application of the University's academic regulations to the validated provision would allow the Expectation to be met for the degree and postgraduate programmes. However, the absence of an explicit regulatory framework for the School's diplomas would not enable this Expectation to be met for these programmes.

1.15 The review team tested this Expectation through the review of a wide range of documentation including the University's academic framework and regulations, the Collaborative Guide, programme specifications, and the student handbook. It also met staff from the School and the University and students from all programmes.

1.16 Staff teaching on the University-validated programmes are clearly aware of the University's regulatory framework and academic regulations through reference to the Collaborative Guide. They are introduced to these during staff induction and through the regular discussions. Students are provided with the regulations through the programme handbooks, and also have access to them on the University's virtual learning environment (VLE). Examination boards are conducted effectively and external examiner reports confirm that the regulations are properly applied.

1.17 However, the lack of an explicit regulatory framework means that it is difficult for the School to fully demonstrate the maintenance of academic standards for the diploma programmes. For example, there are no arrangements for matters such as assessment boards and external examiners. The student handbooks for the diploma programmes make some reference to the academic regulations in the areas of mitigation and late submissions of assessment. However, there are omissions including, for example, the consequences of failing a module and there are no formal statements on how students can make appeals or complaints (paragraph 2.91). There is also a lack of clarity in student handbooks regarding the grading scales to be applied. The review team **recommends** that the School puts in place comprehensive academic regulations for the Garden Design and Architectural Interior Design diplomas and communicates these to staff and students.

1.18 There is also a lack of clarity over the locus of responsibility for the oversight of academic standards for the School's diploma provision. The review team found that none of the School's named committees (paragraph 1.13) have stated terms of reference and

constitutions. The Management Committee's minutes indicate that it addresses a range of matters, some of a commercial nature and others of an academic nature. The review team was informed that the Faculty and Assessment Committees discuss academic matters exclusively. They operate informally and the Faculty committee meetings for Interior Design have minutes. Records of the meetings for Garden Design are informal and take the form of an email record to attendees. The deliberations of these committees may result in matters being referred to the Management Committee and reflected in this committee's minutes. Students are not represented on any of these committees. The review team **recommends** that the School formalises the committees dealing with the oversight of academic standards to ensure that all have terms of reference and defined membership and are systematically recorded.

1.19 In summary, the School effectively applies the University's academic framework for the validated provision. Staff and students on these programmes are aware of the academic regulations. However, the lack of an explicit regulatory framework for the diploma programmes, together with omissions in the articulation of the academic regulations and shortcomings in the design and operation of its committee system, means that the Expectation is not met and the level of associated risk is moderate.

Expectation: Not met

Level of risk: Moderate

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

1.20 The School has a policy in use that requires the creation of definitive documents of each approved programme both self and externally validated. The process has enabled records of each programme to be documented and published and used as a reference point for the delivery of the programmes.

1.21 The School maintains definitive records for the University-validated degree and postgraduate programme and the School-validated diplomas. These consist of programme handbooks, programme specifications, module specifications and student handbooks. These provide definitive information on a variety of areas including course aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements. The School makes these available to staff and students in hard copy and through the VLE. These documents are subject to periodic updating and reapproval.

1.22 The existence of these documents, together with the stated intention to maintain and update these would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.23 The team examined definitive records for all of the programmes and scrutinised the effectiveness of the information that was available in the documents. The team cross-checked information from the definitive records with published information on the School website to check the accuracy and impact of the maintenance of documented information. The team also met staff and students.

1.24 Programme specifications for the University-validated programmes feature clear outlines and descriptions of the programmes at point of delivery. The documents, together with student handbooks, outline the qualifications of study, modes of study available, aims of study, criteria for admission, learning outcomes related to relevant Subject Benchmark Statements, teaching, learning and assessment strategies, key skills mapping for students, roles and responsibilities of the Academic Link Tutor, the role of induction and feedback, and programme approval date. These documents are kept up to date through appropriate periodic review and monitoring.

1.25 The School diplomas programme specifications together with the student handbooks and module specifications are used appropriately within the School as definitive records for staff and students as a point of delivery at the School. These documents outline the teaching institution; the awarding titles; Subject Benchmark Statements used; admissions criteria; aims of the programmes; learning and teaching strategy and assessment strategy. The programme specification document is not as detailed as the University-validated programme definitive documents and some aspects are not well-defined. For example, there is no information regarding the relationship between modules, learning outcomes and relevant FHEQ and benchmarks and approval or review dates of the programmes that are documented. Staff stated that these documents are kept up to date through regular review; however, there is no documented evidence of these discussions having taken place. The team **recommends** that the School revise the definitive

documents for Garden Design and Architectural Interior Design diplomas to reflect the format used for validated provision.

1.26 In conclusion, the School maintains an appropriate formal process of recording the programmes of study as a point of delivery of all provision for the institution. However, the omissions in the Garden Design and Architectural Interior Design diplomas programme specifications point to a weakness in the operation of the School's academic governance of these awards. Therefore, the Expectation is met but the level of associated risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Moderate

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

1.27 The University is responsible for the academic standards of their validated programmes at the School - for example by ensuring that individual modules, learning outcomes and assessment strategies comply with the FHEQ, relevant Subject Benchmark Statements and professional benchmarks, and the Quality Code. The School is responsible for applying the University's academic standards and module guidance to the quality assurance, delivery and assessment of the programmes it delivers on their behalf.

1.28 The University has processes and procedures in place to approve programmes offered at the School and to approve major amendments during the life of a validated programme. Alignment of such provision with the FHEQ is checked in the course of the University approvals processes. The School delivers the University-validated provision in full accordance with these procedures, including annual monitoring of programmes.

1.29 The School's own validated diploma awards were first delivered in 1966 as an intensive one year programme in Interior Design, with the Garden Design following in 1973. The School states that the processes which are used for the approval of the diploma awards follow the University policies and procedures.

1.30 The policies and processes in place for programme approval of University awards are designed to ensure the alignment of content and assessment with the UK threshold standards contained within the FHEQ. This, together with the practice of using these policies and processes for application to the School's own diplomas would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.31 The review team reviewed University and School policy and process documents relating to programme approval and modification. The team met staff with responsibility for programme approval and ongoing review, including representation from the University Collaborative Partnerships Unit and Academic Link Tutor. The review team also read documents relating to recent approvals of new University programmes and explored how these were used for the approval and modification to diploma programmes.

1.32 There are clear procedures and processes in place for the development, design and approval of programmes and these are well understood by School staff. The awards are designed and developed by the School in line with University regulations. The programme approval process for University-validated provision is coordinated by the University Academic Quality and Standards Unit in liaison with the Collaborative Partnerships Unit and senior staff at the School. The School is diligent in executing its responsibilities with respect to the maintenance of academic standards with respect to the validated provision. Full details of all aspects of the academic programme approval processes are included within the Programme Periodic Review and Validation section of the University's Academic Quality Handbook (AQH). The University Academic Link Tutor has a key role in supporting the School in the design and combination of modules.

1.33 The partnership relationships between the School and University are effective and support the sharing of good practice which contributes to the enhancement and quality improvement of the student experience. External examiners report positively on the relationship between the School and University. Recent examples of programme approval and review demonstrate that the processes described above operate effectively and as intended. Attention is paid to standards throughout the preparation and approval of new programmes and modification of existing ones. Validation events consider both the programme content, structure and learning and teaching methodologies, and the capacity of the School to deliver the programme in terms of staffing expertise and resources.

1.34 The School was unable to provide the review team with documented evidence of the formal approval or validation of the diploma awards. This is mainly due to the lack of minutes from committees discussing these aspects. An associated recommendation has been made in Section A2.1 (para 1.18) in this respect.

1.35 The School is currently in discussion with its awarding body to progress a formal validation process for the diploma programmes which is designed to fully position these awards against the FHEQ and to enable students from the diploma programmes to progress to the validated degree programme. The School confirmed that the processes which are used for the approval of the diploma award follow the University policies and procedures. The validity and currency of the diploma programmes is maintained throughout the academic year through a range of changes to programme content to maintain academic relevance to enable students to acquire the skills and competencies for progression. These approaches are also discussed in Section B1. However, there has been no formal process to validate the awards and there is limited evidence of a formal periodic review process. The review team **recommends** that the School implements a formal process of validation, approval and periodic review for Garden Design and Architectural Interior Design diplomas.

1.36 The review team concludes that the School, with the support of the University, has appropriate policies in place for the approval of University-validated awards and which ensure they are set at a level that meets UK threshold standards. Processes are also in place to ensure that UK threshold standards continue to be met after programmes have been amended. The School's approach to maintenance of its diploma programmes for validity and currency is based on that used for University-validated provision. The review team concludes that due to the lack of supporting institutional policies and procedures and associated regulations relating to the formal approval of the diploma awards, the Expectation for diploma awards is not met. It recommends that the School implements a formal process of validation and approval of the core diploma awards. The School has appropriate processes in place to maintain validity and currency of the diploma awards and these enable students to achieve the required skills and competencies to progress (see Section B1). Therefore the level of associated risk is moderate.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

1.37 Credit and qualifications frameworks are provided by the University for validated provision and are aligned to the FHEQ. The University maintains oversight of learning outcomes and assessment through the implementation of their assessment regulations and procedures by the School. Implementation of these regulations is monitored through programme approval, annual review, and the work of external examiners. The School works within the frameworks for assessment provided by the University and is responsible for designing expected learning outcomes and processes for assessment. The School is also responsible for internal verification of student achievement.

1.38 The School has overarching systems, processes, policies and procedures in place designed to implement the frameworks provided by the University. The School also applies the processes and procedures which have been adopted from the University in relation to the achievement of learning outcomes for the diploma awards. These policies and procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.39 The review team reviewed documentation setting out assessment requirements, including programme and module specifications and handbooks; examples of internal moderation and verification; external examiners' reports; operations manuals; responsibility lists; minutes of assessment boards, and general guidance available to staff on assessment. The team also met staff, including a representative from the University Collaborative Partnerships Unit and the Academic Link Tutor.

1.40 Assessment processes for University-validated programmes are in line with the appropriate University regulations as set out in the Academic Quality Handbook (AQH). This provides comprehensive guidance on the various policies and procedures of Glyndŵr University which support the operation of the Regulations. The AQH is comprised of information concerning professional, statutory and regulatory bodies; annual monitoring; programme periodic review and validation; recognition of prior learning; collaborative provision; and external examiners. Overarching guidance is provided to partners through the University Guide for Collaborative Partner Staff. These regulations are well understood by School staff.

1.41 Awarding body frameworks, policies and procedures for assessment and the award of credit and qualifications are operated appropriately by School staff. All aspects of School operating procedures for the design, development, delivery, assessment and quality assurance of University programmes and awards are consistent with the University's Regulations, Policies and Procedures and AQH.

1.42 The supporting School documentation for the University-validated awards clearly describes the intended learning outcomes and associated assessment requirements to meet

these. There are effective operational processes in place for the assessment of students which requires them to demonstrate that they have met appropriate learning outcomes.

1.43 The School Diploma programmes have clearly stated aims and learning outcomes, module learning outcomes and detailed assessment matrices which map assessment decisions to module achievement. Intended learning outcomes for the Diploma programmes are set at an appropriate level and taken into consideration as part of the assessment process. A range of assignments are delivered within each module which, when combined, allows for the achievement of the overall module outcomes. However, the team were unable to identify overarching documentation which described this process fully and how this was communicated to the student body. The review team **recommends** that the School clearly articulate assessment processes for Garden Design and Architectural Interior Design diplomas to ensure alignment of programme learning outcomes.

1.44 The School has robust systems for internal moderation and verification of student assessment which are implemented thoroughly. Staff are provided with appropriate guidance, support and development, to ensure that assessment is effective. The processes for assessment and verification of student performance to ensure they meet the learning outcomes are discussed further in Section B6.

1.45 There are effective and robust operational procedures and processes on the handling of reasonable adjustment, mitigating circumstances, academic malpractice, recognition of prior learning, academic appeals, and the conduct of assessment boards. External examiners report that the assessment boards for University-validated provision operate in accordance with required procedures, and that they were appropriately involved in the moderation of student assessment decisions. Additionally, there are comprehensive processes in place to verify assessment decisions. The review team concludes that Expectation A3.2 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

1.46 Responsibility for the monitoring and review of standards of University-validated provision is shared between the School and the University. Systems are in place for internal and external moderation, as discussed further in Section B6. These are designed to ensure that programmes are delivered as approved and that threshold standards aligned with the FHEQ are met. The academic health of individual programmes is addressed through annual monitoring. These programmes are subject to periodic approval which checks that standards are appropriate. These processes and procedures are also applied in relation to annual monitoring and review of the School's own diploma awards.

1.47 The review team finds that the policies and processes in place for programme monitoring and review of University awards are designed to ensure that standards are aligned with UK threshold standards. These policies and processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.48 The review team tested the effectiveness of the monitoring and review processes by examining documentation supplied by the School, including partnership memoranda, procedural documents, annual monitoring reports (AMRs), minutes of meetings, programme specifications, external examiner reports, handbooks and annual partner reviews. In addition, the team met academic and support staff, and senior staff including representation from the University Collaborative Partnerships Unit and Academic Link Tutor, students, employers and alumni.

1.49 The processes for the monitoring and review of programme delivery, assessment and moderation operate effectively for University-validated awards. The process involves the submission of a reflective report, written to a prescribed template, to the relevant academic department at the University. The report is compiled by the Faculty Director at the School in consultation with other members of the academic team and the University Academic Link Tutor. External examiners are asked specifically to comment on achievement of threshold standards and, where issues are identified, remedial action is taken through the annual monitoring process. Full details on the Annual Programme Monitoring process including report template, and notes of guidance are clearly reported in the Annual Monitoring chapter of the University's Academic Quality Handbook.

1.50 Monitoring and review of the academic standards is relatively informal for School diplomas. This process occurs throughout the academic year under the direction of the Faculty Directors. Any identified amendments are actioned and captured as they occur. This process is further described in A3.1 and B8. However, there is no formal definitive annual record maintained concerning these changes for the diplomas. The team **recommends** that the School implements a formal and systematic annual monitoring process for Garden Design and Architectural Interior Design diploma awards.

1.51 The review team concludes that the School, with the support of the University, has the appropriate policies and practice in place for ongoing monitoring and review of the standards of approved programmes. Staff are aware of these policies and processes and implement them effectively for the University-validated programmes.

1.52 The School diploma awards do not have any substantive annual formal processes in place for the monitoring and review of these awards which explicitly address whether UK threshold academic standards are achieved and whether the academic standards required by the School are being maintained. However, the School did provide the review team with details of the ongoing review of diploma awards which ensured that standards were being maintained and provided a range of opportunities to enhance the content and relevance of the award. Therefore, the team concludes that Expectation A3.3 is met but with a moderate level of associated risk.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

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

Findings

1.53 The University-validated provision is subject to the University's arrangements for validation and approval. These arrangements include the requirement for independent external academic input through the design stage and validation panels include external academic membership. For the 2014 validation there were two external academic members of the validation panel.

1.54 The School receives informal and independent academic input from peers in guiding the design and development of its diploma programmes. It also makes use of industrial expertise throughout the delivery of this provision and seeks advice on making revisions. However, there is no evidence of a more formal process in this area.

1.55 Although the School does not use a development, validation and approval process for its diploma provision, it does seek some academic input and extensive external industrial input to the development and delivery of these programmes.

1.56 The use of external independent expertise in guiding the design, development and approval of the provision at the School would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.57 The review team tested this Expectation through the review of a range of documentation including the University's procedures for validation and approval and the University report for the School's validated provision. It also met staff from the School and the University, and students from all provision. It also met employers who provide placements, internships and employ the School's students on completion of their courses.

1.58 The School follows the stated policies and procedures of the University for the development, validation and approval of the degree and postgraduate programmes. Staff are clearly aware of these formal requirements and the inherent need for external academic input. However, a formal development, validation and approval process is not explicitly stated for the diploma programmes and the School seeks the views of external academics on an informal basis only. The School currently has no formal external examiner system in place for diploma programmes and an associated recommendation has been made in Section B7. Discussions with the range of external advisers are supplemented by using the experience of staff who teach and who are external examiners at other institutions. This serves to informally benchmark their work in the School with that elsewhere in the UK higher education sector. The review team **recommends** that the School ensures that external academic views are formally sought in the development and approval of Garden Design and Architectural Interior Design diplomas.

1.59 The School has formed strong links with employers and practitioners across the garden and interior design industries, which the School effectively uses in the development and delivery of its entire provision. The School is working with the BIID on the development of core competencies which, when established, will inform its diploma provision. The BIID is

working towards chartership status and when this is achieved the School expects its students to be able to apply for membership exemptions.

1.60 In summary, the School effectively meets the University requirements for validation and approval which include arrangements for seeking external academic input. For its own diploma provision, while it does not formally seek the input of external academics in the design and operation, some staff work with other higher education providers and act as external examiners. The current lack of formal external examiners for the diploma programmes has led to an associated recommendation in Section B7. Links with industry are extremely strong and employer input is actively sought and responded to in the development and delivery of the School's diploma courses. The review team therefore concludes that Expectation A3.4 is met. However, the lack of external examiners for the diploma programmes results in a moderate level of associated risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

1.62 The provision validated by the University is clearly set at the correct level of the FHEQ. The School has comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern the maintenance of threshold academic standards for its validated awards. These are clearly set out in a variety of documents including the validation agreement, student handbooks, programme specifications and academic regulations. The School has operating processes that allow it to meet the expectations of the University and its staff are fully aware of their responsibilities with regard to the delivery and assessment of the University-validated awards. An associated recommendation has been made in Section A2.1 (paragraph 1.18) with regard to the need for the School to formalise its committees dealing with oversight of standards. However, with regard to the validated provision this is not of significance due to the close working relationship between the partners.

1.63 There are a number of weaknesses with regard to the setting and maintenance of academic standards for the School's own diploma provision. Of the seven Expectations in this area, two have resulted in 'Not met' decisions. Six Expectations are assessed as 'Moderate' risk. There are no areas of good practice. There are eight recommendations.

1.64 The team recommends that the School confirms the positioning of the diploma programmes at the appropriate level on the FHEQ (A1). The review team recommends that the School puts in place comprehensive academic regulations for the diplomas and communicate these to staff and students (A2.1). The School's committees require terms of reference, defined membership and systematic recording to ensure effective oversight of standards (A2.1).

1.65 Further, the School is recommended to revise definitive programme records for the diplomas to reflect the format used for validated provision (A2.2) and to implement a formal process of validation, approval and periodic review for the diplomas (A3.1, B1, B8). Assessment processes for diplomas require to be clearly articulated to ensure alignment of programme learning outcomes (A3.2). Additionally, the School is recommended to ensure that external academic views are formally sought in the development and approval of diploma programmes (A3.4) and to implement a formal and systematic annual monitoring process for these programmes (A3.3).

1.66 The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies at the School **meets** UK expectations. However, the setting and maintenance of academic standards for the School's own validated provision **requires improvement to meet** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1 Section A1 of this report contains details of the Inchbald School of Design's current University-validated and School-validated provision at diploma, degree and master's level. The University-validated programmes have been developed in partnership between the University and School, with the School leading on the design and development of the programme modules and content. The partnership is based on a well-established structure within the University, which oversees the approval and management of its collaborative provision. There is an Academic Link Tutor appointed by the University to support the School throughout the approval process. The School also benefits from support provided by the University Collaborative Partnerships Unit. University-validated programmes have clear quality assurance processes in place which are informed by the University Quality Handbook and associated regulations, policies and procedures.

2.2 The University retains responsibility for the oversight and maintenance of academic standards. The School operates University-developed quality assurance procedures in accordance with the Quality Code, including annual monitoring of programmes. External examiners and moderators are appointed by the University to comment on the academic and professional standards set for the awards, and specifically the framework for higher education qualifications and the relevant Subject Benchmark Statement(s).

2.3 The School has management responsibilities for the setting and maintenance of standards of the diploma awards which it offers. These diplomas are governed through the policies and procedures agreed with the University.

2.4 The review team considers that the School's processes and procedures for programme design, development and approval for University awards are appropriate processes for the design, development and approval of programmes. However, the lack of formal processes for the diploma programmes, as referred to in Expectation A3.1, has resulted in a conclusion that, overall, the Expectation is not met.

2.5 The team considered a range of documents provided by the School concerning the programme design, development and approval process, including those relating to recently approved programmes. In addition, it met teams of academic and support staff, senior staff including representation from the University Collaborative Partnerships Unit and Academic Link Tutor, students, employers and alumni.

2.6 The School's academic systems and processes are based on the experience of managing the delivery of University programmes. The School works closely with the University and contributed to the process when the new programmes were being developed. The students have benefited from a presentation by the Collaborative Partnerships Officer, outlining the available resources and services provided by the University. Similarly, the staff have been introduced to University resources dedicated to collaborative partners.

2.7 As noted at paragraph 1.36, the School was unable to provide evidence of a formal validation or approval process for the diploma awards and an associate recommendation has been made. However, the School described how the diploma is informally continuously reviewed and considered throughout the academic lifecycle of the diploma, and modifications and improvements made as and when required. This process is led by the Faculty Directors, and is informed by a range of academic staff; including external practitioners involved as studio tutors.

2.8 This process, though lacking formality, results in currency of programme content and that content is relevant, fit for purpose and provides students with required competencies to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge for employment within the interior or garden design sectors. This was confirmed by employers and alumni met by the team, and further evidenced through the student destination information provided by the School. A recent increased level of interaction between the School and University has included a focus on improved documentation and input in respect of student engagement and student representative duties; advice and involvement in procedures relating directly to external monitoring; contributions to course development for recognition of FHEQ levels; visits by academic moderators; visits from collaborative partnerships manager; and visits from support staff introducing School staff to the University's VLE and research facilities. The outcomes from the University validation process reports the good relations between students and staff, the way the students engaged with their work, the quality, diversity and range of student work undertaken, and the excellent access to studio teaching; the team believed this led to the School offering a very student-centred provision.

2.9 The details outlined in Section 1 provide information concerning the background and current arrangements for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities. The School diplomas are continuously reviewed and considered by the Faculty Directors supported by academic staff and external practitioners. The recommendation contained in Section A3.1 is designed to formalise this process.

2.10 The School recognises the need for formal recognition of the School diploma awards and, as part of the developing relationship with its awarding body, is in consultation with the University to schedule an approvals programme for these awards. To support this process the School has established an 'expert group' of current external practitioners to assist in this development process of the diploma in preparation for possible validation. This group will review content and relevance to ensure this reinforces the School's enhancement focus of producing graduates for the relevant design disciplines. The review team **affirms** the establishing of an expert group of current external practitioners to assist in the further development and formal approval of the Garden Design and Architectural Interior Design diplomas.

2.11 The School undertakes and responds to student feedback and student focus groups to support the design and development of provision. Academic staff have worked closely with employers, professional associations and alumni in the development of the diploma awards. Employers and alumni confirmed that the programmes were considered to provide good quality graduates who were equipped with the knowledge and experience to make credible contributions to the fields of design.

2.12 Academic staff also take an active role in the development and ongoing review of University and diploma programmes. They are involved in a range of external activities to support the ongoing design and development of awards, for example through setting projects to real work settings and engagement with specialist designers and crafts people. These have resulted in a range of modifications and enhancements to programmes.

2.13 The School has effective processes in place for the design, development and approval of University-validated programmes. However, there are significant gaps in policy and procedures in this area for diploma programmes and this has resulted in an associated recommendation under Expectation A3.1. There is insufficient evidence that the diploma awards are formally maintained in a valid and current state. Therefore, this Expectation is not met. However, the informal activity undertaken by the School helps to enhance the quality of the learning experience and enables students to achieve the required skills and competencies to progress on the diploma awards, therefore the level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Not met

Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

Findings

2.14 The School has a policy regarding recruitment, selection, and admissions that allows students the opportunity to apply to study at the School in a transparent and inclusive manner. Additionally, the School has various mechanisms in place to make the process valid and accessible for diploma and validated provision students applying to a programme.

2.15 The policy and processes in place for recruitment, selection and admission of students would allow Expectation B2 to be met.

2.16 The team examined evidence that outlines the design of the School's admissions process, through scrutiny of the School's website, and through meetings with students and academic and support staff.

2.17 The policy and processes in place for recruitment, selection and admission of students are aligned with the appropriate section of the Quality Code. The School maintains a robust structure that allows the recruitment, selection and admissions process for students to be transparent, reliable, valid, inclusive and underpinned by appropriate organisational policies and processes. The School is aware of and clearly outlines its responsibilities regarding the recruitment, selection and admissions procedures, for both its diploma and University-validated programmes. Such processes function well in practice to ensure that the recruitment procedure is in line with awarding body regulations.

2.18 The School's website is the main communication tool for prospective students. It contains appropriate and effective key information for prospective students regarding the programmes on offer for study. Each programme on the website outlines the date, length, qualification, location, teaching methods, and entry requirements of study. The details of the relevant Course Director are also outlined.

2.19 The School website outlines the application process for prospective students. For example, admissions criteria for all provision detailed on the School website reflect those outlined in University-validated and diploma programme specifications. The website clearly outlines all programmes available to study. Students are aware of the University as the validating body for the programme they applied for prior to enrolling.

2.20 The School allows students to apply through whichever process is most appropriate for the applicant. Students can apply through the School's website or directly through a visit. The accessibility of the admissions secretary and course directors at the School greatly facilitate this process. The application form for prospective students clearly outlines the previous qualification certificates, English language qualifications and details of references necessary for the application process. Additionally, the credit transfer process including Recognition of Prior Learning, recognition of previous work relevant experience and previous non-cognate degree is effectively considered by the School and the University in line with requirements. Students commented favourably on all aspects of the admissions process including the flexibility of approach.

2.21 The School carries out in-depth interviews with applicants. This process is effective and allows prospective students to obtain detailed information regarding the various nature of each level of study, thus ensuring that applicants apply for the most suitable level of study. The interview process is supported in some cases by applicants completing an interview form prior to meeting the Course Director in order to document the applicant's employment, design experience and academic qualifications. Additionally, applicants may also be required to complete interview projects and to send a digital portfolio in order for the School to enrol the students onto the appropriate programme.

2.22 The enrolment process for validated programmes is enriched by good communication between the School and the University. For example, the School completes enrolment data for validated provision, using a template devised by the University.

2.23 Students are provided with effective induction sessions when fully enrolled onto a programme. Online students are invited to a three-day in-house induction and this is supplemented through online information and exercises. Students found the induction process useful in order to bridge the gap between prospective and enrolled students.

2.24 Overall, the recruitment, selection and admissions process is clear, transparent and fit for purpose. The appropriate design of policies and procedures is followed by robust practice which allows the Expectation to be 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

2.25 The School has a Learning and Teaching Strategy which covers both the University-validated and the School diploma provision. This is delivered on campus and online. The strategy aims to ensure that students develop the skills necessary for a professional career in design which includes independence, self-awareness and reflection, individuality of expression and criticality, through teaching which is informed by educational research and best practice in industry.

2.26 Learning is characterised by intensive studio-based self-learning projects, underpinned by lectures and workshops. The studio sessions are intended to ensure the development of students' individual creative skills. These sessions are supported by tutorials to check student progress and allow discussion among the groups. Teaching staff are largely drawn from the profession in both garden and interior design areas. Teaching takes place in small groups of typically eight students and this approach is designed to foster partnerships with staff in terms of experience and subject interest. Students are able to undertake voluntary placement and internships to augment their learning and gain additional practical experience.

2.27 The Learning and Teaching Strategy with its emphasis on studio and small-group learning and delivery by practitioners, and the ways in which the School implements this, would enable Expectation B3 to be met.

2.28 The review team tested the School's approach to learning and teaching through the review of a range of documentation which included the Learning and Teaching Strategy, module descriptors, course specifications, staff CVs and project briefs. It also met staff from its University and the School, students from all programmes who were studying both on campus and online, employers and alumni. The review team was also provided with a demonstration of the online platform.

2.29 The Learning and Teaching Strategy is clearly being delivered as designed and is highly effective in ensuring that students acquire the skills required by the professions. Employers value the calibre of the School's students and are keen to offer work placement and internships as well as to employ students at the end of their programmes.

2.30 The size of student groups, at a staff student ratio of 8:1, supports the studio sessions which form the backbone of teaching and learning at the School and enables students to develop creatively as individuals - this is a key strength of the provision. This approach involves real-life projects with real clients and equips students with the practical skills needed to function immediately on entering the profession. Assignments are overseen by practitioners to ensure that students develop real-world skills. The small group studio approach, the input of practising professionals and the use of live projects in all provision enhances the student learning experience and is **good practice**.

2.31 The calibre of the staff is impressive and the input of those drawn from the professional career sectors significantly benefits student learning in terms of bringing

real-life scenarios into the campus-based learning. Students are exposed to tutors with a variety of backgrounds and experience during the studio sessions and this enables them to receive a variety of critiques of their work. This, in turn, clearly helps them to develop their own critiquing skills. Students commented very favourably on the calibre of teaching staff which they regarded as a key strength of their experience at the School.

2.32 The School's staff development strategy is largely related to the development of the subjects but also aims to ensure that staff are familiar with the University's practices and procedures. Continuous professional development is a key element of the strategy and it aims to facilitate opportunities for staff to experience postgraduate delivery within other universities and to study for higher degrees. The Dean, Principal and Managing Director encourage individual development agendas with staff which may be technical or pedagogical and funding for such development is available. All new staff are mentored and supported by an experienced member of staff.

2.33 Teaching observation takes place formally and informally within a supportive environment. The observation process is facilitated through the collaborative approach taken to teaching, particularly in the studio settings where staff work in pairs. The outcomes of this observation are not formally captured and neither do they explicitly feature in staff appraisals which occur for all regular teaching staff. While the review team concludes that the School effectively ensures the quality of teaching it may wish to consider the benefits of recording the outcomes of teaching observations.

2.34 Students on the School's online programmes benefit from an effective learning platform which contains well-designed module learning information and includes live lectures which are then archived for student reference. The platform also enables students to communicate effectively with their tutors and with fellow students. The School has developed a comprehensive Online Tutor Guide which provides useful information particularly for staff new to this delivery method and emphasises the requirements for response times to student queries and to examples of best practice in communicating with students online. Students studying via this platform were very supportive of the learning experience.

2.35 Learning and teaching resources are varied and comprehensive and effectively support student learning. They include access to the University's library and VLE for students on the validated provision. For students on both the validated provision and the School's diploma provision, the School provides a central location for course-related information through a digital Dropbox, which acts as the School's VLE. All students have specific software provided for them on their own laptops at the beginning of their course. All students commented favourably on all resources available to them.

2.36 The strategic approach to learning and teaching with its emphasis on small-group studio learning delivered by high-calibre practitioners and assessed by live projects ensures that the School delivers an effective student learning experience. The review team concludes that this 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

2.37 The School has a stated aim of being dedicated to the education of professional practitioners in interior and garden design. It aims to achieve this through the development of student skills which enables them to secure employment and perform successfully in the relevant professional sector. Careers and post-programme advice is available to all students.

2.38 There is a strong emphasis on the provision of academic and personal support and tracking progression for students on all provision including those on the online programmes. For example, online students have a dedicated member of staff who monitors their progress. Studio tutors for the on-campus provision are briefed at the start of each project on each student's progress to date and the current situation as regards development and skills. Mid-year assessment assignments provide for a student meeting with the Course Director to review all feedback and grades, to chart progress and to identify strengths and areas for development. Additionally, students on the Glyndŵr-validated provision have access to the support systems of the University.

2.39 The arrangements in place to support students in both academic and pastoral terms on all of the School's provision would enable this Expectation to be met.

2.40 The review team tested this Expectation through the review of a wide range of documentation, including student handbooks; minutes of management meetings; student questionnaires; progression data and samples of mid-course review sheets. It also met staff from the School and the University, students from all provision, alumni and employers.

2.41 The School's approach to the support and development of its students is extremely effective and is aligned with the appropriate section of the Quality Code. Students confirmed that they are regarded as individuals and that staff operate an open door policy which they greatly value. Students are also clear on who to approach for both academic and personal matters. The Principal is available to all students, many of whom take up the opportunity and appreciate this. The small class sizes and low staff student ratio enable the close and ongoing tracking of student progress, providing an effective early warning system when any problems arise.

2.42 The emphasis on employability, coupled with strong links with industry enables the School to provide effective careers and post-programme support for its students. The work placements and internships also contribute positively to this. The specific tutorials provided to students prior to the end-of-year exhibition are particularly useful in helping them to prepare for entry into the professions. The alumni organisation is extensive and active and effectively informs the School of jobs and internship opportunities. A significant number of alumni employ the School's students at the end of their programmes. The comprehensive and ongoing support for alumni which enhances employability is an example of **good practice**.

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

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student Engagement

Findings

2.44 The School states that communication with students is an essential part of its processes and is historically largely informal in nature. It also states that students have open and flexible access to tutors and senior managers. Further, the School outlines that Student Representatives provide a 'channel' for student feedback.

2.45 The University, which validates the provision, clearly outlines that there should be transparent opportunities for students to feed back any issues regarding their learning experience. The University also requires the School to have regular Student-Staff Consultative Committee meetings in order to obtain feedback from the student voice. Link tutors can attend these meetings. Student representatives are listed as members of the Faculty Committee and are welcome to attend academically related areas of Management Committee meetings. Additionally, the representatives are listed as members of the Student-Staff Consultative Committee for the University-validated provision.

2.46 The School claims to have a strategy for student engagement for all programmes. For example, students are regularly requested to complete survey questionnaires at various points during their study programme. The School is also using its new validation partnership with Glyndŵr University to strengthen channels of communication for students and thus to better engage students in formal feedback mechanisms.

2.47 These formal and informal channels of communication provide a platform for student engagement in a wide range of areas, including the assurance and enhancement of their learning opportunities. This would enable Expectation B5 to be met.

2.48 The review team tested this Expectation by scrutinising documents that outline the processes for student engagement such as the student engagement strategy, evidence of student feedback being collated and analysed by academic staff and by meetings with students, academic and learning support staff.

2.49 The School has a written profile for overall student engagement which outlines the various routes for students to provide feedback regarding the quality of learning opportunities. These include the use of student surveys, an open-door process for discussion with staff and using an online comment system. However, this document is very brief and does not provide much in the way of procedural guidance or strategy. For example, there is no detail of a formal method of articulating the student voice nor an articulated route for capturing feedback and indicating action taken. Nevertheless, the team found that the school does take deliberate if largely informal steps to engage students to provide feedback regarding learning opportunities for all provision. Additionally, appropriate action is taken to deal with issues raised by students through the various channels in place. The small student-staff ratio fosters quick resolution of issues. This process is much appreciated by all students.

2.50 Student representatives are elected for all programmes and provide an effective channel for student feedback. They receive adequate training in their role. Students were aware of the representatives within their programme of study and understood their role. Student Representatives are given appropriate opportunities to provide feedback to senior academic staff, and their feedback is verbally acknowledged and actioned where possible.

2.51 Processes for seeking and reacting to student feedback for validated programmes are effectively documented. Students confirmed that the Student Staff Consultative Committee for the validated provision allows students to give feedback regarding their learning experiences. Students also commented that issues were resolved effectively after such meetings.

2.52 Students are actively encouraged to complete programme survey questionnaires after completion of modules and projects. The results show that the majority of students are satisfied with the quality of their learning opportunities such as lectures, technical workshops and development of employability skills. Students also complete mid-course reviews which allow students to provide feedback regarding their academic progress and quality of learning opportunities. Mid-course review documents are monitored and signed off by the Course Director.

2.53 Students studying online also complete surveys. The online surveys provide effective statistical and qualitative feedback. Online students have access to an open forum where current students and alumni can comment and feed back on any issues and discuss these with staff. This enables an active and effective communicative cohort.

2.54 The process for validated provision of formal recognition of, and action taken on, student feedback works well. Additionally, in general, the processes for informal discussion of student issues work in an appropriate manner across all provision. This is ably supported through easy and regular access to all staff. The School regularly takes action and informs students in an effective manner of decisions made. For example, a common feedback issue has concerned student requests for more computer-aided design workshops. This feedback was acknowledged by senior staff and appropriate action was taken to improve the situation through the introduction of new methodology. However, the team noted that student feedback for diploma programmes is not formally recorded at senior management meetings or in AMRs.

2.55 In conclusion, the School takes appropriate formal action, in a variety of ways to obtain and resolve issues with respect to student feedback on learning opportunities on the University-validated programmes. The lack of a formal process in recording student engagement issues for its diploma programmes is a potential weakness in the School's management of student engagement. However, the strength of the informal process outweighs any potential weaknesses and the team concludes that Expectation B5 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

2.56 The School policies and processes for assessment and assessment moderation are designed to operate in accordance with the academic frameworks and regulations of its University partner. These have already been discussed under Expectation A3.2. The information provided to staff and students makes reference for the need of programmes to comply with the University assessment regulations. Programme specifications and handbooks developed by the School set out the intended learning outcomes for each programme and module, with associated assessment requirements and regulations.

2.57 The School has in place operational procedures for undertaking assessment for University-validated and its own diploma awards. The School implements the same processes for the diploma and University awards which are based upon University regulations and academic processes.

2.58 The policies and procedures in place within the School for assessment and assessment moderation together with the approach to complying with University and School regulations would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.59 The team examined the effectiveness of the approaches and procedures through scrutinising a variety of documented evidence, including assessment documentation, partnership agreements and student and course handbooks. In addition, it met academic and support staff, senior staff including representation from the University Collaborative Partnerships Unit and Academic Link Tutors, students, employers and alumni.

2.60 The assessment procedures and associated documentation to support the implementation of University regulations are comprehensive and align with the relevant section of the Quality Code. External examiner reports for the University-validated provision confirm that the School complies with the University requirements for assessment and provide comprehensive formative and summative assessment feedback throughout.

2.61 The assignments which students on all programmes work through have the same brief and context. However, the outcomes and assessment requirements are differentiated for diploma, undergraduate and postgraduate students. Students and staff confirmed their thorough understanding of this process. Staff were able to articulate the process in which they assess the work of different cohorts in line with the assignment expectations according to the way the students have to be self-organised, their way of thinking, complexity of approach, level of research, analysis, and conceptual thinking. Comprehensive individual formative feedback is provided to students, which is facilitated through low student-staff ratio studio groups (see Section B3, paragraph 2.30) and has already been designated as an area of good practice. Detailed summative assessment feedback is provided on completion of assignments. This is comprehensive and identifies areas for improvement and good practice points. Students were very supportive of the overall quality of their assessment feedback.

2.62 Staff are committed to devising assessments that link theory to practice, are industry-relevant and promote active learning. This was endorsed by students, who indicated that they found the assignments relevant, and that they provided a stretch and challenge as their programme developed. The School uses a range of external expertise, placements, personal networks and simulated experiences for students to generate evidence for assessment. This is described further in the Expectation B3 and Enhancement sections.

2.63 The internal verification and moderation processes that support assessment decisions are comprehensive. The School has in place a rigorous framework to be able to have confidence in the assessment decisions which are approved by the University for validated awards and internally for diploma awards. The moderation of assessment decisions occurs at different stages involving all tutors engaged in the delivery of assignments that make up the assessment components of the module. This is a thorough collaborative process with cross-sampling and agreement of final grades. Final verification involves the Faculty Directors prior to submission to assessment boards. The team looked at a range of assessment verification records across University and diploma awards and the records were comprehensive and valid, demonstrating the extent to which students have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the credit or qualification being sought. The team identified that the comprehensive internal verification and moderation processes that effectively support assessment decisions is **good practice**.

2.64 The School is compliant with the University's Assessment Board procedures both in terms of assessment points and presentation of marks to be considered by the School prior to consideration by the external examiner and the appropriate University boards. Two-tier assessment boards are held at the University and the School are invited to participate. Decisions on student performance are taken by the Module Assessment Boards and Progression and Award Boards. The University is responsible for ensuring that all results are entered onto its student record system. The Assessment Boards for University awards are recorded and external examiners report that Assessment Boards are conducted in an appropriate manner and with due regard to academic regulations.

2.65 Operationally, tutors working in studios undertake the first stage of the assessment process. These tutors chair presentation sessions and provide initial comment and grades, which are passed onto the second level of scrutiny within the School. The second panel is comprised of a group of tutors who examine the collective work, discuss their findings and make an assessment decision. The final stage of agreeing assessment decisions is by a School panel, which includes the Faculty Directors. The School panel considers all stages of assessment moderation and final confirmation of outcomes are made and recorded on a secure central system. Assessment outcomes for University awards are moderated by the external examiner prior to submission to the University Assessment Board.

2.66 However, the School confirmed that there is no formal record of the decisions taken at each stage of the moderation process for diploma awards other than a cohort spreadsheet. The review team **recommends** that the School implements formal recording processes for the conferment of final assessment outcomes for diploma awards.

2.67 University external examiners report that assessment practice is conducted with a clear and fair approach and a robust methodology to the types and variety of assessment practice. There is a clear understanding of the role of learning outcomes and assessment processes with clear evidence of internal module moderation. The feedback is provided in a timely fashion and is diverse and structured, supported by summative and formative feedback which helps build students' learning and knowledge. Students confirmed that they are made aware of the range of assessment methods used, how they would be assessed, and information concerning assessment appeals and associated regulations.

2.68 Overall, the School's processes provide students with appropriate opportunities to demonstrate the intended learning outcomes for the award of credit or qualification. There are clear processes and procedures for assessment which are well understood across programme teams and students. Assessment methods are designed or approved by the University to provide opportunities for students to demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes. Criteria and expectations for assessment are clearly presented to students. Effective internal verification and moderation processes are in place to ensure that standards are being met. The lack of a formal recording process for interim assessment decisions during the academic year for diploma awards does not significantly affect the overall processes in place. Feedback provided from external examiners, staff and students provided the review team with evidence of appropriate assessment practices. Therefore, 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

2.69 External examiners for the validated provision are appointed and managed by the University in line with the Memorandum of Agreement and the Guide for Collaborative Staff. The School is able to nominate examiners and induction for external examiners takes place at the School's campus. External examiners review projects at the setting stage and examine assessed work. They attend examination boards after which they provide their written report to the University using the required standard template. Students have access to these reports on the University's VLE and they are able to meet the external examiners. The School considers these reports via the Faculty Directors and a written response compiled by the School is provided to the examiners via the University. In addition, it is expected that references to external examiner reports are made in the Staff Student Consultative Committee.

2.70 External examiners are not appointed for the School's own diploma programmes and there are consequently no subsequent written reports. There are no formal arrangements in place with the University, however external examiners for the validated provision may have sight of the assessed work of the diploma students as all work is displayed during the external examiners visit.

2.71 Regulations are in place for the University-validated programmes, and the design of these affords proper oversight of these programmes. However, for the School's diploma provision, given that there are no formal arrangements in place, Expectation B7 is not met.

2.72 The review team tested this Expectation through scrutiny of a wide range of documentation including external examiner reports and responses for the University-validated provision, the Memorandum of Agreement and the Guide for Collaborative Partner Staff. It also met a range of staff from the School and representation from the University Collaborative Partnerships Unit and academic Link, and students including those on the online provision.

2.73 The external examining process works effectively for the University-validated provision. The School ensures that the University-appointed external examiners are inducted appropriately to familiarise them with relevant aspects of the validated provision. External examiners visit the School to examine student assessed work and to meet students, as required by University regulations. Reports are considered within the School by the Faculty Directors and appropriate written responses are sent via the University. The review team was informed that the reports are considered at the School management meetings but there is no documented evidence of this happening. The review team **recommends** that the School ensure that discussions of external examiner reports are formally recorded.

2.74 At the time of the visit one Staff Student Consultative Committee had taken place for the postgraduate architectural design programme at which the external examiner was present and a full discussion took place about his report. Most students who met the review team were aware of the existence of the external examiner and that written reports were made, but were unclear on how to access these reports. The review team **recommends** that the School ensure that students are made aware of how to access external examiner reports.

2.75 The review team confirmed that external examiners are not appointed for the School's diploma provision. Assessed diploma project work is not subject to oversight by the external examiners for the University validated provision. However, students on the diploma, degree and postgraduate programmes complete the same projects which have differentiated assessment criteria dependent on the academic level of study. Additionally, project briefs for the University validated provision are scrutinised by the external examiners prior to distribution to students. A selection of students' assessed work, on the University validated provision, is subject to review and discussion by the external examiners when they visit the School for this purpose. External examiner reports only make reference to the University-validated provision. This approach enables the School to gain verbal feedback on the quality of student work for the diploma provision. However, this approach lacks any formal engagement process with external examiners. For example, there is no provision of a written report which the School can use to confirm that its diploma provision is meeting the required academic standards. The review team **recommends** that the School appoints external examiners for the Garden Design and Architectural Interior Design diplomas.

2.76 In conclusion, the arrangements for the appointment and induction of external examiners and consideration of their reports at School level are appropriate for the University-validated provision. However, for diploma provision, the informal approach to external scrutiny of assessed work, together with the lack of any appointed external examiners and no annual reporting process means that quality assurance processes for these programmes lack sufficient emphasis. Therefore, overall, Expectation B7 is not met and the level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

Quality Code, Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review

Findings

2.77 At the time of the visit, the University-validated provision had only undergone one full cycle of annual monitoring and review for the postgraduate provision and was in the first year of annual monitoring for the degree provision. These arrangements are set out in the University regulations for periodic and annual review. The School discussed this process together with an evaluation of the model pursued with its former awarding body. Additionally, the School states that it adopts the awarding University processes for programme monitoring and review for its diploma awards. Oversight is maintained by the relevant University Academic Link Tutor for University awards and by the relevant Faculty Director for diploma awards.

2.78 The review team considers that the School's processes and procedures described above for monitoring and review of programmes would allow Expectation B8 to be met.

2.79 The team tested the effectiveness of the School's arrangements for discharging their responsibilities for programme monitoring and review by examining relevant documentation including University academic regulations for review and monitoring of partner provision, the University Quality Handbook, School procedures for diploma awards, recent annual and periodic reports, including previous reports completed on behalf of the University of Wales, the memorandum of agreement, reports from the University, and internal audit reports. In addition, it met academic and support staff, senior staff including representation from the University Collaborative Partnerships Unit and Academic Link Tutors, students, employers and alumni.

2.80 The processes for the monitoring and review of University-validated programme delivery operate effectively within the School. The annual review of University awards is clearly described within the University arrangements for annual programme monitoring documentation, and the Guide for Collaborative Partner Staff.

2.81 The School reports to the University annually through the submission of an AMR document for each University-validated award. At the time of the visit, there had only been one complete cycle (in session 2014-15) of reporting for the validated postgraduate awards and an incomplete cycle for the current session for the degree awards. The information required in the AMR includes submitting evidence from internal and external feedback, an assessment of programme currency, and detailed assessment of programme performance including statistical data.

2.82 The School also submitted a Partners Annual Review Report for the 2014-15 academic year to the University. This report provides the School with an opportunity to appraise its partnership with the University at a senior, strategic level. The report is completed by senior managers at the School and submitted to the University's Standards and Quality Committee for consideration and approval. A formal response is provided on the report by an appropriate member of staff at the University. The review team found that the AMR for postgraduate awards and Partners Annual Review lacked detail, or use of, qualitative or quantitative evidence. The University and School agreed that, as this has been the first year of the AMR process, further collaborative work is required to ensure the review process makes more use of key quality and quantitative evidence used to inform quality

improvement actions. An associated recommendation has been made for this in Section A3.3.

2.83 The academic content and assessment for diploma awards is informally monitored throughout the academic year by the Faculty Directors, and any amendments are captured as they are agreed. Faculty Directors meet on a weekly basis to coordinate the general and academic business of the School. The Dean and the Directors also meet once a month to discuss and analyse issues relating to these programmes and to consider future policy. A wide range of issues are discussed in this forum, and student representatives are welcome to the meetings in order to air their views direct to staff. Senior tutors are also frequently invited to attend in order to discuss specific items. External reference points, and engagement with employers and alumni, are also considered to ensure that the content and work undertaken by the students align to the requirements of the design disciplines in which the School specialises. These external links are described further in Expectations B3 and Enhancement. The School also reviews programme content and how this aligns to the standards and competencies set by the International Interior Designers Association, British Institute of Interior Design, The Society of Garden Designers, and the Royal Horticultural Society.

2.84 The Dean, Faculty Directors and senior teaching staff, also consider the overall direction of the diploma programmes at a special meeting convened after the Annual Student Exhibition in order to review the success of all the design projects and compare views on the year's achievements. This meeting normally takes place when the course questionnaires and the student review sessions have taken place and when the professional reactions to the student exhibition can be analysed.

2.85 Overall, the evidence from documentation and meetings shows that the School is managing its responsibilities for monitoring and reviewing the programmes delivered on behalf of the University. The informality and lack of appropriate documentation for the annual reporting process for diploma programmes results in insufficient emphasis being given to the quality of learning opportunities in the School's planning process. An associated recommendation has been made for this under Expectation A3.3. Additionally, there is a lack of detailed scrutiny of available key performance data for all provision. Therefore, the team concludes that Expectation B8 is met, but weaknesses in the operation of the annual monitoring process result in a moderate level of associated risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

2.86 The School has policies regarding opportunities for students to access academic appeals and student complaints processes. The policies provide students with guidance on how to appeal an academic judgement and the opportunity to make a complaint regarding their learning opportunities. The policies are designed to enable the processes to be fair, and timely.

2.87 The appeals and complaints policy and procedures in place would allow Expectation B9 to be met.

2.88 The team analysed a range of documented evidence including academic appeals and complaints procedures and met staff and students. The team also received a demonstration of the School's and University's VLEs and was thus able to access the relevant online student forms which trigger these processes.

2.89 The School is required to adopt the University's academic appeals process for University-validated provision. Programme handbooks contain a clear overview of the scope and procedure of the academic appeals and complaints process. The University Academic Procedure document clearly outlines the scope for academic appeals and the procedures involved. The University's VLE gives appropriate student access to an appeals form and academic appeals procedure document.

2.90 The Memorandum of Agreement with the University clearly states that any collaborative partner institution must put in place an appropriate students' complaints policy and that this is subject to the University's prior written approval. The University complaints form and complaints framework document is appropriately available via its VLE. The School has an effective informal approach which deals with any student complaints issue in a constructive and empathetic manner before recourse to the designated formal process. At the time of the visit, the formal process had not been invoked. The informal approach is approved by the University under the terms of its complaints framework document. In addition, if a student at the School is dissatisfied with the manner in which a complaint has been dealt with, then they have the opportunity to make a complaint directly to the awarding body.

2.91 There is no evidence of access to an appeal form or complaints form on the VLE drop-box platform for the School's own diploma students. The academic appeals and complaints process for diploma programmes is dealt with informally or formally with the Principal and Dean. The academic appeals and complaints process for diploma programmes is dealt with informally or formally with the Course Director, Principal and Dean. Diploma students have used the appeals process and these instances have been appropriately dealt with and documented by the School. Students stated that they were made aware of these processes during their induction. However, student handbooks for the diploma programmes contain only limited information about the academic appeals and complaints process. A recommendation regarding this has already been made in Section A2.1 as part of updating academic regulations (paragraph 1.18).

2.92 In conclusion, the processes in place for student appeals and complaints are effective and students are satisfied with the informality of this in practice. The lack of a documented process for diploma programmes means that there may be potential weaknesses in the operation of the School's approach to assuring the quality of its learning opportunities. However, the strength of the informal operational processes outweighs the need for formal documentation. Therefore Expectation B9 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

2.93 The School has numerous opportunities for student placements and internships. These are voluntary and not assessed. Additionally it has overseas connections with an institute in Jeddah. This does not result in any student assessment or accreditation agreements.

2.94 In view of the above, the review team concludes that the School has not delegated the provision of learning opportunities to others and as such Expectation B10 is 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

2.95 The School has no research students and does not award research degrees, therefore this Expectation is not applicable.

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

2.97 The School has effective policies, processes and practice in place for most Expectations in the Quality Code associated with assuring the quality of learning opportunities. Four areas of good practice were recorded (B3, B4, B6 and joint B3 and B4). There are considerable strengths in the teaching and learning activities of the School and all students benefit greatly from this. The practice of teaching students in small groups is a particular strength of the provision and students were very appreciative of this approach. The informal activity that supports the teaching and learning approach helps to enhance the quality of the learning experience, enabling all students to achieve the required skills and competencies to progress towards their final award. Employers and alumni were also very positive about the learning experience of students in the School.

2.98 There are also strengths in the thoroughness of the recruitment, selection and admission of students. The provision of strong academic and pastoral support throughout the period of study, coupled with the robust approach to monitoring of student performance and effective careers support also enable a positive and empathetic learning experience.

2.99 The School's approach to the design, moderation and practice of assessment of students provides appropriate opportunities to demonstrate achievement of the intended learning outcomes for each stage of study.

2.100 The School takes transparent and effective actions to obtain and resolve issues with respect to student feedback on learning opportunities on the University-validated programmes. There is also an effective informal and open approach for student representation and feedback for all provision and appropriate practice in handling informal student appeals and complaints.

2.101 However, the processes and practice in place for assuring the quality of learning opportunities for students on the School's own diplomas show some significant weaknesses. For example, there is a lack of formal supporting institutional policies and procedures and associated regulations relating to the formal approval of the diploma awards (B1); lack of a formal recording process for interim assessment decisions during the academic year (B6); the absence of external examiners (B7); and the absence of formal annual reporting mechanisms (B8).

2.102 These weaknesses in the area of diploma provision have led the team to record 10 recommendations or associated recommendations in several areas of Section B of the Quality Code (B1, B6, B7, B8 and B9). There is one affirmation associated with this area. The team affirmed the School's developments to pursue formal approval of the diploma programmes through the establishment of an expert external group.

2.103 Also, seven Expectations are met and two Expectations (B1, B7) are not met. Three Expectations (B1, B7 and B8) are considered moderate risk.

2.104 Despite the weaknesses observed, the overall conclusion of the review team is that strengths outweigh weaknesses and therefore the quality of learning opportunities at the School **meets** UK expectations.

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Findings

3.1 The School has a policy and processes in place that are designed to ensure that published information is formally approved and monitored in use. These are also designed to ensure that the information is fit for purpose, accessible and accurate.

3.2 The processes and procedures in place at the School are designed to ensure that published information is accurate and up to date. This would allow Expectation C to be met.

3.3 The team scrutinised the School's website and a range of published information including programme handbooks and the School brochure to assess the consistent accuracy of information published regarding student learning opportunities. It also met staff and students on all programmes regarding the effectiveness of the information.

3.4 All information produced for the University-validated provision is subject to joint agreement and approval between the School and its awarding body. This includes marketing, recruitment and enrolment information. For example, the School's website is required to identify key aspects of programmes in terms of structure, delivery, assessment and schedules.

3.5 Additionally, the School is responsible for creating level 6 and 7 student handbooks using the University template and this process is subject to subsequent approval by the University. Marketing material and student handbooks are checked by the University during the Academic Link Activity Report. There is regular and effective communication between the School and the University regarding the monitoring of information on the website. There is also evidence of the monitoring and approval of information regarding the School and its self-validated diploma programmes.

3.6 Students commented favourably on the accuracy of the information on the website and stated that the information regarding all programmes of study and the admissions process is clear and transparent. The majority of information scrutinised was found to be accurate and up to date. However, the School brochure pack was found to still contain the name of the previous validating body at the expense of the current one. This inaccuracy is noted in the current awarding body's Academic Link Activity Report and is being addressed by the School.

3.7 The Dean of the School has the final signing responsibility regarding the monitoring of published information concerning the School's diplomas and there is evidence of the Dean's input which is put in to practice. Senior staff indicated that they were aware that the Dean has the final sign-off of all published information regarding the School's provision of its self-validated programmes.

3.8 The majority of information is accurate, up to date and relevant. Students and staff are comfortable with the processes involved. The minor oversight noted for the website regarding the awarding body does not detract significantly from the overall situation. Therefore, Expectation C is met and the level of associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

3.10 There are no features of good practice and there are no recommendations. The quality of the School's information about learning opportunities **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 School is committed to enhancing the learning opportunities and experience of its students as part of its mission in 'educating the designers of the future, in both practical and theoretical terms'. The School has in place regular and systematic opportunities which inform quality improvement within the School, including the identification of graduate career enhancements for students. Further, the School undertakes a range of quality monitoring activities within a culture of continuous improvement and with a fundamental focus on linking student study to the current industry requirements. These opportunities lead to the production of graduates able to progress successfully into the representative industries of interior and garden design.

4.2 A variety of enhancement initiatives stem from quality monitoring activities considered by the Directors, Management Team, Faculty and academic staff. Each activity generates a range of information which is then evaluated by the Directors and then through the School meetings structure, and inform individual developments and enhancement activity. The procedures which the School has in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

4.3 The review team considered the effectiveness of the approach to enhancement by reviewing a variety of documentation including minutes of meetings, employer engagement activity, marketing and promotional materials, case studies and progression information. In addition, it met teams of academic and support staff, senior staff including representation from the University Collaborative Partnerships Unit and Academic Link Tutor, students, employers and alumni. Additionally, the team evaluated notes of internal discussions to consider the relevance of programme content and assignments which the students completed as part of their studies.

4.4 The School is very effective in driving forward and regularly reviewing and monitoring strategies that foster enhancement of learning opportunities and successfully demonstrated how enhancement was influenced through this process. Staff, students, employers and alumni all clearly understand the processes that promulgate enhancement. There are key overarching principles underpinning an ethos that drives enhancement within the School. These include the wide range of initiatives and activities that prepare students for direct employment within the related industries. The support for enhancement is built upon the strong foundations established from the formulation of the School in 1960, and delivery of the diploma programmes, which have been promoted and delivered as an intensive professional qualification for graduate employment for over 50 years.

4.5 The School is committed to the practical and theoretical education of students in the field of interior and garden design and continuously involves and exposes students to current professionals and employers to ensure they are equipped and ready to move into the profession. The Academic Link Tutor reported that the students he met considered the programmes to be demanding and to have pushed their practical and intellectual development.

4.6 All staff engaged in the design, development, delivery and assessment of provision offered by the School are directly involved within the interior and garden design sectors. For example, a number with specialist commercial expertise are involved in the design and

delivery of assignments including lighting design, plumbing, installation and construction for interior and garden environments. Employers and alumni reported that they were able to contribute directly to the relevance of what the School delivered to ensure students were adequately prepared for employment; for example, in influencing senior staff in the School regarding the relevance of computer software systems and relationship with studio practice. Employers also confirmed that the School prepares students effectively in areas such as process, open attitude, creative and practicalities of design and in having an excellent technical knowledge for the disciplines. The School also has close links with the International Interior Designers Association (IIDA), British Institute of Interior Design (BIID), The Society of Garden Designers (SGD), and the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS). The wide-ranging and effective external partnerships which enhance the student learning experience and provide effective preparation for graduate employment is **good practice**.

4.7 Senior and academic staff were able to illustrate how enhancement was discharged and how this was informed by the strategic and operational activities evident within the School. The School Management and Faculty meetings are key forums at which enhancement is strategically managed. Also, Faculty Directors play a key role in identifying and pursuing specific enhancement initiatives. For example, the Garden Design Faculty continually assesses new locations for potential student projects often involving challenging physical conditions or scope, the VLE forum to communicate and share experiences, and case studies of current practitioners and designers and tutors.

4.8 The content of programmes is continually reviewed to ensure the students gain relevant experience within a variety of settings. These involve external expertise from the specialist field. New project briefs are continually researched and refined. For example a Lighting Project, which previously linked to the retail sector was reviewed and changed to focus on the hospitality industry. Projects are continually designed and developed in consultation with external expertise and commercial enterprises. The small group studio approach to learning and teaching with the input of practising professionals and the use of live projects in all provision is also an initiative that fosters enhancement and enriches the student experience (Section B3, paragraph 2.30).

4.9 The quality of the student learning experience is continuously being enhanced through the initiatives outlined above. Students spoke positively regarding their experience at the School and reported that they are satisfied with the various enhancement activities which the School has put in place.

4.10 In summary, there is clear evidence that the quality of experience that the students have is of a very high standard and very much appreciated. The evidence presented shows a clear focus on the student and ensuring the programme content, engagement with external practitioners and access to relevant work placement or simulation, and internships, provide all students with an 'enhanced' learning experience. The alumni connections and involvement of 'prestigious' designers and crafts people indicates that this is the key enhancement focus for the School.

4.11 The review team has confidence that the School is continually identifying key quality improvements to fully embed its strategy for enhancement and improve the quality of the student learning opportunities through preparing students for employment. The review team has seen evidence to show that the School's enhancement approach is effective. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation (Enhancement) is met and that the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.12 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.

4.13 There is a strong and effective approach to ensuring regular and systematic initiatives that enhance student learning opportunities within the School. For example, the School is continually identifying key quality improvements to fully embed its strategy for enhancement that enable its students to secure employment. Three of the areas of good practice associated with this report are related to enhancement opportunities within the School. These include the small group studio approach, the input of practising professionals and the use of live projects (associated with Section B3); the wide-ranging and effective external partnerships which provides effective preparation for graduate employment (associated with Sections B3 and B4); and the comprehensive support for students and alumni which enhances employability (associated with Section B4).

4.14 In summary, the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low. The enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1 The ethos of the School is geared towards employability by developing within its students the skills required by the relevant professions for which it prepares students. Its mission is to educate the designers of the future in both practical and theoretical terms. In particular, it aims to train students in the creative and technical aspects of interior and garden design and in the specialist skills associated with these professions and to enable them to work with confidence and skill in their future careers.

5.2 The School provides students with sound advice and guidance with regard to careers advice and actively promotes its graduates to the profession. Since its inception, the School has developed a worldwide reputation for the quality of its courses and the calibre of the students who graduate. Its links with employers are extremely well embedded and the School benefits from these links in terms of the support and input of employers into the development of the curriculum, the provision of work placements and internships, and in the high proportion of students who find employment with these employers.

5.3 The School's provision, which has been informed by relevant professional bodies including RHS and BILD is highly vocational and is geared towards the professions to which it prepares its students. It has purposely designed its curriculum with employability and the needs of employers in the fields of garden and architectural interior design. Teaching is largely delivered by working professionals who are able to bring their current real-life experience of the two design areas. Studio processes and procedures reflect methods used in professional settings. Assessment is geared towards employability in that projects undertaken by students are 'live' and are set in real contexts. Often 'live' clients are involved in design projects where professional criteria are used.

5.4 Students are able to take advantage of voluntary work placements during the Easter break. Internships, which can be undertaken after the course is complete, provide a testing ground for graduates, and employers from the UK and overseas are invited by the School to view graduates' work and to interact with them. Many students gain full-time employment following such internships.

5.5 In conclusion, the School actively supports its students to develop employability skills and to secure employment. This is achieved through sound careers advice, the design and execution of the curriculum including assessment, and the close links the School maintains with employers. The provision of voluntary placements and internships enhances the employability of its students.

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 22-25 of the [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\) handbook](#).

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

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

Academic standards

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

Award

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

Awarding organisation

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

Blended learning

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

Credit(s)

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

Degree-awarding body

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

Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

Dual award or double award

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

e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning

Enhancement

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

Expectations

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

Flexible and distributed learning

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

See also **distance learning**.

Framework

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

Framework for higher education qualifications

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