



# Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of The Institute of Ismaili Studies

April 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 The Institute of Ismaili Studies. The review took place from 25 to 27 April 2016 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Peter Hymans
- Dr Libby Pearson
- Ms Emily Connor (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by The Institute of Ismaili Studies 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)<sup>1</sup> setting out what all UK [higher education providers](#) expect of themselves and of each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

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

- makes judgements on
  - the setting and maintenance of academic standards
  - the quality of student learning opportunities
  - the information provided about higher education provision
  - the enhancement of student learning opportunities
- 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 The Institute of Ismaili Studies 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,<sup>2</sup> 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 2. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 7.

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

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

<sup>2</sup> Higher Education Review themes: [www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2859](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2859)

<sup>3</sup> QAA website: [www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us).

<sup>4</sup> Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers): [www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Educational-Oversight.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Educational-Oversight.aspx)

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about The Institute of Ismaili Studies

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at The Institute of Ismaili Studies.

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

### Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at The Institute of Ismaili Studies:

- The continuous dialogue and support for students throughout the recruitment and admission process which enables student progression (Expectation B2)
- the appointment of an Academic Support Programme Advisor to deliver academic writing, critical thinking and academic English support to students which enhances students participation in their learning (Expectation B4)
- the involvement of students in the planning and design of new library and accommodation facilities which enables the appropriate development of resources (Enhancement)
- the extensive and effective use of alumni to provide support, information and guidance to all current students, which supports and enhances students learning. (Enhancement).

### Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to The Institute of Ismaili Studies.

By September 2016:

- develop and implement a formal moderation process for assessment tasks on the Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities (Expectation A3.2)
- establish and implement a formal induction and mentoring procedure for all new teaching staff (Expectation B3).

By January 2017:

- revise the programme and module learning outcomes on the Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities to clearly and consistently reflect the terminology used in the FHEQ at Level 7 (Expectation A1)
- develop and implement grading criteria for the Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities that more clearly relate to the learning outcomes for each module (Expectation A3.2).

## **Affirmation of action being taken**

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

- the steps taken to seek external validation for the Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities (Expectation A1)
- the actions taken by the Institute to expand the training available to student representatives to enable them to engage with deliberative committees (Expectation B5)
- the appointment of a Head of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Unit to further enhance learning opportunities (Enhancement).

## **Theme: Student Employability**

The Institute's Teaching Learning and Assessment Strategy contains five key aims, the fourth of which is to ensure that students have the skills necessary for success in learning, personal development, and the enhancement of employability.

Students on the Secondary Teaching Education Programme (STEP) are recruited in their home country and receive an employment contract before starting the programme. On successful completion of the programme, they progress to teaching jobs within their home organisation. Students are well prepared for their careers and before starting the programme undertake six weeks of teaching practice in their home country. While on the course they have teaching placements with support, both in the UK and in their home countries. The Institute provides enrichment sessions on professional values and conduct and facilitates ongoing dialogue with their employers who attend meetings at the Institute. After graduation, students are provided with continuing support that include mentorship, annual continuing professional development workshops within country contexts, professional learning communities, conferences, networking opportunities and access to online and physical resources.

The Institute primarily prepares students on the Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities (GPISH) for progression to academic employment but employability remains a high priority. Students are introduced to a number of activities, such as careers seminars and leadership workshops, which supports them in developing employment skills. The Institute provides extensive funding to support students on internships within other organisations and to undertake doctoral studies.

Destination data shows that all STEP students are employed by their host country teaching organisations and that most GPISH graduates transfer to high profile universities for their third year of study. Information on GPISH graduates who have completed the full three years indicates that most have gained employment in international government and non-governmental agencies, and in several private sectors.

Students reflected that the STEP course was excellent preparation for a career in teaching. They also stated that support given to GPISH students in preparation for careers and support from former students was useful.

Employers were highly complimentary about the employability of GPISH graduates stating that students were well prepared, with a broad understanding, had sophisticated knowledge, and the ability to apply it to community learning, and are committed to further learning.

## Financial sustainability, management and governance

The Institute of Ismaili Studies has satisfactorily completed the financial sustainability, management and governance check.

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

## About The Institute of Ismaili Studies

The Institute was established in 1977 and is located within several floors of a building on Euston Road, London. A unique provider in that it focuses on the object of promoting scholarship on Muslim cultures and societies and a better understanding of their relationship with other societies and faiths. It seeks to explore the relationship of religious ideas with broader dimensions of society and culture (humanities). Within the Islamic tradition, the Institute's programmes seek to promote research on those areas which have had relatively little attention devoted to them in scholarship to date. These include the intellectual and literary expressions of Shi'i Islam in general, and the Ismaili tradition in particular.

The Institute is funded on a long-term basis by His Highness the Aga Khan, the Aga Khan Foundation and donors from the Ismaili community. It is a unique advantage to be financially confident about the future and not to be dependent on yearly student numbers and income from tuition fees. The Institute supports students for the cost of their study.

The Institute offers two postgraduate programmes: STEP and GPISH. The former extends over two academic years and culminates in a double postgraduate award: a Master of Teaching (MTeach) and Master of Arts, Education (Muslims, Societies and Civilisations). The MTeach is managed and delivered by the University College London, Institute of Education (UCL-IOE) and the MA programme is validated by UCL-IOE and delivered in-house. A merger between the then Institute of Education and UCL took place in December 2014, at which time the degree-awarding body became UCL-IOE.

GPISH has the principal aim of cultivating intellectual leadership for the Ismaili community. The three-year programme includes a two-year residential component, comprising a course of study at the Institute followed by a third year non-residential component. During the final year of the programme, students pursue a master's degree in a field of study aligned with the goals of GPISH. The third year of study is undertaken at universities such as London School of Economics and Political Science, the University of London, the University of Oxford and the School of Oriental and African Studies with which the Institute has an articulation agreement.

At the time of the review, there was a total of 85 full-time students; 62 enrolled on the STEP programme and 23 on the GPISH programme. The Institute employs 43 full-time staff who contribute to teaching and research supervision on both STEP and GPISH provision; 19 of which act as Module Leaders or Co-leaders. A further 26 external and guest lecturers are hired for teaching and the Institute employs 16 full-time administrative staff.

The Institute has made several improvements and changes as a result of ongoing reviews and following engagement with QAA in 2012 (REO), 2013 (REO Annual Monitoring) and 2015 (REO Annual Monitoring). Following a two-year deliberation under the aegis of the Academic Steering Committee, the GPISH curriculum review was completed in 2014, and the revised curriculum for Years 1 and 2 is currently being delivered. Contributions from external specialists in the field of Islamic studies and humanities, from current faculty members, and from current and alumni students informed the design of the programme.

The teaching faculty for the new curriculum now comprises experts whose research has greater relevance for the objectives of the programme and modules being taught. Better cohesion in the programme structure has also led to better and continued interaction between faculty members. The workload is now more streamlined, with a better balance between depth and breadth in individual modules, as well as across the programme. The new curriculum also shows a clearer progression from Year 1 to Year 2 in terms of subject knowledge, approach and assessment.

An Annual Programme Review (APR) protocol; piloted for GPISH, has been implemented to provide a comprehensive institutional overview of all programmes currently on offer, and potentially of any other programmes or provisions that might be implemented in the future.

Student involvement in decision-making processes has been greatly enhanced with student-elected student representatives on the Staff-Student Liaison Committee (SSLC) for non-academic issues, and the Institute and the Ismaili Tariqah and Religious Education Board-UK Joint Committee. A student member has also been included on the Validation Panel and on the Academic Management Committee. A student member was added to the Oversight Group (OSG) and Board of Governors (BoG) that meet once a term commencing in the second term of the academic year 2015-16.

A single marketing strategy has been implemented to inform all sources of information and ensure cohesion and consistency across different formats: electronic, print and presentations.

It is now a requirement that all internal members of the teaching faculty possess certification for teaching at higher education level. For those who do not yet possess such certification, the Institute is funding staff to undertake the first level of King's College London's Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice in Higher Education (PGCAPHE). Faculty members are actively invited to pursue further levels as a matter of continued professional development and are supported in so doing. The programme has been well received by teaching staff, with two members progressing to the next stage.

The Institute has also undertaken a complete review and restructuring of STEP, in collaboration with UCL-IOE, to address the needs and concerns of students' future employers in the field, as well as to maintain the programme's continued relevance, particularly concerning teacher training and subject knowledge. Several models have been outlined in collaboration with UCL-IOE and relevant stakeholders, and are now being prepared for further stages of approval and validation. The estimated inception date for the new STEP model is September 2017. The 2016 student intake will follow the current curriculum.

Challenges facing the Institute include finding suitably qualified individuals to design and deliver its academic programmes, and ensuring continuity and consistency in the collaboration with its external faculty. The Institute continues to invest in developing its own internal faculty by providing doctoral scholarships, and recruiting specialist external lecturers of the highest calibre.

The English proficiency and study skills of international students, coming from areas with limited learning opportunities and resources, is a continuing challenge. This is being met, in collaboration with the University of Central Asia, by developing a preparatory programme in Tajikistan to seek and properly equip high-quality applicants for the Institute's academic programmes. The programme also supports sister organisations in other countries who run preparatory programmes, to ensure the supply of qualified applicants from target countries such as Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, and Syria.

In April 2012 the Review for Educational Oversight evaluated the provision with 'confidence' judgements in all areas and with six areas of good practice for dissemination. There were three desirable recommendations around the clarification of assessment outcomes, the creation of a single point of reference for quality assurance policies and procedures and the implementation of a system of peer observation of teaching. Good practice has been disseminated and continues to be enhanced. The Institute has addressed all of the recommendations although the success and impact of the measures taken is not fully clear to the review team.

## Explanation of the findings about The Institute of Ismaili Studies

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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



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

**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* 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 Secondary Teaching Education Programme (STEP) is a combination of two courses: the MTeach which, including teaching and assessment, is entirely the responsibility of the awarding body, the University College London, Institute of Education (UCL-IOE); and the MA Education (Muslim Societies and Civilisations), which is a programme written and delivered by the Institute and validated by UCL-IOE. Students are enrolled on both courses and undertake a double master's award over a two-year period. UCL-IOE's procedures ensure that the STEP programme design is at the correct level and is in line with *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and the *Master's Degree Characteristics Statement*.

1.2 Graduates of the STEP programme do not receive UK Qualified Teacher status but success on the STEP programme is a requirement for employment as a teacher in Ismaili Tariqah and Religious Education Board (ITREB) educational establishments for which students are being prepared. The procedures in place would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.3 The Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities (GPISH) is an internal programme and on successful completion the students are able to progress to a master's

programme at other institutions. The programme has been internally validated using the Institute's Programme Design Development and Approval Policy.

1.4 The GPISH prospectus, validation documentation and programme specification refers to the programme as a postgraduate FHEQ level 7 programme although the programme learning outcomes do not reflect that level of study. The module descriptors vary in their academic rigour with some module learning outcomes reflecting study at level 7 while others do not. Staff recognise this variance and stated that regardless of this, teaching and learning was at level 7. This is confirmed by the external examiner and a letter received from the School of African and Oriental Studies, University of London. The review team **recommends** that the Institute revise the programme and module learning outcomes on the GPISH programme to clearly and consistently reflect the terminology used in the FHEQ at Level 7.

1.5 The GPISH is a two-year full-time programme of study with appropriate entry requirements such as a first degree equivalent to a UK first degree, but does not in itself qualify as a master's degree. Some students stated a concern that the lack of certification could have an adverse effect on employability. At a meeting with senior staff the Institute stated that it is seeking to have the programme validated as a master's degree in its own right. The processes in place would enable the Expectation to be met. The review team **affirms** the steps taken to seek external validation for the Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities.

1.6 The review team tested the Expectation through meetings with senior and academic staff and consideration of programme specifications and other course documentation.

1.7 For the STEP programmes, the process meets the Expectation and for the GPISH programme the mechanisms exist to meet the Expectation, but a more critical approach is needed in determination of the learning outcomes.

1.8 The Expectation is met, but due to the concerns regarding the levels of learning outcomes, the risk level 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**

1.9 For the STEP programme, the Institute is bound by and complies with UCL-IOE's framework and regulations. The MTeach programme is the awarding body's own programme on which students are enrolled. The MA Education credit and award structure was designed by the Institute in collaboration with UCL-IOE under the terms of the Memorandum of Agreement.

1.10 The Institute has developed its own award framework for the GPISH programme with clear governance arrangements and a committee structure, which includes a Programme Board that reports through the Academic Management Committee to the Board of Governors. The terms of reference and minutes of these committees show that they have good oversight of the maintenance of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities.

1.11 The structure of the GPISH programme is contained within the programme specification that names the taught modules but does not give clear weightings or module specifications for each. The programme specification states that attendance will be graded but this has been discontinued by the Institute. A programme structure is contained within the Student Handbook but, again, there is no evidence of module weightings. The Handbook also contains a sample student record which refers to points values, hours earned and grade point average (GPA) as calculated by the Institute's systems but it is not clear from the documentation how these measures are derived. The grading criteria contained in all documentation are generic and do not enable assessors to grade against the module learning outcomes. This is discussed further in paragraph 1.32.

1.12 The STEP programme is within the framework and regulations of UCL-IOE and therefore meets the Expectation. The GPISH programme has a governance structure and programme design developed by the Institute which would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.13 The review team tested the Expectation by considering the Memorandum of Agreement with the awarding body for the STEP programme and documents relating to the GPISH programme, including the programme specification, Student Handbook and the Assessment policy. In both cases, the team tested the Expectation in meetings with senior and teaching staff, including representatives from the awarding body, and in an extra meeting with the Head of Graduate Studies and the GPISH Programme Leader.

1.14 In practice, the structures and processes supporting the GPISH programme allow the Expectation to be met but would be significantly improved with the consideration of a more rigorous programme structure. The STEP programme arrangements work effectively in meeting the Expectation.

1.15 The Expectation is met with a low level of risk as staff and students are clear about the structures of both programmes as published by the Institute.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.16 As described in paragraphs 1.1-1.3, STEP definitive records are held by the Academic Standards and Quality Enhancement Unit of UCL-IOE, and include programme descriptors and module descriptors. The Institute is responsible, as the awarding body, for maintaining definitive records for GPISH.

1.17 In both cases, the Institute is responsible for ensuring that these documents are made available to students and that they are used as the reference point for the delivery and assessment of programmes. Any modifications are tracked in line with UCL-IOE protocols or the Institute's Programme Design, Development and Approval Policy. These arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.18 To test this Expectation, the review team looked at a range of evidence from the Institute, which included process documents, programme specifications and scrutiny of the virtual learning environment (VLE) for both STEP and GPISH. The team interviewed teaching and senior staff, staff from UCL-IOE, and students from both STEP and GPISH.

1.19 Programme handbooks for both STEP and GPISH contain information and details of the delivery and design of the programme which is in line with the Institute's validation documents. Programme and module specifications are made available for students to access on the VLEs.

1.20 STEP documentation is held by UCL-IOE in accordance with its own protocol, which includes programme specifications and module descriptors. The validation documents for the GPISH programme are held by the Institute under the responsibility of the Academic Management Committee (AMC). Any revisions that are made to programmes are reflected in the validation documents and subsequent publications, post approval, by UCL-IOE, or the Institute, respectively.

1.21 The approach the Institute takes to the provision and maintenance of records of higher education provision, and the management of programme specifications for its awards is appropriate. The review team concludes, therefore, that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

**Findings**

1.22 Procedures for the approval, validation and review of the STEP programme are set out by UCL IOE and are outlined in the Memorandum of Agreement between UCL-IOE and the Institute. The review team explored the effectiveness of approval processes for the STEP programme through reviewing examples of validation documentation, periodic programme review and by meeting staff who had been involved in the recent STEP programme re-approval.

1.23 The Institute is responsible for the programme design, development and approval policy of the GPISH programme with clear guidelines outlined in the Programme Design, Development and Approval process. Ultimate responsibility for the development and monitoring of the present policy, its associated procedures, the maintenance of academic standards and quality assurance, and the final approval of taught programmes lies with the Institute's Academic Steering Committee (ASC). However, it is not clear from the documentation how the GPISH programme has been mapped against the UK standard *Master's Degree Characteristics Statement*, as discussed in Expectation A1.

1.24 Both programmes' validation and approval processes are supported by the Institute's Teaching and Assessment Strategy and is evidenced by the STEP Periodic Review Procedure and the Programme Design, Development and Approval Policy.

1.25 The STEP programme is within the framework and regulations of UCL-IOE for validation and therefore meets the Expectation. The approval process for GPISH has been developed by the Institute and would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.26 The team tested the Expectation by considering the Memorandum of Agreement between the Institute and UCL-IOE for the STEP programme as well as a recent validation report and a STEP periodic review procedure, and in meetings with staff of the Institute and the awarding body. The team also scrutinised documents relating to the GPISH programme, including the Institute's Programme Design, Development and approval Policy supported by the Institute's Teaching and Assessment Strategy, and in meetings with staff of the Institute.

1.27 The STEP validation procedure and arrangement with the awarding body work effectively in meeting the Expectation.

1.28 The GPISH approval procedure allows the Expectation to be met but would be improved with consideration of UK standard *Master's Degree Characteristics Statement* at FHEQ Level 7 as outlined in the recommendation in Expectation A1.

1.29 Effective processes are in place for the validation of STEP and approval of GPISH taught programmes, which ensure that academic standards are set appropriately and in accordance with national and awarding body frameworks. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.30 The awarding body validation process ensures that the MTeach programme provides an opportunity for the achievement of the STEP Learning Outcomes through a formal assessment process. The MA Education assessment model is designed by the Institute in accordance with this process. Revalidation is required for the purpose of assessment modification. External examiners have input into the extent to which standards are being maintained and their findings are reported to the Joint Partner Management Committee (JPMC). The Institute regularly engages with UCL-IOE to discuss how academic standards are met. Student feedback is used to inform these meetings.

1.31 The Institute applies its own approval process for the GPISH programme as outlined in A3.1. It verifies that the learning outcomes can be achieved by assessment in accordance with UK threshold standards and external examiner reports state that academic standards are being achieved. The external examiner reports were critical of the lack of clarity of second marking and the lack of moderation of the assessment instruments. However, the report of July 2015 acknowledged that there was 'more visible and transparent second marking with, in some cases, second markers contributing significant formative feedback to students'. Most recently, the examiner commented on the lack of an assessment tariff for word counts. The response from the Institute indicates that it has introduced a tariff and word count penalties are included in the student handbook. The review team **recommends** that the Institute develop and implement a formal moderation process for assessment tasks on the Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities.

1.32 As outlined in Expectation A2.1, the GPISH documentation does not contain clear grading criteria for the programme to relate directly to the learning outcomes for each module and as such does not enable assessors to grade against module learning outcomes. The review team **recommends** that the Institute develop and implement grading criteria for the Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities that more clearly relate to the learning outcomes for each module. The processes in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.33 The team tested the Expectation through meetings with senior and academic staff and an extra meeting at the review team's request with the HGS and the GPISH Programme Leader. The review team also considered the STEP and GPISH programme documentation, external examiner reports, and examples of assessment instruments and marked work.

1.34 The Expectation is met but due to the recommendations made about grading criteria and the lack of a formal moderation process on GPISH the risk level is moderate.

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

**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**

1.35 The STEP programme undergoes a Periodic Programme Review (PPR) as well as an Annual Programme Review (APR) with input and representation from both UCL-IOE and the Institute. The PPR uses UCL-IOE's process and includes references to academic standards. This would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.36 The STEP PPR action plan demonstrates how the Institute has taken actions to address the recommendations arising out of the reports. Action plans resulting from the aforementioned reviews are written in collaboration between the two institutions and are approved jointly by the Joint Programme Management Committee (JPMC). Staff from the Institute gave an example of how tutors and module leaders identified a selection of their own teaching sessions to invite colleagues at the partner institution to observe.

1.37 The STEP Annual Programme Review uses the awarding body pro forma and detail is contained within the external examiner reports.

1.38 The GPISH programme monitoring of UK threshold academic standards is achieved through the Institute's own APR protocol, which is clearly outlined in the committee terms of reference. The APR process is reviewed and reported on by the external examiner and an action plan is created for inclusion in the APR process.

1.39 The APR for GPISH is similar to that for the STEP awarding body and includes detail on external examiner reports thus satisfying the Expectation.

1.40 The team tested the Expectation through meetings with senior and academic staff, with representation from the awarding body, as well as consideration of PPR, APR, external examiner reports and other committee documentation.

1.41 For both STEP and GPISH programmes there are mechanisms that exist to effectively meet the Expectation and the level of risk is low.

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

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.42 For the MA Education, the Programme Leader, the Head of Department and Module Leaders prepare the programme in consultation with the Institute's Academic Steering Committee, Department of Graduate Studies Oversight Group, Board of Governors and UCL-IOE. Once the programme, including module specifications, is approved at committee level at the Institute it is considered for validation by UCL-IOE. The latest revalidation of the programme was in 2014 when external academics were consulted.

1.43 For the GPISH programme, the Institute uses its own internal validation process which specifies the external membership of validation panels. The initial development of new programmes involves the advice of leading academics recruited at a national and international level. Current and past reports from external examiners on existing programmes are also taken into consideration but the external examiner may not form part of the validation panel. Programme validation panels include external senior academic staff of internationally recognised expertise. Feedback from current students and alumni is actively sought and considered while developing or amending programmes. Minutes of the Academic Steering Committee show that external expertise is sought on a continuing basis to assist the Institute in maintaining its programmes.

1.44 The validation panel delivers a report to the Institute giving detailed feedback down to module level. Following the last revision of the Programme Design, Development and Approval Policy, the Validation Panel makes recommendations directly to the Director.

1.45 The two systems would enable the Expectation to be met for the inclusion of externality in programme design. The Institute works hard to ensure that its programmes are informed by academic externality at a national and international level.

1.46 The team tested the Expectation through consideration of the validation policies, procedures and records of the Institute and through staff meetings.

1.47 The processes of the Institute are highly effective in ensuring that externality is a key feature of the programme design and validation process.

1.48 The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low as the use of externality is a key theme for the Institute.

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



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

1.49 In reaching its judgement about the Institute's maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its awarding body, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook.

1.50 All of the applicable Expectations in this area have been met. There are two recommendations, with a judgement of moderate risk, and one affirmation for Expectation A1.

1.51 The Institute, in partnership with its awarding body, takes due regard of the awarding body's framework and regulations for the STEP programmes under the terms of the Memorandum of Agreement and is effective in maintaining the academic standards of the programme.

1.52 GPISH is internally validated using the Institute's Programme Design Development and Approval Policy. It has clear governance arrangements with good oversight of the maintenance of academic standards but the module descriptors vary in their academic rigour with some module learning outcomes reflecting study at level 7 while others do not. The review team recommends, for Expectation A1, that the Institute revise the programme and module learning outcomes to more clearly and consistently reflect the terminology used in the FHEQ at Level 7.

1.53 The recommendations made in A3.2 relate to the grading criteria outlined in the GPISH module descriptors that need to more clearly relate to the learning outcomes for each module to enable assessors to grade against module learning outcomes, and the need to develop and implement a formal moderation process for assessment tasks.

1.54 The affirmation in Expectation A1 relates to GPISH that as a two-year full-time programme of study with appropriate entry requirements, such as a first degree, does not in itself qualify as a master's degree. Students were concerned that the lack of certification could have an adverse effect on employability and senior staff are seeking to have the programme validated as a master's degree. The review team affirms the steps taken to seek external validation for the Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities.

1.55 On the basis of documentation provided and discussions with staff and students, the team concludes that the Institute's maintenance of academic standards for awards **meets** expectations.

## 2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.1 The Institute has a comprehensive Programme Design, Development and Approval Policy which outlines the principles, guidelines and procedures for the development, approval, amendment and alteration of taught programmes delivered by the Institute. The aims of the Policy are to ensure that programmes are designed and delivered to the appropriate academic standard, are consistently verified and maintained, ensure high quality learning opportunities for all students and that programmes are consistent with the Institute's philosophy and educational mission.

2.2 The Institute works closely with UCL-IOE for the design of the STEP programmes and the governance arrangements for the relationship are outlined in the Memorandum of Agreement. The process begins with the Programme Leader who designs the programme, in collaboration with the Head of Department and the Module Leaders, and in consultation with the Institute's committees and groups and the awarding body. Outcomes from the STEP PPR are fed back into the design phase of programmes. Once the programme has been internally approved by the Institute it is validated by UCL-IOE.

2.3 The Institute has developed its own internal policies and protocols for the GPISH programme. The use of external experts on the Academic Steering Committee (ASC) as outlined in the ASC Terms of Reference (TORs) is further supported by the use of external members on the Validation Panel. Outcomes and recommendations from the external examiners reports, the STEP unified APR protocol and input from current and alumni students through the Annual Student Experience Review (ASER) inform the approval process.

2.4 The Institute provides guidance on the principles governing programme design, as well as on the criteria used in its assessment. Staff stated that they were supported in their engagement with the policy in order to achieve a grounded understanding of the criteria that underpins effective programme design, through both one-to-one and group briefings.

2.5 The validation of new programmes follows a three-tiered process consisting of a plenary session by the ASC, a validation panel as outlined in the approval protocol and final sign-off by the Institute's Co-Director.

2.6 The development and approval of individual modules for a programme delivered over two years is conducted in two stages. The recent review of GPISH developed and validated the first-year modules before the programme started in September 2014 whereas the second-year modules were developed during the academic year 2014-15, and then validated before the start of the programme's second year in September 2015. The staggered approach to the design of first year and second year modules allowed the sharing of good practice between developers to ensure appropriateness of the second year modules.

2.7 The Institute's policy on Programme Design, Development and Approval together with engagement of a wide variety of key stakeholders, such as externals, students and the awarding body provide a good framework for the effective design, development and approval of programmes. For both the STEP and the GPISH programmes, the approval process has taken into account the quality of resources available for delivering the programmes and the sharing of good practice. This would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.8 The review team tested the Expectation through scrutiny of the Programme Design, Development and Approval policy and the Memorandum of Agreement for the STEP programme and associated documentation of committee meetings as well as through meetings with staff and the awarding body.

2.9 There are effective processes for STEP and GPISH programme design, development and approval allowing the Expectation to be met with a low level of risk.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.10 The Institute has a thorough and rigorous recruitment and admissions process for both programmes. Recruitment for each programme is slightly different depending on the stakeholder and awarding body involved. An Admissions Policy underpins the structures for recruitment in the organisation. The Board of Governors contribute to strategic guidance for recruitment and selection for both courses, and have final sign-off for successful candidates for both STEP and GBPISH.

2.11 A multistage approach ensures that the students arriving from a variety of backgrounds and countries have the appropriate qualifications to enter their programme, and supplementary support to aid any additional learning requirements. Clear and transparent information is articulated, on the Institute's website and in the prospectus, about the course programme and the entry requirements, outlining fair and equal practice.

2.12 The Institute is responsible for marketing activities, and providing an induction for students on their arrival. Pre-enrolment information is provided to applicants to support their transition to UK higher education. The rigorous arrangements for recruitment and selection would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.13 The review team analysed various pieces of evidence including policy documents, marketing materials and admissions guidance to test the approach used for recruitment, selection and admissions. The team met senior and professional members of staff, and heard students' views on their experience of the Institute's admissions processes.

2.14 All applicants are provided with written admissions criteria to inform them of the application process. Staff are given the same guidance alongside additional training if they are involved in interview panels. To ensure consistency across countries for application review and interviews, all interviewers are trained by the Institute at the start of each academic cycle on the Institute's expectations, entry requirements and evidence requirements. Some interviews are recorded to provide additional support and staff training material in order to demonstrate appropriateness of behaviour and provide clearer examples of interview practice.

2.15 STEP recruitment is jointly managed by the Institute and UCL-IOE. The Institute is responsible for providing pre-entry information on programmes, initial shortlisting, conducting the actual interviews and overall review of interviews through an Admissions Committee. UCL-IOE is involved in the second round of shortlisting and final decisions as part of an admissions committee with the Institute. ITREBs perform the operational management of the admissions process in the applicant's home country, preparing and supporting each applicant, arranging a six-week teaching practicum and assessing the student's attitudes towards the teaching profession. It is over this period where additional support or learning needs are identified, such as further English language support. ITREBs are involved in the support and operational logistics of recruitment for STEP students.

2.16 Once a student accepts an offer, they are sent information on accommodation, travel and visas alongside their offer letter. Successful applicants receive an orientation programme and notes are kept during both sets of interviews to provide feedback to applicants. Orientation is evaluated and student feedback is shared with programme leaders and the Head of Department.

2.17 For GPISH, students apply directly to the Institute and applications are reviewed by the Admissions Committee. Applicants are required to submit a personal statement, examples of written work, transcripts and language test results. These applications are shortlisted by the Admissions Committee with successful applicants undergoing an entrance exam designed by the Institute and administered by the ITREBs in the interviewee's respective country. The entrance exam and interviews are held at the same time. The admissions committee reviews the interview outcomes and exam results before the final list is prepared for sign-off by the BoG.

2.18 Admissions is reviewed on an annual basis and includes student feedback from past, current and former students. Feedback is integrated into an annual review of the recruitment and admissions process to help direct and inform any changes on a year-by-year basis, which is subsequently reported to the Department of Graduate Studies Oversight Group. An example was given where as a result of feedback the total time taken to manage recruitment was reduced. Admission review meetings are held with ITREBs to share best practice and inform development to the admissions cycle.

2.19 The review team considers that the level of support provided to students by the Institute and the ITREBs is effective and characteristic of the relationship that the Institute has with its students. Students emphasised the level of support and information that they received from the point of enquiry to application and admission as highly beneficial in making sure they made an informed decision. The Academic Support Programmes Advisor (ASPA) was noted by the team as a beneficial role in supporting students through the recruitment process. The additional information provided to students such as information and guidance on visa applications, and six-week practicum prior to study lead the team to consider that the continuous dialogue and support for students throughout the recruitment and admission process which enables student progression is **good practice**.

2.20 The level of support provided to students during the admissions process was highlighted by staff and students as highly beneficial to supporting students in their transition to study at the Institute, but also in maintaining the standard of quality students. Overall, the review team found that this Expectation is met and the 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**

2.21 The Institute has a comprehensive Teaching Learning and Assessment Strategy. It includes five key aims: to provide a quality learning environment; to promote excellence and share good practice; to create a culture of success; to ensure students have the skills necessary for success in learning, personal development, and the enhancement of employability; and to ensure that assessment is an integral element of learning.

2.22 The Institute requires all new teaching staff to have experience of teaching at higher education levels. The procedure for the appointment of new teaching staff requires that the Head of Department write a job and person specification that includes this requirement.

2.23 New staff have a corporate induction and then meet the relevant Head of Department who discusses with them the requirements of their role. The member of staff is also supported in their teaching and assessment practice on a needs basis by the Head of Department, and the Programme Leader as required. All staff new to teaching at the Institute receive an induction from the Programme Leader, covering requirements of teaching and assessing at the postgraduate level; they are provided with documentation to support their work with the Institute, including the Lecturer Handbook and all necessary modular documentation. Pre-term faculty meetings serve to introduce lecturers new to the Institute to other members of the teaching faculty, as well as covering the requirements of teaching and assessing at the postgraduate level, and the administrative processes of the Department of Graduate Studies. In the first term they take part in Peer Observation of Teaching. Some new teaching staff undertake co-teaching with existing members of staff. To ensure that new teaching staff are aware of the requirements for teaching at postgraduate level from the start of their teaching practice, the review team **recommends** that the Institute establish and implement a formal induction and mentoring procedure for all new teaching staff.

2.24 The quality of teaching is monitored through face-to-face meetings between the Head of Department and the Programme Leader and students, and by student feedback on modules. Students stated that as a result of feedback given by them for one module the tutor had been changed.

2.25 The Institute has a well-developed Peer Observation of Teaching process. Observations for all established staff are carried out every other year while for new staff this occurs during their first term of teaching at the Institute. Reflective processes identify good practice and areas for development and this feeds into the staff appraisal process by means of the individual objectives discussed with the line manager at mid and end-of-year meetings. The review of Peer Observation of Teaching undertaken by the Head of Graduate Studies identifies strengths and areas for development but does not identify numbers of staff observed or on which programmes or modules.

2.26 The Institute has a policy to fund all internal teaching staff not already qualified to undertake the Post Graduate Certificate in Academic Practice in Higher Education at King's College. Other continuing professional development is supported by the Institute, which considers lifelong learning as central to its ethos.

2.27 The Institute's policies on teaching and learning, together with its recruitment practices and peer observation scheme, provide a good framework for teaching and learning including monitoring and improvement would enable the Expectation to be met. The process would be improved by the introduction of a formal induction and mentoring scheme for teaching staff new to the Institute.

2.28 The team tested the Expectation by scrutinising the Teaching and Learning Policy and the Peer Observation of Teaching process and associated documents and through meetings with staff and students.

2.29 The processes work effectively in practice and the team considers that the Expectation is met and the 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**

2.30 The Institute has no overarching strategy for learning resources but the students on both programmes have access to a wide range of resources and support. Ultimate responsibility for learning resources rests with the Board of Governors but this is delegated through the committee structure to the Academic Management Committee and the Programme Boards.

2.31 The Institute has an extensive range of services to support learning. As a research institution, the students benefit from research undertaken at the forefront of the field. Students have access to a number of libraries at external higher education institutions as well as an internal library which is recognised internationally.

2.32 The Institute has created a number of specific roles as part of the lecturers works team to support learning such as the Academic Advisors who have a personal tutor role, the Lesson Planning Tutor for STEP students, the Placement Coordinator and the Academic Support Programmes Advisor (ASPA) which was created in response to the needs of the students, most of whom have English as a second language and are new to studying in UK higher education. The ASPA who teaches English for academic purposes, academic writing and critical thinking is available to students on a drop-in basis. Students valued highly the assistance being given by the ASPA. The review team considers that the appointment of an Academic Support Programme Advisor to deliver academic writing, critical thinking and academic English support to students and which enhances students' participation in their learning is **good practice**.

2.33 The Student Services team assists the students with non-academic matters such as obtaining visas. The Student Services manager liaises with the Head of Department and the Programme Leader on personal matters.

2.34 The student satisfaction survey for non-academic matters shows general satisfaction with learning resources except for information technology and some dissatisfaction with teaching spaces. The Institute will be moving to new teaching and residential accommodation in the near future and students were consulted about their requirements for the design of the project. A Staff-Student Liaison Committee has been established to discuss non-academic issues with students.

2.35 Students expressed broad satisfaction with learning resources and appreciated the range of services available to them. They also reflected that learning resources were well maintained. The resources and services available to students would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.36 The review team tested the evidence by looking at student views expressed in the student submission, meeting with students and scrutiny of the student survey supplied as evidence. The team also met support staff and looked at other documents supplied by the Institute as evidence.

2.37 The procedures and resources that the Institute provides work effectively in practice and are appreciated by the students. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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



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

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

#### **Findings**

2.38 Students are actively encouraged to contribute their feedback in a range of formal and informal mechanisms at the Institute. There are a number of opportunities for students to participate, academically and non-academically, in the evaluation and development of the student experience at the institute. Student Services takes full responsibility for the coordination, management and support of student representation across both programmes.

2.39 Each cohort elects two student representatives each year, and to maximise representation students cannot run for a second term. Representatives attend Student-Staff Liaison Committees with minutes and actions for meetings posted on the (VLE). Students are represented on a range of committees including the Joint Programme Management Committee, Programme Board for GPISH, Student-Staff Liaison Committee, and the ITREB-UK Joint Committee.

2.40 Student Services coordinate and support student reps on an operational basis such as the management of student representative elections. All student representatives receive training following their election at the start of the year.

2.41 Students can contribute feedback through verbal and written feedback. Feedback is collected in end-of-year module, post programme and six months after graduation evaluations. Feedback is also collated during midterm reviews, from the religious education centre placement debrief. The number and level of opportunities for student feedback would enable this Expectation to be met.

2.42 The review team tested the Expectation by examining terms of references and minutes of committees, reviewing the training provided to student representatives and the use of feedback following survey completion. The team met senior, professional and teaching staff, and a number of students across both programmes, including student representatives and graduates.

2.43 Student representative roles and responsibilities are included in the student handbook. The Institute also operates an IT representative system where students are trained by IT staff to support minor technical glitches during class to reduce disruption. More recently, to extend student engagement, a student voice has been included at further levels, such as the Department of Graduate Studies Oversight Group, and the Board of Governors. There is an intention to expand further opportunities for student input in deliberative committees with appropriate training. The review team **affirms** the actions taken by the Institute to expand the training available to student representatives to enable them to engage with deliberative committees.

2.44 With the exception of last year due to a change in staffing, student representatives are surveyed on their experiences to assess the suitability of training and support provided to them. The survey will resume with the intention to monitor the development and engagement of student representatives in the future.

2.45 A variety of examples were provided of changes made as a result of student feedback, such as library opening hours and input into graduation sessions and the new accommodation building. Students felt that their feedback was listened to and responded to, and were able to navigate the VLE to follow up with any queries they had raised during

formal meetings in the minutes. Due to the small number of students in each cohort, students felt they were able to address any concerns in an informal matter quickly as well as formally through committees.

2.46 Mid-term reviews are open to all students from STEP cohorts to discuss the student experience. It is attended by senior managers from the Institute and UCL-IOE with feedback feeding into delivery and improvement. Surveys and evaluations are filled out here and results are collated into a report and considered at a strategic level at Academic Management Committee on academic and non-academic experiences of students, such as the library or a field trip to Spain.

2.47 Focus groups are convened for specific projects to ensure student input, for example the content of enrichment sessions and Spanish field trip, or the design of the new Kings Cross accommodation building. All students have the opportunity to meet the Governors and Co-Director at the start and end of their studies to comment on their expectations and experiences.

2.48 The range of formal and informal mechanisms provided by the Institute to capture student feedback, and the confidence of the students to integrate their experiences in future planning and delivery, leads the review team to conclude that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.49 As described in Expectation A1, the Institute operates two assessed programmes: STEP and GPISH. The Memorandum of Agreement between the Institute and UCL-IOE outlines the role of the Institute with regard to assessments for the MA Education (Muslim Societies and Civilisations), as part of STEP.

2.50 The STEP programme uses formative assessment to support student learning and this is outlined in the UCI-IOE Assessment Policy and Guidelines.

2.51 The Institute internally designs, delivers and manages the first two years of the GPISH programme that does not currently result in an award. At the end of their two years at the Institute, students leave for their third year in a UK University with a detailed transcript with achievements from the Institute calculated using the grade point average system. The UK university will administer its own postgraduate award on successful completion of the third year.

2.52 The GPISH Assessment Policy and Guidelines outlines the Institute's policy for the assessment of students including assessment of both oral and written work. The policy contains an overview of the generic grading and banding of assessment criteria along with the policy and procedures for the formulation and moderation of assessments. Summative assessments and assessments worth more than 40 per cent of the final mark for a module are marked by the lecturer and then second-marked by another member of staff. Oral sessions are recorded and the records made available to the relevant students upon request for review or reflection. Students are invited to discuss the feedback with their tutors.

2.53 The GPISH Assessment Policy and Guidelines outlines that Module Leaders are responsible for liaising with the respective Programme Leader for the formulation of the assessment strategies for his or her own module, including the assessment schedule. The use of the Assessment Methods Matrix is encouraged and these are then made available to students in order that they can successfully undertake the proposed assessment. Assessments based on coursework are required to be approved by the Head of Graduate Studies before being published on the VLE as part of the module outline. Written examination questions are developed by Module Leaders in consultation with the respective Programme Leaders, and are moderated by the external examiner before being used in an examination. Despite the process being contained within a series of documents, the teaching staff stated that the process for moderation was not fully formalised.

2.54 The student handbooks for both STEP and GPISH contain guidelines on the assessment procedures policy and the grading criteria used for written assessments.

2.55 The mechanisms for assessment are in place for both the STEP and GPISH programmes, in that the processes involve staff training and development in the purpose, function and alignment of learning outcomes.

2.56 The Institute makes use of external examiner feedback and comments made on sample assessments for each module taught, as well as on the quality and consistency of assessment in general.

2.57 The GPISH Assessment Policy and Guidelines provide a framework for assessment instruments but, as identified in Expectation A3.2, students would benefit from the development of clearer grading criteria that relate to the learning outcomes for each module and a formal moderation process for assessment tasks. The assessment procedures in place would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.58 The team tested the Expectation through meetings with senior and academic staff and consideration of the Institute's Assessment Policy and Guidelines, instruments of assessments, examples of second marking, feedback to students and other associated documentation.

2.59 The Expectation is met as there are clear policies and procedures in place currently for the assessment of students and the interaction of staff during the pre and post-assessment period.

2.60 For the STEP programme, the process meets the Expectation. Mechanisms exist to meet the Expectation for GPISH, although a more rigorous approach is required to demonstrate explicit assessment of each intended Learning Outcome and a formal moderation process for assessment tasks needs to be developed and implemented.

2.61 The Expectation is met and the level of risk is considered 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**

2.62 For both courses of the STEP programme, the awarding body is responsible for the appointment and management of external examiners. External examiners are sent samples of completed and marked work. UCL-IOE is responsible for the monitoring process and sends samples directly to the external examiner without input from the Institute.

2.63 UCL-IOE, in consultation with the Institute, is responsible for preparing the response to external examiner reports for STEP. The reports are considered at the STEP JPMC which is run jointly by the two institutions with the Chair alternating between the two.

2.64 For the GPISH programme, the Institute has developed its own processes for the appointment and management of external examiners. The external examiner's reports are made on a pro forma and invite extensive reflection on all aspects of the programme, including academic standards.

2.65 The GPISH Programme Leader is responsible for writing a response to the external examiners report, which is considered by the GPISH Programme Board. The external examiner report is uploaded onto the VLE together with the report for the STEP programme.

2.66 Students are invited to give feedback on the external examiners reports for both programmes but no comments have yet been made. Students from both programmes stated that they were unaware of the availability of the external examiners' reports, although this was subsequently clarified with the team during the review.

2.67 For the STEP programme UCL-IOE's policies and procedures ensure the Expectation is met. For the GPISH programme, the Institute's own external examining policy and practices would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.68 The review team tested the evidence through meetings with staff of the Institute and the awarding body and by consideration of policies and procedures relating to external examining, external examiner reports and responses.

2.69 The process works effectively in practice but monitoring of actions arising from the external examiner reports could be clearer. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

**Findings**

2.70 Annual monitoring of both the STEP and GPISH programmes is undertaken in January each year. The process aims to highlight good practice and to identify areas for development. It is the responsibility of the Programme Leader to gather feedback from each faculty and the external examiners in order to maintain consistency and comparability as outlined in the Institute's APR protocol.

2.71 The Institute has recently combined the annual monitoring of both the STEP and GPISH programmes to enable further sharing of resources and outcomes across the Institute and UCL-IOE. The report was reviewed by the AMC to enable the Institute to gain a comprehensive overview of all provision, in addition to enhancing areas of good practice. Students also had opportunities to feed into this report.

2.72 The Institute's APR protocol considers programme management from both the operational and academic perspective and takes into account the student experience, inclusive of current student and alumni feedback. External examiner reports are also considered in the APR and ASER process.

2.73 Annual monitoring has included enrichment sessions for further feedback and input of provision to highlight areas for improvement in ensuring progress is made.

2.74 The GPISH programme was subject to a Periodic Review following a two-year deliberation under the aegis of the Academic Steering Committee (ASC) and a curriculum review was completed in 2014. The revised curriculum for Years 1 and 2 is currently being delivered.

2.75 The Institute's APR protocol fully and clearly describe the approach to the annual and periodic review process and assess the action plan for the past academic year to inform the action plan for the coming year. The guidelines request that staff who wrote the report place particular emphasis on the evaluation of current practices rather than description. While the points of enquiry provided for each section must be addressed, staff responsible for the report are nonetheless free to highlight further issues wherever necessary. Examples of annual programme review documents from each programme demonstrate that the process is consistent across STEP and GPISH and review reports contain a reasonable level of detail to support the process, along with reflection and actions for improvement. This process is effective and ensures that appropriate oversight of programme monitoring and review is maintained.

2.76 The awarding body has a process in place for STEP which is conducted every six years and the most recent was completed in May 2014. The processes in place would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.77 The review team tested the Expectation through meetings with senior staff, representatives of UCL-IOE, teaching staff and students as well as consideration of the APR and ASER documentation and associated policies and documentation.

2.78 There is evidence that the APR process for both the GPISH and STEP programmes has internal and external input and is working effectively as a combined process. The Expectation is therefore met and the risk level is considered to be low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

**Findings**

2.79 The Institute has a complaints procedure which applies to both the STEP and GPISH programme. For academic appeals, UCL-IOE policies apply to STEP, and the Institute's internal procedures apply to GPISH.

2.80 Policies and procedures are articulated to staff and students in the student handbook, which includes timelines and a flowchart. The process articulates informal and formal mechanisms such as mediation. Due to the small size of the Institute, a strong sense of student care was articulated by staff and students, enabling the quick resolution of student complaints. The student handbooks clearly outline the appeal and complaints procedures for student and are available via the VLE to staff and students. The use and publication of the Institute's Complaints and Appeals Policy would enable this Expectation to be met.

2.81 The review team tested the effectiveness of this Expectation by examining relevant policy and procedure documents, viewing the VLE, checking programme handbooks and speaking to a range of staff and students about complaints and appeals processes.

2.82 For GPISH, a complaint will initially be dealt with informally and as close as possible to the point at which it has arisen. The complaint is therefore made initially to the member of staff who seems best able to deal with it there and then. This will provide staff with an early opportunity to address the complaint and take appropriate action. If there is any doubt as to whom the complaint should be referred, the student must contact the GPISH Programme Leader or Student Services. The relevant staff member responds to the student within five working days. Should the complaint escalate to a second stage, the Head of Department will then be involved. Receipt of this will be given within a further five working days before a second investigation is completed by an independent staff member. This investigation will be completed with outcomes articulated to the student within a further five working days. If the student is still dissatisfied, the student is required to contact the Programme Leader or Chair of the Board of Governors. Acknowledgement will occur within 14 working days by the relevant recipient, and the outcome of the final investigation within a further 14 working days.

2.83 Appeals can only be processed on the basis of a procedural error, and cannot be made on an academic decision. The APR comments on the monitoring and evaluation of appeals. Student Services write a report summarising the volume and type of complaints annually including further considerations and/or actions. The Academic Management Committee receive this report.

2.84 When tested, students were not completely clear where to find the policies, but felt that they could speak to tutors and Student Services for any support, should they require it.

2.85 Overall, the review team concluded that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low. Clear policies and procedures are in place for students to access, with support provided should they need to file a formal complaint.

**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**

2.86 STEP students undertake teaching practice in secondary schools, including mainstream schools in England managed by the awarding body as part of MTeach, and religious education centres (RECs) in the UK, Europe and their home countries. The teaching placements in the RECs are managed by the Institute. Teaching in RECs takes place once a week for most of the first year and the first term of the second year. Teaching placements in students' home countries, known as Field Research and Teaching Practice (FRTP), takes place for 10 weeks during the second term of the second year.

2.87 The Institute has a Teaching Placements Coordinator who oversees all placements in the UK and European RECs and coordinates the logistics of FRTP in the student's home countries. The Coordinator visits potential sites in Europe to ascertain their suitability before they are accepted for placements.

2.88 The Institute works closely with the ITREB-UK, which runs the RECs in the UK and Europe. In order to ensure that both share a common understanding and vision, regular meetings are held between the Institute and ITREB-UK to monitor the quality of student experience, discuss issues and identify areas for enhancement. Students are included in the meeting. Staff at the Institute are supported by local ITREB Academic Directors in countries where STEP students carry out their field research.

2.89 The requirements for an ITREB to host a STEP student on teaching practice are defined in the Field Research and Teaching Practice (FRTP) Checklist for ITREBs. Formal meetings and regular informal contacts between placements and the Institute provide a mutual understanding of responsibilities.

2.90 GPISH students attend a language immersion programme in an Arabic-speaking country for four weeks during the summer of their first year. Though this language immersion is mandatory, as it contributes to their language learning while at the Institute, it is not credit bearing.

2.91 The Institute and its related ITREBs manage the placements of STEP students in a rigorous manner, which would enable the Expectation to be met. Although all parties currently understand their responsibilities, this would be improved by the addition of a three-way written agreement between the placement provider, the Institute, and the student, which would clarify the responsibilities of each party.

2.92 The review team tested the Expectation through meetings with staff and students and consideration of documents relating to the teaching placements

2.93 In practice the process works in achieving the learning outcomes in accordance with the programme specification. The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

**Findings**

2.94 The Institute does not currently offer research degrees.

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

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

2.96 Of the 10 applicable Expectations, all are met, with good practice identified in Expectations B2 and B4, one recommendation in Expectation B3 with low risk, and one affirmation in B5.

2.97 The team makes one recommendation regarding learning opportunities - for Expectation B3 the Institute needs to establish and implement a formal induction and mentoring procedure for all new teaching staff. New staff have a corporate induction and then meet the Head of Department who discusses with them the requirements of their role. The member of staff is supported in their teaching and assessment practice on an informal basis by the Head of Department, as required, and in the first term take part in Peer Observation of Teaching, with some co-teaching with existing members of staff. A formal process of induction and mentoring would ensure that new teaching staff are aware of the requirements for teaching at postgraduate level from the start of their teaching practice.

2.98 The affirmation made for Expectation B5 relates to the opportunities for student input and engagement in deliberative committees. Student engagement in a greater number and higher level of committees has recently been expanded and the team affirms the actions taken by the Institute to expand the training available to student representatives to enable them to engage with deliberative committees.

2.99 The team identified two areas of good practice. In Expectation B2, the level of support provided to students by the Institute and the ITREBs is effective and characteristic of the relationship that the Institute has with its students.

2.100 In Expectation B4, the Institute has created a number of specific roles to support learning such as the Academic Advisors who have a personal tutor role, the Lesson Planning Tutor for STEP students, the Placement Coordinator and the Academic Support Programmes Advisor (ASPA). The latter was created in response to the needs of the students, most of whom have English as a second language, and are new to studying in UK higher education. The appointment of an ASPA to deliver academic writing, critical thinking and academic English support to students, enhances students participation in their learning.

2.101 On the basis of documentation provided and discussions with staff and students the team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the Institute of Ismaili Studies **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 Institute communicates information about its higher education provision both electronically and in hard copy. Most of its communication is provided in electronic format, to ensure the accuracy of public information following any changes and developments. The Institute communicates with stakeholders through the website, VLE, promotional and informational hard copy material, and through presentations.

3.2 The website is aimed at providing information to prospective students about the Institute's programmes, and the VLE communicates information on policies, procedures, and other responsibilities or available opportunities to current students. The STEP VLE is managed by UCL-IOE, and the GPISH VLE is managed by the Institute. Any published information on the website concerning STEP is approved by UCL-IOE prior to publication, and drawn from programme validation documents. A marketing strategy outlines methods, types and dates of information available to prospective students. The member of staff responsible for marketing has overall responsibility for checking published materials. These arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met.

3.3 The review team scrutinised a range of digital and hard copy documentation to check that the Institute provides information that is fit for purpose. The team spoke to senior, teaching and professional members of staff, and interviewed students across both programmes, including graduates of the Institute.

3.4 Information about funding, admissions, programme entry and individual programmes is available on the external website. Programmes are advertised globally through sister organisations and students can contact the Student Services team and Programme Leader for more information. After enrolling, students are provided with further information about the services and support available to them.

3.5 The admissions process allows the Institute, through the ITREBs, to assess any additional learning requirements of its prospective students and forward relevant specific information. A new document production procedure for print and digital materials aims to ensure quality and transparency in the production of all documentation (including in digital form) in the Department of Graduate Studies, for both prospective and current students, as well as all stakeholders, and is not limited to those with special needs. The new process enables documents to be considered holistically, from the perspectives of the document's aims and its eventual audiences is being piloted for prospective students with special access for additional needs. Evidence shows a thorough process of checking and approving with various roles and responsibilities, and students are able to request information in specific formats if they have any access needs. Feedback is collected from students after arrival on the information provided and enrolment process to inform future practice. A new website was launched in 2015.

3.6 Printed materials are reviewed by the Department of Communications and Development and Department of Graduate Studies. Materials relating to STEP are reviewed

by UCL-IOE. There is a sign-off process for information published on the website articulated clearly in a flow chart with several stages of sign-off by senior members of staff to ensure accuracy before publication.

3.7 Programme Leaders are responsible for signing off any changes to information on the GPISH and STEP VLE. Rights for uploading to the STEP VLE are provided to module leaders by UCL-IOE.

3.8 The Programme Leader for GPISH reviews the student handbook, lecturer handbook and field research guide annually, including input from students. The handbooks include information on the Institute's policies and regulations, expectations, complaints and appeals information, teaching, academic support and external services. It is anticipated that the new document production procedure, to be adopted in August 2016, will ensure further quality control.

3.9 Student Handbooks are available on the VLE and in hard copy during orientation to GPISH students. STEP Handbooks are made available only on the VLE according to UCL IOE policy. The lecturer handbook is also available in hard copy and digital format. A pre-term meeting is held as an opportunity for staff to access any further information.

3.10 Transcripts are available to students once a term and are signed off by the Student Services Manager and STEP transcripts are managed by UCL-IOE.

3.11 In summary, the review team found that the information provided to prospective and current students is accurate and accessible. There is a rigorous checking process that ensures public information is kept up to date for prospective students. This enables the Expectation to be 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

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

3.13 The Institute provides information about its higher education provision for prospective and current students, employers, staff, and public stakeholders, and for those with responsibility for maintaining standards and assuring quality. Information is accessible, appropriate and accurate.

3.14 No recommendations or good practice points relate to this area.

3.15 On the basis of the documentation provided, and discussions with staff and students, the team concludes that the Institute provides information that is fit for purpose, trustworthy and accessible and in so doing the Institute of Ismaili Studies **meets** UK expectations for the quality of information about learning opportunities.

## 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 Institute has a range of strategies, support structures and events that reflect its approach to enhancement. The recent DGS working paper on enhancements aims to formalise the approach and commitment to enhancing the student experience. Responsibility for overseeing enhancement lies with the Board of Governors, which is informed by the work of the subcommittees and faculties. The Department of Graduate studies containing the Head of Department, Student Services and placements teams alongside the functions of the library support work in the area of enhancement and ultimately the student experience. The review team **affirms** the appointment of a Head of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Unit to further enhance learning opportunities.

4.2 Professional development for teaching staff to undertake a Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice in Higher Education at King's College London has been introduced across the Institute to ensure continuous improvement in teaching. Also, a revised STEP Interview Guide acts as a predictive indicator to uncover applicants' qualities that will enable them to be successful as a student and eventually as a teacher on graduation.

4.3 Combining the APR process across both STEP and GPISH programmes has enabled an enhanced system to provide greater sharing of best practice across the two programmes from both an institutional and strategic perspective.

4.4 The merger of library resources and the interface for resource discovery has actively encouraged the involvement of students in the development of the new library and accommodation facilities and is **good practice**.

4.5 Preparing students for professional life as teachers has effectively used alumni to provide support, information and guidance to all current students, which supports and enhances students learning and is **good practice**.

4.6 Students expressed wide-ranging satisfaction with the opportunities afforded to them during their studies and the enhancements undertaken by the Institute through a consultative approach to library and resource planning as well as the appointment of an Academic Support Programme Advisor to deliver academic writing, critical thinking and academic English support to students.

4.7 The Institute recognises the need to harness stakeholder and student engagement more effectively in enhancement measures, supported by training where required, and a need to protect enhancement where it is working in practice. It is evidenced by the 'New interface for resource discovery' that allows remote access to library facilities, the outcomes of the Library Survey Report and the introduction of the STEP Professional Ethics Session.

4.8 The Institute has had a traditional view of enhancing its provision through its feedback, review and committee structure and there is evidence that there is an ethos of improvement as evidenced by its improved feedback mechanisms and the implementation of its Peer Observation Process. The new processes would enable the Expectation to be met.

4.9 The review team examined a range of documentation to test how the Institute's processes for enhancing learning opportunities operate in practice. The team met the Head,

senior staff, teaching staff, professional support staff, and employers. In particular, the team was interested in the views of the students and the support provided by the Institute to applicants, enrolled students and alumni who provide support sessions and feedback for current students.

4.10 The team also reviewed documentation in place for a working paper on enhancement as recognition of the Institute's commitment to improving student experience and affirm the recent appointment of a Head of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Unit to further enhance learning opportunities.

4.11 The process for enhancements is working effectively and is appreciated by the students. Therefore, the Expectation is met and 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 learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against criteria specified within the Quality Code, summarised in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

4.13 The Expectation for this judgement area is met and the associated level of risk is low. There are two features of good practice and one affirmation.

4.14 The Institute has a range of strategies, support structures and events that reflect its approach to enhancement. Responsibility for overseeing enhancement lies with the Board of Governors, which is informed by the work of the Institute's subcommittees and faculties. Support functions for enhancement include the Department of Graduate studies containing the Head of Department, Student Services and Placements teams alongside the functions of the Library to support the student experience. The review team affirms the appointment of a Head of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Unit to further enhance learning opportunities.

4.15 A number of specific enhancements support the continuous improvement of the student experience, such as funded professional development for teaching staff to undertake a Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice in Higher Education at King's College London; a STEP revised Interview Guide which acts as a predictive indicator to identify applicants' qualities to enable them to be successful as a student and as a teacher on graduation; the recent production of a combined APR process for STEP and GPISH that has enabled greater sharing of best practice from both an institutional and strategic perspective.

4.16 The merger of library resources and the interface for resource discovery has actively encouraged the involvement of students in the development of the new library and accommodation facilities and is considered good practice by the review team.

4.17 Preparing students for professional life as teachers has effectively used alumni to provide support, information and guidance to all current students, which supports and enhances students learning and is considered good practice by the review team.

4.18 On the basis of the documentation provided, meetings with staff and students, and the deliberate steps being taken at the Institute level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities, the review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the Institute **meets** UK expectations.

## 5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

### Findings

5.1 The Institute's Teaching Learning and Assessment Strategy contains five key aims, the fourth of which is to ensure that students have the skills necessary for success in learning, personal development, and the enhancement of employability.

5.2 STEP students are recruited in their home country by the ITREBs. Students receive an employment contract before starting the programme and progress on successful completion to teaching jobs within their local ITREBs.

5.3 Students on the STEP programme are well prepared for their careers. Before undertaking the programme they undertake six weeks of teaching practice in their home country. While on the course they have teaching placements with support, both in the UK and in their home countries. The Institute also provides enrichment sessions on professional values and conduct and facilitates ongoing dialogue with their employees who attend meetings at the Institute.

5.4 After graduation, students are provided with continuing support including mentorship, annual continuing professional development workshops within country contexts, professional learning communities, conferences, networking opportunities and access to online and physical resources.

5.5 The Institute states that the GPISH programme is an academic rather than a vocational programme but that employability remains a high priority. The Institute provides a number of activities that support the students in developing employment skills. Careers seminars and leadership workshops are provided and the Institute provides extensive funding to support students on internships within other organisations and to undertake doctoral studies.

5.6 Destination data shows that all STEP students are employed by their host country teaching organisations and that most GPISH graduates transfer to high profile universities for their third year of study. Information on GPISH graduates who have completed the full three years indicates that most have gained employment within international government and non-governmental agencies.

5.7 Students reflected that the STEP course was excellent preparation for a career in teaching. The students also stated that support given to GPISH students in preparation for careers and support from former students was useful.

5.8 Employers were highly complimentary with regard to the employability of GPISH graduates stating that students were well prepared with a broad understanding, had sophisticated knowledge and the ability to apply it to community learning and are committed to further learning.

## 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](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality)

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

### Academic standards

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

### Award

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

### Awarding organisation

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

### Blended learning

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

### Credit(s)

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

### Degree-awarding body

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

### Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

### Dual award or double award

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

### e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning

### **Enhancement**

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

### **Expectations**

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

### **Flexible and distributed learning**

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

See also **distance learning**.

### **Framework**

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

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

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

### **Good practice**

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

### **Learning opportunities**

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

### **Learning outcomes**

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

### **Multiple awards**

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

### **Operational definition**

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

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

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

### **Programme specifications**

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

### **Quality Code**

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

### **Reference points**

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

### **Self-evaluation document**

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

### **Subject Benchmark Statement**

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

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

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

### **Threshold academic standard**

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

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

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

### **Widening participation**

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

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