



# Higher Education Review (Foreign Providers) of Irish School of Ecumenics (Trinity College Dublin) at Belfast

May 2021

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## About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Foreign Providers) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at the Irish School of Ecumenics (Trinity College Dublin) at Belfast. The review took place from 5-6 May 2021 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Jenny Gilbert
- Mrs Jill Lyttle.

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provision and to make judgements as to whether or not academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. These expectations (and the associated Core and Common Practices) 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 (Foreign Providers) the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
  - the quality of student learning opportunities
- provides a commentary on academic standards
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the provider is taking or plans to take.

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

## The impact of COVID-19

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the review visit was conducted online and included meetings with senior, teaching and support staff, and students. The scope of the evidence considered, and the nature of the outcomes and operational milestones, have remained the same but with some adjustments due to the online format. A risk assessment was carried out prior to the review to identify and mitigate any potential risks.

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

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

<sup>3</sup> Higher Education Review (Foreign Providers) handbook: [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/types-of-review/higher-education-review](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/types-of-review/higher-education-review)

## Key findings

### Judgements

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

- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

The QAA review team also provided a commentary on academic standards.

- The provider satisfactorily manages its responsibilities for academic standards, as set out in contractual arrangements with its academic partners.

### Good practice

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

- The wide variety of learning opportunities that optimise the unique sociopolitical environment of the course location. (Core practice Q2)
- The use of well-qualified practitioners and academics from around the world to enrich and broaden the student experience. (Core practice Q3)
- The range of libraries to which students have access, including the specialist subject provision, which together offers a highly valued learning resource. (Core practice Q4)

### Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendation**.

By September 2021:

- Provide clear and consistent feedback on all assessed student work in order to enable students to focus appropriately on their academic development. (Core practice Q9)

## About the provider

The Irish School of Ecumenics (ISE) was initially established in 1970 as a private institute. From 2001, it became fully integrated into Trinity College Dublin (TCD) and sits within TCD's governance structures. There is a joint Advisory Board linking the College and the ISE Trust. ISE is located within the School of Religion (the School) and is one of two specialist disciplines within the School: Peace Studies and Religious Studies.

There are two programmes of study offered in Belfast: a taught MPhil in Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation (CRR) and research degrees. The programmes in Belfast come under Peace Studies.

The School of Religion seeks to understand the roles of religion, peace-making and theology in both their historical settings and contemporary life. Degrees educate students in multiple modes of analysis and communication: history, philosophy, literary criticism, languages, sociology and political sciences. Students find employment across a wide range of career trajectories, with particular concentrations in the non-profit sector, teaching, broadcasting, the public sector, NGOs, government, advocacy and activism, religious ministry, academia, publishing, marketing, banking, law and management consultancy.

There are two full-time academic staff, both Assistant Professors, based in the ISE facilities and they are supported by two part-time administrative staff. Student numbers have remained stable over the last five years and average around eight to 12 MPhil students each year. Currently there are eight students enrolled. There are three students on PhD programmes. All students are full-time.

The Belfast premises underwent extensive refurbishment in 2018. Benefits include improved technology, which has allowed for the relatively smooth running of new teaching delivery models necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic, with some students and lecturers joining remotely and some in the classroom.

Key challenges relate to the physical distance from ISE's parent School and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. Having consolidated its position with new staff and a building move in 2016, ISE continues to face the challenges (alongside benefits) of the Belfast location, and the distance from the main campus. The PhD cohort has increased to three, and study and office space for them is limited. Brexit, which came into effect at the beginning of the year, may pose challenges as yet unclear for the Belfast campus.

ISE last had a QAA Higher Education Review in 2017 and an action plan was developed and implemented in response to the four recommendations and one affirmation made. Subsequent monitoring by QAA each year confirmed that the recommendations and affirmation were addressed and the monitoring for 2018 and 2019 determined that commendable progress was being made. A desk-based monitoring took place in 2020 and concluded that ISE was continuing to make progress with the management of academic standards and the quality of student learning opportunities.

## Explanation of findings

This section explains the review findings in greater detail.

### **1 Commentary: The provider satisfactorily manages its responsibilities for academic standards, as set out in contractual arrangements with its academic partners**

#### **Findings**

1.1 Trinity College Dublin (College) is the awarding body for the awards offered at ISE. It is quality assured by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), the national statutory body responsible for developing, promoting and maintaining the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) which is benchmarked against the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). The College is required to report in considerable detail to QQI through an Annual Institutional Quality Assurance Report (AIQR) which outlines its quality assurance policies and procedures; student representation is present at all levels. At the time of the review visit, a new School and College strategy was in preparation, including renaming the School.

1.2 Governance structures are clearly set out on the College's website. The Board is the College's governing body and the Council is charged with responsibility for academic affairs. There are several joint Board and Council committees, including the Quality Committee. Scheduled periodic reviews of governance structures and processes take place and committees carry out annual self-evaluations.

1.3 The Quality Committee has as its main function 'to devise, implement and monitor quality procedures and processes' across all areas of the College's activities and responsibilities. The College's comprehensive Framework for Quality encompasses its policies and procedures for the maintenance of academic standards. Schools submit information for inclusion within the faculty's annual quality report which is submitted to the Quality Committee.

1.4 Despite the physical distance from the rest of the School and College, it was clear to the team that ISE activity is well integrated within the School. Quality assurance processes are managed at School level and ISE staff participate in School-based quality systems. Both academic and administrative staff have School-wide roles. Committees are constituted on a School-wide basis and include student representatives. Paradoxically, the increased reliance on digital means of communication arising from the restrictions due to COVID-19 has enabled better connectivity between Dublin and Belfast.

1.5 ISE follows the quality assurance policies and processes of the College and has a proven track record in meeting QAA expectations. Reviews to date have been positive and recommendations have been actioned appropriately. The 2017 QAA review was discussed at both School and College level. Regular ISE staff meetings take place to consider issues raised by, and feedback from, students. The agenda also includes QAA-related quality assurance and local teaching and operational matters. Oversight of ISE QAA matters is exercised by the School Postgraduate Studies Committee.

1.6 Under the heading of 'Engagement with other bodies' the College's AIQR refers to QAA in the context of the CRR MPhil being subject to its quality assurance procedures and to the UK Quality Code. The CRR MPhil handbook refers to QQI and positions the course within the NFQ. More widely, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) is also explained in the handbook.

1.7 ISE preparation for this current review has enabled ISE to map its practices against the requirements of the revised UK Quality Code to ensure these are met.

1.8 The College's process and procedures for the approval of new courses and associated modules include a detailed permission flowchart and pro formas, in which the role of an external assessor is clearly embedded, to ensure that the appropriate academic standards are set at both course and module level from the outset. Once a course has been approved, the College relies primarily on the external examiner process to ensure the maintenance of the academic standards of the course.

1.9 A key element of the College's quality assurance structures is the periodic review of its schools and other units. The most recent review of the School (2017) resulted in major internal and structural changes which furthered the integration of ISE in Belfast within the School and Faculty, with shared teaching and field trips. All five members of the review team were professors from institutions outside Ireland. Information for staff and students about the forthcoming QQI review makes clear the importance of external reference points in positioning the College and its courses within national and international frameworks to ensure that standards are set and maintained at the appropriate level.

1.10 The College appoints external examiners to individual courses, normally for a period of three years. College policy is clear and comprehensive. Detailed information and guidance for external examiners is provided. The standard pro forma report includes several questions asking explicitly for comments on comparative standards and student performance. External examiner reports are sent to the Dean of Graduate Studies (DGS) who sends them to course coordinators for comment before sending the formal written response. External examiner reports are discussed in detail at several levels within the College. These reports feed into annual course evaluation by the course team and are considered at the School Postgraduate Committee. The School's Court of Examiners considers the comments and reports from external examiners for all courses within the School. A new external examiner for the CRR MPhil was appointed recently.

1.11 The previous external examiner's reports for the CRR MPhil confirm the appropriateness of the academic standards of the course and of the quality of student performance. The reports are highly complimentary about the course itself and provide enhancement suggestions for consideration, mainly in the area of assessment. However, the final report states that the external examiner had received no communication as to whether suggested changes had been made.

1.12 The team noted that the external examiner's reports were discussed by the ISE course team and considered at the School Postgraduate Committee. A number of changes were made in response to the external examiner's suggestions. Notwithstanding the formal College process, the team considers that it would be helpful for the continued assurance of the management of standards in ISE for an informal response to be made to the external examiner after the annual course review.

1.13 The College's external examiner process map states that there should be a response from the Dean of Graduate Studies. The team was told that no such responses had been sent to the previous external examiner. Nevertheless, the team was able to confirm that due consideration was given at both ISE and School level to the previous external examiner's reports. There are clear College policies and procedures to ensure that robust external scrutiny of academic standards takes place through the external examiner process, and these procedures are followed by ISE.

## **The provider satisfactorily manages its responsibilities for academic standards, as set out in contractual arrangements with its academic partners: Summary of findings**

1.14 In reaching its conclusion, the review team matched its findings against the three questions specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The review team concludes that the Irish School of Ecumenics (Trinity College Dublin) in Belfast satisfactorily manages its responsibilities for academic standards, as set out in the policies and procedures of Trinity College Dublin.

1.15 The review team found that ISE in Belfast, as a component part of the School of Religion in Trinity College Dublin, is stringent in managing its responsibilities for maintaining academic standards. It adheres to the requirements of Trinity College Dublin, which in turn is quality assured by Quality and Qualifications Ireland, the national statutory body responsible for developing, promoting and maintaining the Irish National Framework of Qualifications.

1.16 The review team concludes that ISE in Belfast satisfactorily manages its responsibilities for academic standards.

## 2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

**Core practice (Q1): The provider has a reliable, fair and inclusive admissions system.**

### Findings

2.1 The College's comprehensive Admission and Transfer Policy applies to both MPhil and PhD applicants. Decisions are made by relevant academics within the School and quality assured by Academic Registry, for example by checking that all entry requirements have been met; offers are made through Academic Registry. Recognised national and international reference frameworks are used. Baseline English language requirements are specified, and both pre-sessional and in-sessional academic English online language classes are available. There is an admissions appeals procedure but to date there have been no admissions-related appeals in ISE.

2.2 The College is committed to widening participation and has a detailed Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy. Where it entails informal or experiential learning, applicants are asked to provide writing samples so their likelihood of being able to complete the course can be assessed. RPL also applies if applicants fall slightly short of entry requirements. Such application must be approved by the Dean of Graduate Studies. Additional support is provided for applicants if required and they are encouraged to disclose any disability at an early stage.

2.3 The policies and procedures put in place by the College would allow the Core practice to be met. In assessing the effectiveness of the relevant policies and procedures, the team considered documentation, including policy documents and student outcome data, and spoke with staff involved in the admissions process and also with current students.

2.4 Applications for the CRR MPhil are managed by the School administrative team, including the ISE senior executive officer, and are approved by the course coordinator. No CRR MPhil students have yet been admitted through RPL although some PhD students have been admitted through this route.

2.5 There are around 25 applicants for the CRR MPhil course each year, almost all of whom have been accepted, though not all have taken up their offers. There are no target numbers for the course and there is capacity for around 15-20 students; to date, numbers have varied between eight and 12 which is considered acceptable by the School.

2.6 PhD applicants have already identified a supervisor before applying and have come to a supervision agreement with that supervisor; a second supervisor may also be appointed. A structured School webpage guides applicants through the application process.

2.7 The students expressed their positive reasons for studying the CRR MPhil course in Belfast. They agreed that the admissions process was straightforward, and that the orientation provided was helpful. Student outcomes to date indicate that the admissions criteria effectively ensure the recruitment of students who are capable of meeting, and usually exceeding, the threshold requirements of the course. The review team, therefore, considers that the provider has a reliable, fair and inclusive admissions system.

**Core practice: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**



## Core practice (Q2): The provider designs and/or delivers high-quality courses.

### Findings

2.8 The design and delivery of courses and modules within the College is governed by detailed procedures, with externality embedded in the initial approval and ongoing assessment processes. Proposed new courses and associated modules are reviewed by a panel including an external academic assessor before approval at College level. This ensures the internal consistency of awards and alignment with the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) and with the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). Subsequent new modules are approved at School level and noted at College level.

2.9 The CRR MPhil course handbook provides general information for students and is to be read in conjunction with the course overview document, the key source of information about the course, which includes a brief outline of each module. Full module information is contained in a separate detailed module syllabus maintained by ISE on the College's virtual learning environment (VLE).

2.10 Student opinion is sought formally at College level through annual online qualitative module evaluations. Within ISE, the course is normally reviewed through an annual focus group meeting, although it was not found possible to hold this in 2020 due to the COVID-19 situation.

2.11 Module evaluation data, together with commentary, is included in the Annual Quality Faculty Report which is considered by the Quality Committee. It is discussed in detail within the School (and within ISE in Belfast) when the course coordinator presents a narrative module feedback summary, including student and staff comments. Feedback from students and from the external examiner is used to enhance course design and delivery, for example, developments in assessment and curriculum content.

2.12 The policies and procedures put in place by the College allow the Core practice to be met. The team considered a range of documentation, including policy and process documentation, minutes of meetings, course and module information, and held discussions with staff and students to evaluate the effectiveness of the policies and procedures.

2.13 The CRR MPhil is located in Belfast to maximise access to relevant local learning opportunities. The MPhil offers a range of learning and teaching methods across an optional suite of modules. Students take a research skills module as preparation for their dissertation and a further five (out of seven) modules offered by ISE. They are permitted to audit (attend but not be assessed) one additional module each term if they wish. They may also substitute one or two modules offered within the School of Religion. Several students take up this opportunity each year and some Dublin-based MPhil students choose ISE modules.

2.14 Most modules are arranged around weekly lecture or seminar sessions and two are delivered intensively over one week. A number of modules include contributions from, or are delivered by, local and international guest practitioners and lecturers and several include site visits or field trips. The Community Placement and Reflective Learning module, taken by most students, is a 96-hour internship within a local community organisation. There is a wide selection of subject matter from which students can choose as well as additional extracurricular learning activities arranged by ISE, for example walking tours in relevant locations. Most of the students who met the team had chosen to stay in Belfast despite lockdown restrictions, expressing their view that the location was integral to the course. They were appreciative of the input from practitioners as well as from academics. The team took the view that the wide variety of learning opportunities that optimise the unique sociopolitical environment of the course location is **good practice**.

2.15 There are no examinations, and an appropriate range of other assessment methods is used, including presentations and a placement portfolio. There is a strong emphasis on assessment solely by essay, usually at the end of the module. External examiner reports speak highly of the existing learning opportunities afforded to students and of the standard and quality of student achievement.

2.16 Pre COVID-19, it had been possible to hold a joint seminar for School students in Dublin and Belfast, which was well received. In both the student written submission and in their meeting with the team, current students spoke highly of their experience of both formal and informal learning opportunities provided by the course, and of the quality of the teaching staff who deliver it, although they expressed disappointment that better integration with Dublin did not take place. They were also appreciative of the staff response to lockdown and the consequent successful changes to course delivery, telling the team that staff responded quickly and found solutions to any problems that arose.

2.17 Classes for most of the current academic year were held virtually due to COVID-19. This had an adverse impact on the weeklong intensive module taught by a visiting academic which includes a short residential. However, as a consequence of virtual delivery, the modes of learning were adapted to capitalise on other opportunities, such as introducing more guest speakers and lectures and enabling Belfast students to attend virtual conferences which would not otherwise have been available to them. Students were very appreciative of this innovative response to the situation, which was replicated elsewhere in the course.

2.18 The adaptations to course delivery as a result of COVID-19 have potential positive implications for future course delivery, as expressed to the team by academic staff. For example, 'hybrid' teaching (face-to-face classes but also including virtual attendance) could enable more Belfast students to take Dublin modules and vice versa without having to travel, which would both enrich and enhance their overall learning experience.

**Core practice: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

**Core practice (Q3): The provider has sufficient appropriately qualified and skilled staff to deliver a high-quality academic experience.**

## **Findings**

2.19 The appointment, support and promotion of academic and professional staff complies with the College's procedures for appointment, induction, mentoring, probation, tenure track review, promotion and progression. Learning and organisational development programmes are offered to all staff and the College operates a Centre for Academic Practice and Student Learning (CAPSL) to support academic staff in their teaching. CAPSL focuses on developing research-led approaches to teaching.

2.20 The processes and procedures for staff appointment, training, support, review and promotion allow the Core practice to be met. The team checked these procedures in order to judge their effectiveness in providing academic expertise in the subject area, together with the necessary pedagogical skills to deliver a high-quality programme. The team held meetings with staff and students and explored relevant documentation, including staff CVs, publication records and awards.

2.21 Most modules are delivered by one of the two permanent full-time Assistant Professors resident in Belfast. In addition, one module is delivered by a member of staff from Dublin; another module is coordinated by a Research Fellow based in Belfast and a third module is delivered by a visiting academic from South Africa. The third module is normally

scheduled as an intensive week of teaching. Finally, the internship module is coordinated by a Belfast-based PhD student.

2.22 The course coordinator role is currently held by one of the two Assistant Professors based in Belfast. Both members of academic staff have cross-School roles that require them to attend committees in Dublin. In this way they are fully integrated into the School of Religion. Both have doctorates and are well published in the discipline area. Additionally, they were both nominated for awards for civic engagement and one has a recent teaching award. Other support on the Belfast site is provided by a Senior Executive Officer who also has a cross-School role and a part-time Librarian whose role is to support the library provided on the Belfast site.

2.23 Students on the Belfast programme are permitted to take some optional modules based in Dublin and this gives them access to additional academics from the School of Religion. Similarly, Dublin-based students are permitted to take modules from the Belfast menu and these students contribute to the class being delivered in Belfast and to the two modules delivered in intensive mode.

2.24 Adjunct staff or guest lecturers who might teach individual sessions are identified by the Course Coordinator through local knowledge and contacts. Following identification, the College appointment and administration processes are employed. In one instance, an entire module is delivered by an academic distinguished in the field of conflict resolution from a prestigious South African university. This enables students to explore reconciliation in a post-apartheid environment. Normally, this visiting academic travels to Northern Ireland and the module is delivered during a residential week. Due to the pandemic, this module was delivered online in 2020-21 and this enabled the contributor to include input from colleagues and contacts based in South Africa.

2.25 The use of ethnographic field trips, walking tours of Belfast, practitioner-led modules and guest lectures provides students with access to a diverse range of experience in community reconciliation in Northern Ireland. The careers of the contributors span the range from youth workers to politicians, including ministers, clinicians and practitioners working in community development. Students comment that they found the practical and experiential knowledge of the tutors invaluable. Given the sensitivity required by professionals working in the area of conflict resolution, students felt that the insight provided by such practitioners was an integral and important part of the course. The team considers the use of well-qualified practitioners and academics from around the world that enriches and broadens the student experience to be **good practice**.

2.26 Trinity College's Centre for Academic Practice (CAPSL) supports the development of academic staff, focusing on developing a research-led approach to teaching. Both of the Belfast-based academic staff have availed themselves of the courses provided, and during the pandemic more courses have been accessible online, thus facilitating greater uptake. The College also offers many staff development courses for professionals and Belfast-based professional staff have attended these in both Dublin and Belfast.

2.27 A range of performance-monitoring procedures are in place for academic staff. This includes the web-based Research Support System that requires staff to update their publication records on a regular basis. There is a rigorous promotions procedure that involves a Faculty Review Committee and a Senior Academic Promotions Committee. There is a set of criteria and a threshold scoring system in order to promote assistant professors (lecturers) to associate professor and then to 'professor of' or 'professor in'. Assistant Professors are appointed on a salary scale with an annual increment until they reach the merit bar. At this point they are reviewed by the Junior Academic Progression Committee. Professional staff are formally line managed within the School of Religion. Their goals and

objectives are agreed informally. The Human Resource Department at the College is currently in the process of introducing an annual performance appraisal system.

2.28 Students are complimentary about the quality of staff. They appreciate the support of the two professional staff based in Belfast and mentioned a number of occasions on which they would approach them for help and advice. Academic staff are valued for their subject knowledge and their willingness to engage closely with the students throughout their teaching. The module coordinator for the internship module provides mentoring to the MPhil students. This is being undertaken as part of the tutor's assessed work on the Teaching and Supporting Learning as a Graduate Teaching Assistant module.

2.29 The team based in Belfast, with support from Dublin-based staff and well-qualified adjunct lecturers, demonstrates an appropriate mix of academic, professional and pedagogic knowledge and skills. The Core practice is therefore met and the level of risk is low.

**Core practice: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

**Core practice (Q4): The provider has sufficient and appropriate facilities, learning resources and student support services to deliver a high-quality academic experience.**

## Findings

2.30 ISE is situated in its own grounds in Belfast's University Quarter. The building on the Belfast campus has lecture rooms, meeting rooms, a limited amount of study space and a specialist library. A part-time librarian supports students in navigating the College's library resources in Dublin and contributes to the teaching in the Research Skills module. IT systems have recently been upgraded in order to deliver hybrid teaching. Students have access to a wide range of student services based on the Dublin campus.

2.31 The design of the physical and online infrastructure and the resources available to students on the Belfast campus allows the Core practice to be met. In order to test the efficacy of the provision, the team studied a range of documentation and spoke to academic and professional staff and to students.

2.32 Recent building refurbishment includes a technology upgrade that has improved the connectivity between Belfast and Dublin, and the College makes extensive use of its VLE. There have been significant improvements in the IT facilities for presentation and for hybrid teaching within classrooms. The current three PhD students are allocated office space. The limited space available for the MPhil students is, under normal conditions, compensated for by the availability of space for individual and group work in Queen's University library.

2.33 Students have access to three libraries. There is a small specialist library on the Belfast campus, the College library on the Dublin campus and the nearby library of Queen's University. The Belfast campus library is dedicated to the Belfast MPhil and PhD students. It has 6,000 volumes focused on literature relevant to the study of conflict resolution and reconciliation. Students speak highly of this facility. There is a self-service arrangement for students to borrow books and, during the pandemic, there has been a click and collect service. Queen's University provides study space and students are entitled to borrow hard copy books. Due to government regulations, both of these entitlements were suspended during the pandemic which was particularly problematic for PhD students. The access agreement is renewed annually as part of Queen's University's Associate Membership of the library.

2.34 Students need to travel to Dublin in order to borrow hard copy books from the College library. Students were disappointed that there was no facility to order books for postal delivery. However, professional staff confirmed that recent amendments have increased entitlements and students are now permitted to borrow up to 50 books for a period of 12 weeks with one renewal; this information is published on the library website. During much of the pandemic it has not been permissible to make the journey from Belfast to Dublin. Nonetheless, under normal circumstances, these borrowing limits should facilitate Belfast-based students in making infrequent trips to borrow and return books. Students also have electronic access to all the books and journals that are available from the Dublin library. Trinity College Dublin is one of the six electronic legal deposit libraries entitled to a free copy of each book published in the UK. Under the terms of the copyright, some of these must be accessed electronically on specific computers within the library. This facility is of considerable benefit to those students undertaking research. Students spoke highly of the library provision and of the support in accessing electronic sources provided by the librarian based on the Belfast campus. The team concludes that the range of libraries to which students have access, including the specialist subject provision, which together offers a highly valued learning resource, is **good practice**.

2.35 The Global Relations Office contacts every international student to discuss their plans for arrival and quarantine before they arrive in the UK. This year, a dedicated online mini orientation event was provided so that students can identify the student services staff to whom they might refer for advice and support. Students reported that their first port of call for any type of query is the professional staff on the Belfast campus. Students indicated that they are confident that they will be appropriately signposted. The College's Postgraduate Advisory Service is based in Dublin. In previous years, students have expressed concerns, on numerous occasions, about access to these services, as reported in the minutes of the monthly Belfast staff meetings. Careers and counselling are the main services requested. During the pandemic, students have been able to access all student services online and they are optimistic that this will continue. Students have membership of the Queen's University sports centre and their Students' Union and ISE renews this arrangement annually.

2.36 The environment for both taught and research students permits access to appropriate resources and wider student support in order to provide a high quality academic and personal student experience. The Core practice is met and the risk is low.

**Core practice: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Core practice (Q5): The provider actively engages students, individually and collectively, in the quality of their educational experience.**

## Findings

2.37 The College system for course evaluation includes the appointment of a student representative, the collection of student feedback by module and the collection of data through two university-wide surveys, the International Student Barometer and the National Student Survey. Postgraduate taught programmes are evaluated twice a year using an online questionnaire. These are administered in alternate years, one year by the Faculty and the next by the School.

2.38 The processes in place allow the Core practice to be met. To evaluate the effectiveness of these processes the team examined the Student Handbook, student survey data and minutes of the Belfast Staff Meeting for the last three years and spoke with staff and students to confirm their understanding of how students are engaged both individually and collectively.

2.39 The CRR MPhil Handbook sets out the various feedback opportunities. In addition to the opportunity to contact staff during their office hours for informal feedback, it underlines the importance of students contributing through the formal processes of module evaluation and end-of-year survey. The Student Submission to the review highlighted the effectiveness of communication between staff and students at the Belfast site, commenting that staff are quick to respond to student concerns and questions.

2.40 The MPhil student representative is appointed early in the academic year following a vote. The Graduate Students' Union is responsible for electing and appointing student representatives for each taught postgraduate programme. There is a School representative for PhD students. ISE PhD students are familiar with this representative and note that a useful social media group has been set up by the representative to enable communication between PhD students. The representative from the MPhil and the School representative for the PhD attend the School Executive Committee meeting and the agenda includes a 'Student Issues' section.

2.41 The MPhil representative attends the monthly Belfast staff meetings and contributes student queries or concerns, which are then recorded in the minutes. Over the last three years students have raised a number of issues and are kept informed of QAA reviews and Institutional Quality Review. Issues raised have related to: charging for sports facilities at Queen's University, building work on the Belfast campus, IT services, visas for international students travelling to Dublin, Brexit risks and a number of issues relating to access to the services provided in Dublin. Almost all of these concerns were resolved in some way to the students' satisfaction. The most intractable have been those relating to access to the services provided in Dublin and, with the improvement in IT services during the pandemic, this situation has improved.

2.42 Students are invited to provide feedback on each module using a survey link on the VLE portal. The Course Coordinator comments on student feedback and the summary, together with suggested actions, are submitted to the Director of Teaching and Learning Postgraduate. Suggested actions include the introduction of more concrete exercises and an increase in the preparation time for the immersive event. ISE also holds an end-of-year student focus group recording staff responses and action points. Due to COVID-19, the focus group did not take place in 2020.

2.43 The College collects annual College-wide data through two surveys: the International Student Barometer and the National Student Survey. The International Student Barometer is a global survey of international students' experience in the university in question. It allows nations to benchmark their institutions against each other, and against universities in other countries. The National Student Survey is the Irish Survey of Student Engagement. It collects data from first-year undergraduate, final-year undergraduate, and taught postgraduate students. The lowest level of reporting from both surveys is school level. It is, therefore, not possible to draw conclusions about the data for individual courses. The College produces an Annual Institutional Quality Assurance Report that includes results and analysis, and each faculty produces a Quality Report.

2.44 ISE has effective formal and informal processes for obtaining, reviewing and acting upon individual and collective student feedback on their educational experience. The Core practice is therefore met, and the level of associated risk is low.

**Core practice: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Core practice (Q6): The provider has fair and transparent procedures for handling complaints and appeals which are accessible to all students.**

**Findings**

2.45 The College's formal Student Complaints Procedure has two stages, each with detailed information outlining responsibilities, deadlines and the range of outcomes. There is a final external appeal possibility to the Visitor or the Office of the Ombudsman. The College's Appeals Policy has a four-level process for postgraduate taught students and a two-level process for postgraduate research students. It clearly sets out the grounds for appeal, the scope of the policy and the responsibilities. The policy includes references to a number of relevant forms that can be accessed online. The Admissions Policy also includes an appeal process relating to admission.

2.46 TCD's Complaints Procedure and its Appeals Policy are fair, transparent and accessible to students and therefore the Core practice is met. The team checked the availability of information on complaints and appeals, by studying the formal documentation and the references to these policies in handbooks. The team also sought information in meetings with staff and students.

2.47 It is normal practice for the Postgraduate Advisory Service to give a presentation to all students during orientation at the beginning of the year. In this presentation, they highlight their services and inform students of their rights in relation to complaints and appeals.

2.48 Students are pointed to the College's appeals policy in the MPhil Course Handbook. The Complaints Procedure is also sign-posted in the MPhil Course Handbook. Students informed the team that should they wish to make a formal complaint they would approach the professional staff at the Belfast campus to refer them on. There have been no appeals or complaints for the last three years and staff confirmed that concerns were dealt with informally and had all been resolved without recourse to the formal procedures. Complaints raised by the Student Representative at Belfast Staff Meetings are documented in the minutes. Professional staff were fully aware of the location of complaints and appeals information and were able to advise students when necessary.

2.49 There are fair and transparent procedures for handling complaints and appeals which are accessible to all students. The Core practice is met and the level of associated risk is low.

**Core practice: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Core practice (Q7): Where the provider offers research degrees, it delivers these in appropriate and supportive research environments.**

**Findings**

2.50 Research degrees are awarded by the College in line with the Irish National Framework for Qualifications. The regulations governing research degrees are set out in the Calendar Part 3. The College is a research-intensive university offering a range of research-related events and networks for its research community. The Postgraduate Research Student Handbook and the School of Religion PhD handbook each provide students with the necessary regulations and information about the College's Structured PhD. Both handbooks include information on the Dean of Graduate Studies, the Graduate Studies Office, the support services available, the taught elements, the supervision and the stages of the PhD. Other relevant documents include the Postgraduate Research Supervision Policy, the Policy

of Good Research Practice and the Research Charter and Living Research Excellent Strategy.

2.51 The regulations allow the Core practice to be met. The team read the handbooks and associate documentation and met senior members of the School of Religion, PhD supervisors and doctoral students at different stages in their PhD in order to test the effectiveness of policies and procedures.

2.52 PhD applicants identify a suitable supervisor from within the School and gain their agreement prior to applying to register for a research degree. Students interested in doing a PhD are recommended to review potential supervisors' details on the website to identify their interests before contacting them. Prior to submitting an application, candidates must be matched to an appropriate supervisor who has the skills and expertise to supervise the chosen topic. Staff and students were able to confirm that this method operates successfully. In recent years, all PhD students have joined ISE directly through this route and have not been graduates of the ISE MPhil programme. Students are assigned a principal supervisor from the School of Religion. Co-supervision is not a requirement but may be arranged and all current research students at ISE have a main and a co-supervisor. The team was reassured by the large number of qualified staff available within the School of Religion so that a PhD student can be reallocated to another supervisor if a principal supervisor leaves the College's employment.

2.53 The two research handbooks, the College and the School handbook, provide clear information about the stages of the PhD and outline the requirement for students to complete at least 10 ECTS points of taught modules, selected from a menu. Doctoral students are permitted to complete up to 30 ECTS points and may attend other modules without assessment. The team was informed that students find it useful that they can choose from modules from any faculty, in order to develop or reinforce their subject knowledge and to assist their study. All students are required to take the five ECTS point module, Research Integrity and Impact in an Open Scholarship Era. Those students who are acting as Teaching Assistants within the School are encouraged to take the five ECTS point module Teaching and Supporting Learning as a Graduate Assistant that is offered through CAPSL. This module is highly regarded by the students for the development of those undertaking support work in seminars and tutorials but is not geared towards those acting as adjunct faculty. Two PhD students in Belfast have contributed to teaching. One is coordinating the internship module, including some teaching of taught sessions. During the current year, this research student has also been offering additional mentoring. Students commented positively on this extra support.

2.54 Academic supervisors and students indicate that supervisions generally take place on a monthly basis and that this is an appropriate frequency. At the end of each supervision session a short report is written and signed by both supervisor and student. Students are required to submit a progress report at the end of years one, three and four. They are also required to produce a written report with a PhD timeline and attend a viva with reader and chair present, no later than 18 months from initial registration. This internal viva within the School is to confirm the student's position on the PhD register. [033] It replaces a year two progress report and it provides the student with an opportunity to defend their research orally, a key aspect of doctoral level study. In addition to the formal College requirements, the PhD students in ISE are expected to complete a reflective log. A thesis committee has recently been set up to oversee each student.

2.55 PhD students make good use of the library resources as described in the section of this report dealing with Q4 (page 11) but have suffered from the restrictions imposed during the pandemic, in particular the closure of Queen's University library. On the other hand, IT links with Dublin have been enhanced as a result of the adaptations made by the College in



order to support online teaching during the pandemic. Students report that IT links between the Belfast and Dublin campuses were previously inadequate for their needs but now report that the improvement in video links means that students are now able to attend any event that they wish to, such that they now feel fully integrated College PhD students. The Postgraduate Student Services in Dublin have been utilised by Belfast PhD students and are valued. Students expressed a hope that developments resulting from the College's response to the pandemic will give rise to a permanent change in accessibility to resources based in Dublin.

2.56 ISE provides an appropriate and supportive environment for research degree students and, as such, the Core practice is met and the risk is low.

**Core practice: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Core practice (Q8): Where a provider works in partnership with other organisations, it has in place effective arrangements to ensure that the academic experience is high-quality irrespective of where or how courses are delivered and who delivers them.**

## Findings

2.57 The College aims to create opportunities for students to engage in internships and has an Internships and Placement Policy that requires all credit-bearing opportunities to be defined within the context of a module. ISE offers such a module. It is entitled Community Learning and Reflective Practice and it aims to bridge the divide between learning in an academic environment and the practical experiences involved with conflict resolution work.

2.58 The team studied the College policy, the module description and the internship agreement and concludes that the regulations allow the Core practice to be met. Following exploration of the websites of some partner organisations that offer internships, the team held discussions with staff and students to test the implementation of the policy.

2.59 The internship module is not compulsory but is selected by most students on the programme. Students enrolling in 2020 were made aware that in-person internships could not be guaranteed due to the pandemic and students commented that, despite their virtual nature, the internships were worthwhile. Most community service providers recruit students each year and it is unusual for a new provider to approach ISE. However, a number of alumni of the programme now work in the locality and provide links to such agencies.

2.60 The CRR internship must allow the student to experience the work of an organisation engaged in peace, reconciliation or community transformation. The internship must complement and connect with the academic components of the MPhil in Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation. Students must also be able to meet the learning outcomes of the module and the programme. Examples of the type of internship offered include a centre providing support for those bereaved or traumatised by the Troubles and a multi-denominational Christian group organising festivals. Although all current students are placed in Belfast, one of the ISE academics facilitates an internship opportunity through a university in Palestine, for up to two students each year. Judgements regarding the suitability of an internship are based on the student's interest and this is assessed by the module coordinator, based on longstanding connections to peacebuilding work in Northern Ireland.

2.61 A tripartite agreement between Trinity College, the internship provider and the student is signed by all parties. The agreement incorporates a risk assessment and outlines roles and responsibilities, including actions required should an internship not be completed.

Students are interviewed for their internship and records of all students' internships are maintained in Belfast. No students work with vulnerable persons or children.

2.62 The internship module takes a 'developmental mentoring network' approach with the aim of learning about career trajectories and appropriate ethical frameworks in the arena of conflict resolution. The skills developed can be applied in any sector. The taught sessions focus on values and ethics, networking and CVs, job sectors, personal skills, wellbeing and career directions. The internship must provide 96 hours of work and the student is assessed on a pass/fail basis by means of a written reflection, an evaluation of the community internship and formal verification of their contribution by the placement organiser. Students disagreed regarding the value and relevance of the taught sessions within the module but there was consistent positive feedback regarding the value of the experience and the quality of mentoring afforded by the ISE module coordinator.

2.63 The community internships offer students a valuable opportunity and effective arrangements are in place to ensure that the academic experience is high quality. The Core practice is met and the risk is low.

**Core practice: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Core practice (Q9): The provider supports all students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes.**

## Findings

2.64 The College Annual Institutional Quality Assurance Report (AIQR) includes sections outlining its self-evaluation, quality assurance and enhancement activities. The narrative is accompanied by documentary evidence by way of hyperlinks to the College website. One section covers the wide-ranging student support provision put in place by the College. Both School and course handbooks are well grounded in, and referenced to, College policies, mostly by hyperlinks, thus ensuring students are accessing accurate, up-to-date information.

2.65 The College's Academic Registry administers the formal student journey from admission to graduation. The main sources of student information about academic matters are contained in the Calendar Part 3, School webpages and course handbooks. ISE has developed specific dissertation guidance for its CRR MPhil students. Learning outcomes and expectations are made clear to students in module documentation and by staff. Students receive helpful and timely formal feedback on submitted assessments.

2.66 Additional support is provided for applicants who need it, and they are encouraged to disclose disabilities at an early stage; some ISE students have been supported by the College Disability Services. Applicants with prior experiential learning are also welcomed by the College and specialist support services are available to both applicants and students to enable them to achieve successfully. Pre-sessional and in-sessional English language classes are also available.

2.67 Information about student support services, including counselling, is available through a range of College webpages. Some support services are more general, for example Student Support Services itself, while others focus on supporting international students and postgraduate students, both of which are particularly relevant to ISE students. The Postgraduate Advisory Service (PAS) is usually the first contact for postgraduate students. It provides direct support and also advice or referral to other support services. The Belfast orientation session introduces ISE students to the Student Counselling Service, the PAS, the Graduate Students' Union, and signposts them to other support services. Trinity

Careers Service has a designated consultant for each School and offers Skype appointments as well as specialist online seminars. In normal circumstances, staff visit Belfast to talk to students.

2.68 The policies and procedures put in place by the College allow the Core practice to be met. To test the effectiveness of the policies and procedures, the team considered a range of documentation, including handbooks, module and student services information, and held discussions with students and with academic and support staff at all levels.

2.69 Students spoke of the valuable academic support and guidance they received from staff. Having early assessments helped them to understand what was required, as did feedback on presentation of their dissertation proposal and the possibility of receiving informal feedback before final submission of assessments. The small cohort size facilitates ongoing informal discussion between staff and students and enables staff to monitor student progress and identify promptly any emerging issues and support needs. Students appreciate the quantity of feedback they receive but find there are inconsistencies and a mismatch between the general rubric outlined in the handbook, module learning outcomes and marking criteria, and the feedback they receive through the VLE. They pointed out to the team that the way in which formal feedback was presented did not always identify which aspects they needed to develop further for subsequent assessments. The team, therefore, **recommends** that ISE should provide clear and consistent feedback on all assessed student work in order to enable students to focus appropriately on their academic development.

2.70 Most students undertake the internship module, which explicitly fosters reflective practice and develops professional skills. It currently includes mentoring activities. As well as one-to-one mentoring with the course coordinator, peer group mentoring is facilitated through group sessions and an online discussion forum. Once students progress to the dissertation, more intensive, focused academic support is provided by the supervisor.

2.71 The ISE Librarian and the Senior Executive Officer are considered by students to be crucial in guiding and supporting individual ISE students to achieve and students who met the team spoke very highly of them. Both are well integrated in their respective School and College administrative networks and their support is wide-ranging from the outset, including activities such as giving orientation advice, introducing students to library facilities, advice on accessing research resources, and organising group social activities as well as keeping in contact with individual students. In response to the COVID-19 lockdown, ISE introduced a click and collect system for library books, an especially valuable facility as students were unable to access the QUB library which was shut. They are usually the first people students turn to for information.

2.72 In principle, all College support services are available to ISE students as registered College students, although some services are only accessible in Dublin. Students have found this difficult, especially the less easy access to counselling services in normal circumstances compared with Dublin-based students. Over the years, as the result of student feedback, ISE administrative staff have worked to improve this situation and have been successful in arranging access to a number of facilities that are physically available only in Dublin, but equivalents have been made available through Queen's University Belfast. Examples include library study space, access to sports facilities and to student clubs and societies.

2.73 Additional communication and personal support for students in response to COVID-19 was a priority for the College, the School and, above all, for ISE, given that most students were international and remained in Belfast. More communication took place, to give them reassurance and support. ISE staff demonstrated a clear concern for students, especially

their mental health. In summer and autumn 2020, walks and outdoor meetings were arranged. During lockdown, frequent online contact took place to replace physical meetings. This contact was much valued by students.

2.74 TCD offers students a comprehensive range of services to support them in achieving successful and academic outcomes. ISE staff contribute to this locally by contextualising relevant support services and, as far as possible, by finding bespoke solutions for difficulties arising due to location. CRR MPhil student performance and outcomes demonstrate a high level of achievement over the years. The Core practice is therefore met and has a low level of associated risk.

**Core practice: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

## **Common practice (1): The provider reviews its core practices for quality regularly and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement.**

### **Findings**

2.75 The College is subject to quality assurance and review under the auspices of the Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) in line with the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ), which is in turn benchmarked against the European Qualifications Framework. The College is required to report to QQI through its Annual Institutional Quality Assurance Report which details all its quality assurance policies and procedures. In addition, the College regularly undertakes internal reviews and these are published on its website.

2.76 The policies and procedures enable the Common practice to be met. The team studied the College's policy documents and various review reports. Meetings were also held with senior staff, academic staff and professional staff to determine whether procedures are reviewed and outcomes are evaluated in order to drive improvement and enhancement.

2.77 Academic schools, research institutes and administrative services are reviewed cyclically. There are also thematic reviews. Programmes undergo professional accreditation, as necessary. Reports and outcomes can be found in a Central Quality Folder that is accessible to schools. This enables the schools to self-monitor and enhance provision. Such enhancements are reported to the Quality Committee through Annual Faculty Quality Reports. Both the Annual Institutional Quality Assurance report and the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Annual Report include numerous references to enhancements made to provision and services over the year in question.

2.78 There are annual student surveys for first-year and final-year undergraduates and for taught postgraduate students, and a survey of postgraduate research students is undertaken every second year. The results are shared across the institution.

2.79 ISE follows the College's processes for the development and approval of new modules, the stages of which are clearly set out in a process map. Feedback from students' evaluations leads to amendments to modules in order to enhance the offering.

2.80 The most recent external review of the School of Religion was undertaken in 2017. The membership of the review team included senior academics from the relevant discipline area across a range of universities in the UK and US. The recommendations led to significant changes, including a change to the School name. Other changes included the realignment of reporting lines to the Head of School and the appointment of a Director of Research, a Director of Teaching and Learning for Postgraduate and a Director of Teaching and Learning for Undergraduate. Both of the Belfast-based academic staff hold School-wide roles. The clear positioning and the integration of ISE into the School of Religion has facilitated curriculum development. A recently developed School-wide undergraduate module in conflict resolution is proving popular with students. It is hoped that this taster might encourage students to progress to the MPhil CRR. Discussion is still ongoing regarding the title of the School in order to make its curriculum offer clearer to prospective students.

2.81 The College and ISE in Belfast have responded rapidly to the need to offer online teaching during the pandemic. While the COVID-19 pandemic has restricted students' access to resources and impacted their presence in the classroom, they have undertaken town tours and met outside. The academic who would normally fly over from South Africa has instead taught through an online platform and included contributions from a number of other academics, hence broadening the offer to students. As a result, there is discussion of the possibility of hybrid teaching in order to enhance the offering to Belfast-based students,

to provide better links with services based in Dublin and to recruit more international students.

2.82 ISE, as part of the School of Religion within the faculty framework of the College, regularly reviews its core practices for quality and uses the outcomes to drive improvement and enhancement. The Common practice is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Common practice: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Common practice (2): The provider's approach to managing quality takes account of external expertise.**

## Findings

2.83 In addition to the use of external expertise in institutional quality reviews and periodic reviews of schools and services, as discussed under Common practice 1, external expertise is sought and taken into account at various stages within programme development, review and delivery.

2.84 The quality assurance policies and processes in place enable the Common practice to be met. In assessing the effectiveness of the policies and processes, the team read external examiners' reports, studied guidelines, flowcharts and templates for courses, strand and module proposals and spoke with senior management, professional and academic staff in order to determine whether due account is taken of external expertise.

2.85 The role of external assessor is embedded in the approval of new programmes and the Graduate Studies website provides access to the approval guidelines, process flowchart and templates. The MPhil CRR was approved under an earlier validation process and this also included an external assessor's input. There is a separate process for a stand-alone module proposal. This approval process does not include input from an external assessor, nor is approval of an individual module included in the role of an external examiner.

2.86 The external examiner for the MPhil in CRR is appointed for a three-year period. Nomination is approved through the Dean of Graduate Studies. The external examiner process map details the full cycle. External examiner recommendations are considered by the Course Coordinator and, where deemed appropriate, acted upon. However, there is no evidence of a formal response being sent to the external examiner following submission of the annual report (see paragraph 1.13).

2.87 ISE offers an internship module entitled 'Community Learning and Reflective Practice' based in a wide variety of peacebuilding agencies in Belfast and Derry. The module aims to bridge the divide between learning in an academic environment and the practical experiences involved with conflict resolution work. The two professors based in Belfast have long-standing connections to colleagues undertaking peacebuilding work in Northern Ireland and many contribute to the module 'Conflict and Peace in Northern Ireland'. A recently approved module entitled 'Contemporary Conflict and Peace-making: Global Perspectives' will utilise the expertise of numerous academic contacts from the geographical areas of Israel-Palestine, Syria, the Balkans, Sri Lanka, South Korea and South Africa. The quality of the curriculum is enhanced by the large number of external specialists who contribute their expertise.

2.88 ISE, as part of the School of Religion within the faculty framework of College, takes account of external expertise in its approach to the process of managing quality. The Common practice is met, and the associated level of risk is low.

**Common practice: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Common practice (3): The provider engages students individually and collectively in the development, assurance and enhancement of the quality of their educational experience.**

## Findings

2.89 The College system for programme design and evaluation includes input from students to the programme and module development process and student representation on committees. Student views are collected at module level, programme level and through university-wide surveys.

2.90 The procedures and processes in place enable the Common practice to be met. The team held meetings with staff and students and studied a wide range of documents, including student evaluation of modules and minutes of meetings, to determine whether students are engaged individually and collectively in quality assurance.

2.91 The postgraduate taught course review process allows changing demand by students to be taken into account in course design and development. Student feedback is also considered, as documented in the flow chart for the postgraduate course approvals process.

2.92 Student representation is included in deliberative committees at all levels, including the School Executive Committee. The Graduate Students' Union ensures that there is an election for a representative from each programme and a school representative for PhD students. The MPhil CRR representative attends the monthly Belfast staff meeting. Their attendance enables a range of issues to be raised and discussed and this has led to speedy resolution. Issues raised relate to resources and access to student services in Dublin. The completion of the building work and the upgrading of IT in Belfast have been positive factors, although there are still space limitations. While the pandemic has had a detrimental effect on access to the Queen's University library, it has had a positive effect by providing better access through online facilities to services in Dublin.

2.93 Students provide feedback on each module through the VLE portal. There is a student focus group held at the end of each year. The Course Coordinator submits a summary of student feedback, together with recommended actions to the Director of Teaching and Learning Postgraduate. Annual College-wide data is collected by means of two surveys: the International Student Barometer and the National Student Survey.

2.94 The team concludes that the Common practice is met and the risk is low, due to ISE engaging with its students individually and collectively. Students are involved in the development, assurance and enhancement of the quality of their educational experience.

**Common practice: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

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

2.95 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook. All Core and Common practices are met with low levels of associated risk.

2.96 The review team makes one recommendation in this section, relating to the quality of student learning opportunities, and this recommends ISE to provide clear and consistent feedback on all assessed student work in order to enable students to focus appropriately on their academic development. The level of risk associated with this was assessed as low because the issue was one of establishing consistent practice and there are positive examples of good practice on which to build.

2.97 Three examples of good practice were identified in this section, all three of which related to the high quality of the learning resources available to students both in terms of well-qualified academic staff, strong library resources and the sociopolitical environment in which the course is delivered.

2.98 The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the provider **meets** UK expectations.



## Glossary

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

### **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**).

### **Common practices**

Practices included in the UK Quality Code that will be applied by providers in line with their missions, their regulatory context and the needs of their students. These are practices common to the underpinning of quality in all UK providers but are not regulatory requirements for providers in England (registered with the Office for Students).

### **Core practices**

Practices included in the UK Quality Code that must be demonstrated by all UK higher education providers as part of assuring their standards and quality.

### **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.

### **Expectations**

Statements in the **Quality Code** which clearly and succinctly express the outcomes providers should achieve in setting and maintaining the standards of their awards, and for managing the quality of their provision.

### **Flexible and distributed learning**

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

### **Framework**

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

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

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

### **Good practice**

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

### **Learning opportunities**

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

### **Learning outcomes**

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

### **Multiple awards**

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

### **Operational definition**

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

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

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

### **Programme specifications**

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

### **Quality Code**

Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is the UK-wide set of **reference points** for higher education providers (agreed through consultation with the higher education community, and published by QAA), which states the **Expectations** (and associated, applicable, Core and Common Practices) that 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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