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

May 2017

Contents

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 3 to 4 May 2017 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Helen Corkill
- Emeritus Professor Diane Meehan.

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

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

- makes judgements on
  - the quality of student learning opportunities
  - the information provided about higher education provision
  - the enhancement 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[2] and explains the method for Higher Education Review (Foreign Providers).[3] For an explanation of terms see the glossary at the end of this report.

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[1] The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code.
[2] QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk.
[3] Higher Education Review (Foreign Providers) handbook:
www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2960.

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 quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement 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 feature of **good practice**.

- The comprehensive and diverse range of complementary learning opportunities available to students to develop their academic and professional potential (Expectation B4).

Recommendations

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

By September 2017:

- formalise and strengthen the procedures for arranging and monitoring placements to ensure that learning opportunities are delivered securely (Expectation B10)
- update hyperlinks in student handbooks to ensure that all information is fit for purpose (Expectation C).

By April 2018:

- develop further its recently implemented course evaluation process to formally consider a wider range of data and other evidence (Expectation B8).

By June 2018:

- apply quality assurance processes more systematically to identify opportunities for enhancement (Enhancement).

Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms** the following action already being taken to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to students:

- the steps taken to implement and review Counselling and Careers support (Expectation B4).

About the provider

The Irish School of Ecumenics, Trinity College Dublin at Belfast (ISE) is one of three departments located within the Confederal School of Religions, Peace Studies and Theology, Trinity College Dublin (Trinity). ISE has sites in both Dublin and Belfast and this review is concerned with the latter. ISE was originally an independent institute for postgraduate study founded in 1970 but was integrated into Trinity in 2001. Trinity is subject to review and quality assurance under the Institutional Review process of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI).

ISE's teaching and research is centred on understanding conflict and the possibilities for peace, reconciliation and dialogue in many different contexts, including the political, the global, the religious and the local. The taught and research programmes attract students from around the world who wish to further their knowledge and careers in these areas.

ISE was subject to a QAA Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight review in April 2013. This had successful outcomes, with Confidence and Reliance judgements, two features of good practice, two advisable recommendations, and two desirable recommendations. In 2014, following the first annual monitoring visit, ISE was deemed to be making 'commendable progress' in implementing the action plan, so was not required to undergo a visit in 2015. In 2016, ISE received an outcome of 'making acceptable progress with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision'.

ISE offers a taught Master's in Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation, and provides supervision for PhD students. At the time of the 2013 review, there were 14 master's students and five PhD students. During the academic year 2016-17, there were 10 full-time students on the master's programme, mostly from the United States. At the time of the review visit, the final PhD student had just completed their studies. The study abroad programme has been suspended at ISE.

ISE cites as its main challenges: meeting the multiple demands of contemporary academia; maintaining and improving student recruitment and satisfaction; maintaining policy and civic engagement/relevance; the impact of the UK leaving the EU; producing internationally excellent research output; and consolidating the situation after two to three years of major change, including new academic staff, course content changes, and a move to a new location.

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   The strategic aims of ISE, as a department within the wider Confederal School of Religions, Peace Studies and Theology, are set out in the 2015-19 Confederal School Strategic Plan, which is aligned to Trinity's Strategic Goals. As a department within the Confederal School, the management of academic standards at ISE, including ISE, is governed by Trinity's procedures and regulations, over which the Council exercises oversight. The Council, chaired by the Provost, is responsible for Trinity's academic affairs. The Council has six subcommittees: Quality Committee; Undergraduate Studies Committee; Graduate Studies Committee; Research Committee; International Committee; and the Student Life Committee. The Quality Committee, chaired by the Vice-Provost and Chief Academic Officer, reports to both the Council and College Board and has responsibility for recommending quality policies for approval by the University Council.

1.2   Under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, Trinity is responsible for the quality of its own teaching and learning, and for implementing formal quality assurance procedures; these are subject to review by QQI. Trinity reports annually to QQI on its quality assurance arrangements through the Annual Institutional Quality Report. Trinity's quality assurance and enhancement arrangements are set out on the Quality Office website.

1.3   Responsibility for the management of the provision at ISE rests with a small team of staff; the Head of ISE is based in Dublin, as is the Director of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate). The core team at ISE consists of one permanent academic staff member (the Course Coordinator), one fixed-term academic staff member, a librarian, and the Executive Officer.

1.4   Oversight of the provision at ISE is achieved in a number of ways. A monthly departmental executive meeting, chaired by the Head of the Confederal School deals with internal school matters. Membership of the Confederal School Executive follows Trinity policy. The Director of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate), who sits on the School Executive and is a member of Trinity's Graduate Studies Committee, provides a conduit for information to the Confederal School and its departments. In addition, the ISE-Trinity Advisory Board, on which ISE trustees are represented, meets twice a year, once in Belfast and once in Dublin, and is chaired by the Registrar, with the Dean of Graduate Studies and the Faculty Dean in attendance. A new School-level Graduate Studies Committee is in the process of being set up.

1.5   ISE academic staff meetings take place once a term in Dublin and are attended by staff teaching on both the Dublin and Belfast-based programmes. In addition, staff based in Belfast hold local programme meetings to oversee the day-to-day management of the provision. The Head of ISE remains in regular contact with staff in Belfast and visits the site once or twice a month.

1.6   Staff are recruited in accordance with the resourcing procedures set down by Trinity's human resources office, and in fulfilment of Trinity's objective to attract outstanding

staff and meet the requirements of the non-discriminatory employment practices, to which Trinity is committed through its diversity and inclusion policy. Trinity has in place a Staff Development Policy and a calendar of staff development workshops, which can be accessed by ISE staff; personal and career development for support staff has recently been made a priority.

1.7   Entry requirements for applicants to ISE courses are set out on the Graduate Studies website. Admission to the MPhil courses and PhD programmes offered by ISE is governed by Trinity's Admission and Transfer Policy. Procedures governing application and admission to postgraduate programmes are available on Trinity's website. Information specific to applicants to ISE courses is available on Trinity's course applications portal.

1.8   Assessment is carried out in accordance with Trinity's procedures, with the assessment regulations being set out in its calendar.

1.9   ISE utilises a range of external reference points. Staff are cognisant of the Quality Code, and a number of Trinity's policies and procedures align with its Expectations. The Irish National Framework of Qualifications, which sets the level of skills, competence and knowledge of qualifications obtainable at Irish educational institutions, is benchmarked against the European Qualifications Framework and the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area. Since 2012, Trinity has expanded its focus on quality assurance procedures and enhancement to meet the requirements of the new legislative environment under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012.

1.10   ISE follows Trinity's processes for the development and approval of new courses and modules as detailed in the Guidelines for a new Postgraduate Course proposal and clearly set out in a process map. External review of new course proposals is undertaken, and recommendations from the external reviewer are incorporated by the proposer into the final submission to the Council.

1.11   ISE is subject to Trinity's external examining procedures made available on the Graduate Studies website. ISE nominates external examiners to evaluate the quality and academic standards of its taught programmes and research degrees. Appointments are approved by the Dean of Graduate Studies and oversight is maintained through the Graduate Studies Office (see also Expectation B7). The external examining process forms part of the demonstration of institutional quality assurance and enhancement to external stakeholders such as QQI and the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.

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

1.12   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 found ISE to be assiduous in managing the responsibilities delegated to it by Trinity for maintaining academic standards.

1.13   The review team concludes that ISE **satisfactorily** manages its responsibilities for academic standards, as set out in contractual arrangements with its academic partners.

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   ISE follows Trinity's processes for the development and approval of new courses and modules, the stages of which are clearly set out in a process map. The current postgraduate course proposal guidelines, available on Trinity's website cover all elements of the course design process, including learning outcomes, level of award, financing, modes of learning, assessment methods, rationale for proposing the course, and relationship of the proposed course to both the Confederal School and Trinity's strategic plans. These guidelines are relevant to the development of a new course and significant amendments to an existing one. Trinity also has procedures in place for course suspension and cessation; procedures relating to postgraduate courses are set out on the Graduate Studies website. Adherence to these procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.2   The review team reviewed the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by examining documentation relating to the programme design and approval process and minutes of relevant committee meetings. The team also held meetings with senior, academic and support staff, and students.

2.3   The review team found these processes to work effectively in practice. Proposals for new postgraduate courses are submitted to Trinity's Graduate Studies Committee following approval by the School Executive Committee and a financial viability review by the Faculty Dean. All new programme proposals are subject to external review prior to formal and final approval by the Council. Recommendations from an external reviewer are incorporated by the proposer into the final submission to the Council. The current MPhil in Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation offered by ISE was approved in 2009-10 under Trinity's course approval procedures in operation at that time. The current MPhil replaced the original MPhil in Reconciliation Studies offered since 2001.

2.4   Ideas for new modules are discussed by the local Course Committee prior to proposals being developed by the relevant academic staff and submitted on standard templates to the Director of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) and approved by the Graduate Studies Committee. Trinity's procedures require justification of the creation of a new module and proposers must demonstrate how the learning outcomes of new modules map onto the learning outcomes of the course as a whole.

2.5   Definitive course records are contained in Trinity's calendar; minor changes to courses are handled locally and signed off by the Graduate Studies Committee, while significant amendments are dealt with through postgraduate course approval procedures. The process of updating the definitive course records following change is overseen by the School Administrative Manager and approved by the Head of Department.

2.6   The processes for course design, development and approval are comprehensive and effective. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.7   The Admission and Transfer Policy of Trinity, revised in February 2017, outlines the University's overarching framework for admission and transfer procedures, and governs admission to the MPhil and PhD courses offered by ISE. Procedures governing application and admission to postgraduate courses are available on Trinity's website, with information specific to applicants to ISE courses being available on Trinity's course applications portal. The MPhil course at ISE is publicised within the ISE pages of the Trinity website. An ISE brochure is available on request and a postgraduate prospectus is available on the Trinity website. Admissions criteria and requirements for English language proficiency are included in the postgraduate prospectus, but not on the course webpages for ISE. A Guide for International Students applying to ISE includes information on UK visa application. New policies have been introduced to safeguard international students, including a new Education Recruitment Agents Policy in June 2016. The policies and procedures in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.8   The review team examined the effectiveness of the recruitment, selection and admissions procedures by analysing documentation including the Trinity Admission and Transfer Policy, the postgraduate prospectus, and website information relating to the application processes. The team also met students, and senior, academic and support staff.

2.9   The review team found that the procedures for recruitment, selection and admission of students work effectively in practice. Trinity has a strategic target to diversify the student community. In addition, student recruitment is now a priority area within the Strategic Plan of the Confederal School, including the setting of quotas and targets, and ISE's approach to recruitment is aligned directly to this priority. For example, ISE has started to engage with secondary schools both in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland.

2.10   Students confirmed that the application process was straightforward. They were provided with useful information from ISE, and very much appreciated the help given by the staff in Belfast and the Graduate Studies Office in Dublin. Feedback on applications was provided within two weeks. ISE updates annually the information in the International Students' Handbook, taking into account feedback from students.

2.11   Staff at ISE are not provided with specific training on admissions procedures, other than face-to-face and online training on the student records system for support staff. Peer learning also takes place. All staff involved in admissions processes are aware of the requirements and have a checklist; assessors have a document from the Academic Registry that includes expected turnaround times. Advice on admissions is available to students through the Academic Registry and, for international students, the Global Relations Office. There is nobody within Trinity with expert knowledge of the UK visa system, as this only applies to a very small proportion of international students. The Senior Executive Officer assists students at the ISE, but is not qualified to give expert advice. However, the general support provided by the Senior Executive Officer is much appreciated by students.

2.12   ISE adopts processes and procedures for the recruitment, selection and admission

of students that are transparent, fair and rigorous. They align to the legislative requirements of the Republic of Ireland and the regulations of Trinity. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B3): Higher education providers, working with their staff, students and other stakeholders, articulate and systematically review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices, so that every student is enabled to develop as an independent learner, study their chosen subject(s) in depth and enhance their capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking.

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.13   Trinity does not have a dedicated teaching and learning strategy but instead sets out its vision and objectives for education in the Strategic Plan 2014-19, including engagement with the Trinity Education Project. The College Calendar sets out in detail the practices and regulations governing learning and teaching on postgraduate programmes. A summary of regulations and information concerning what students can expect are provided by ISE in course handbooks. Handbooks include information concerning University policies such as those relating to assessment feedback, plagiarism and regulations. The Assessment and Academic Progress Policy is also reflected in the MPhil Course Handbook. The regulations on assessment and progress are designed to ensure that students meet the academic requirements of their study and that the integrity of awards is maintained. Students also receive a Course Overview document and module syllabi. The policies and procedures in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.14   The review team examined the effectiveness of learning opportunities and teaching practices by reading relevant documentation relating to the aforementioned policies and procedures. The team also held meetings with students, and senior, academic and support staff.

2.15   ISE makes effective use of the policies and procedures set out by Trinity. ISE provides an exceptional learning environment for the study of the specialised area of conflict resolution and reconciliation and students reported that they enjoy the teaching on their course. The provision is well resourced for the size of the student body. Students are supported by a specialist subject collection and dedicated librarian at ISE, and have access to the facilities and staffing of ISE and Trinity as a whole. In addition, ISE has a special arrangement for library access at Queen's University Belfast, and students can also access the library at Edgehill Theological College. The library at ISE is central to supporting teaching and learning, providing students with study and dissertation help, as well as access to learning resources. The team saw evidence that students have many opportunities to provide feedback on teaching and learning, and staff have a variety of mechanisms available to review their teaching and learning practice.

2.16   Research and scholarly activity impacts on teaching. Staff communicate and disseminate research activity through social media platforms, on a publications board and through speaking engagements. They regularly discuss their research with students and, where appropriate, co-author journal articles. Students are encouraged and, where possible, supported to attend conferences. Opportunities for research collaboration both within Trinity and in international settings are widely utilised.

2.17   While Trinity has a Staff Development Policy and a calendar of staff development workshops, staff met by the team did not consider the use of the development plan to be strong within ISE. Trinity's Performance Management Development Scheme has not been developed further since the 2014 QAA monitoring visit, nor is there any formal appraisal scheme or formal means of identifying training needs on an annual basis. However, the needs of staff are discussed at ISE staff meetings in Belfast, and ISE and Trinity both

provide support for new members of academic staff. In addition, ISE ensures that all staff are appropriately qualified, while staff members are reviewed formally by Trinity on appointment, at the end of their first probationary year, and at the various promotion points. Both academic and support staff have taken advantage of opportunities for staff development available through the Centre for Academic Practice and e-Learning (CAPSL) in Dublin, although geographical distance tends to limit frequent attendance. Video recordings and webinars of staff development activities are also available. While there is currently no system for formal peer observation of teaching across the University, an informal process of observation of guest lecturers and team teaching does occur at ISE.

2.18   ISE has an effective approach to learning and teaching, appropriate processes for the appointment of staff, and adequate access to staff development opportunities. Students have ample opportunities to provide feedback on the quality of their courses and staff. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.19   Trinity has policies that are intended to safeguard the student experience, including the Admission and Transfer Policy; the Assessment and Academic Progression Policy; and the Plagiarism Policy. The College Calendar details the procedures that support learning and teaching, and outlines students' entitlements and the pattern of the academic year. The Annual Institutional Quality Report draws together policies and procedures relating to the student lifecycle, which are designed to support students at all stages of their studies. Trinity currently does not have policies on resourcing provision or resourcing staff. Instead, the identification of the resources required is identified at course approval, or at the addition, or major modification of, a module. The effectiveness of the mechanisms employed and resources provided are reviewed regularly through module and course evaluations, focus groups, staff meetings, the School review process and informal feedback. Working within the policy and regulatory frameworks of Trinity and as part of the wider Confederal School, ISE takes responsibility for supporting and developing its students, and for enhancing the student experience. The policies and procedures in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.20   The review team tested the effectiveness of the arrangements and resources by scrutinising relevant documents including policies and procedures, student handbooks, student feedback, internal quality reports and external examiners' reports. The team also held meetings with senior, support and academic staff, and students.

2.21   Overall, the review team found that the procedures for implementing, monitoring and evaluating arrangements and resources work effectively in practice. During the pre-arrival period, ISE provides a high level of support and information to incoming students. Relevant information is provided on the ISE website and also distributed by email. Students are provided with course handbooks and other materials prior to commencing their course, and are appreciative of the nature and amount of information made available to them. Student transition to study is supported through orientation activity, both in Belfast and Dublin, although not all students are able to attend due to late notice of date, or visa restrictions. Students have access to a virtual learning environment (VLE), which is used to support most modules on the MPhil programme. The VLE also provides access to online resources to help develop information, and research and writing skills.

2.22   Although ISE does not have a formal tutoring policy, students are well supported during their studies by tutors and support staff through a variety of mechanisms. Despite this, and the recognition that some types of support are better in Belfast, there has traditionally been a perception of disparity among students in the extent and quality of support services between Dublin and Belfast students, most notably the careers and counselling services. As a result, ISE in Dublin has actively considered ways to improve access to comparable services for students in Belfast. While the Counselling Service in Dublin cannot extend its services at present, particularly as student numbers in Belfast are small, it does now offer online modules on certain topics such as anxiety, depression and body image as well as making available phone counselling for Belfast students. Students at ISE in need of urgent assistance would be referred to their GP surgery, and this mirrors the procedure followed in Dublin. ISE has also investigated links with counselling services at Queens University Belfast, but concluded that this was not an option. Students have been similarly frustrated by lack of access to career services. However, the Careers Advisory

Service now offers four one-hour online career development modules and the latest relevant publications from the Careers Office are kept on site for Belfast students to consult. In addition, careers advice is available by video conferencing and the Careers Service would be prepared to travel to Belfast on occasional days to offer one-to-one advice, and to visit more regularly if career management could be built into the curriculum. The review team **affirms** the steps taken to implement and review Counselling and Careers support.

2.23   In the past year, ISE has moved from premises owned by the ISE Trust in north Belfast to rented accommodation within Edgehill Theological College in south Belfast. This move provides good quality teaching accommodation and library facilities, as well as easy access to the library and other facilities at Queens University Belfast. There is no specific resourcing strategy at Confederal School or Faculty level to inform resource development at ISE. However, ISE monitors and evaluates its provision, resources and co-curricular activity in a variety of ways, including module and course evaluations, focus groups, external examiners' reports, and staff meetings in both Belfast and Dublin. This is particularly important given that the move to Edgehill Theological College has altered the demand for a number of key resource areas. The librarian does have an annual budget with which to replenish the library stock throughout the year and, if additional books are required, a specific request is made through the Head of Department at ISE in Dublin.

2.24   Students reported that they enjoy the teaching on their course, and appreciate the combination of formal lectures and discussion, and greater opportunities for cross-campus teaching. The latter is part of the Confederal School's Strategic Plan and includes the implementation of a new Belfast-based module, which is taught by both Dublin and Belfast staff. In 2016-17, Belfast-based lecturers have also been invited to lead individual classes in Dublin-based modules, and vice versa. The involvement of external stakeholders also contributes significantly to the distinctive learning environment at ISE, something which students have described as 'priceless'. This includes external input into lecturing and the residential period at the Corrymeela Community. In addition, ISE makes a determined effort to bring in guest speakers, drawn from local and overseas organisations and alumni, who will be interesting and useful for students. Students are very appreciative of this, and have benefited from meeting key figures. The VLE has also been used for a guest lecture from a Colorado-based academic. New for 2016-17 is a public lunchtime seminar series, which has been designed both to increase ISE's visibility and to develop links with civil society. The comprehensive and diverse range of complementary learning opportunities available to students to develop their academic and professional practice is **good practice**.

2.25   Students studying at ISE are able to access and benefit from a wide range of resources and learning opportunities relevant to the specialist area of their study. The range of complementary learning opportunities was highlighted as good practice and the review team affirmed the steps taken to implement and review Counselling and Careers support. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B5: Student Engagement*

Findings

2.26   ISE engages students in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience in a variety of formal and informal ways. Course handbooks, which are available on the external website and distributed at the start of the year, introduce students to the range of formal opportunities for engagement including student representation, course and module evaluations, student surveys and focus groups. The framework for student engagement would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.27   The review team examined the effectiveness of the procedures in place to engage students by examining documentation including minutes of relevant committee meetings, course handbooks, and outcomes of student evaluations. The team also held meetings with senior, academic and support staff, students, and student representatives.

2.28   The review team found that the procedures for student engagement work effectively in practice. ISE aims to include students at all levels of decision making and to operate a system of structured reception of student feedback. There is a formal process of election of student representatives for each class, carried out in conjunction with the Graduate Students Union of which ISE students are members. The Graduate Student Union runs a comprehensive whole-day training session for new student representatives. Student representatives are active in seeking views from, and feeding back to, their peers. The team saw evidence that a student representative from each class attends the monthly staff meetings in Belfast, as well as the staff meetings in Dublin by video conference. There is regular contact between student representatives based in Dublin and those at ISE. The team was informed that class representative participation at staff meetings has provided an effective and efficient means of receiving formal and informal feedback, and reporting back on previous topics raised. In addition, three student representatives sit on the Confederal School Executive Committee: one undergraduate, one MPhil and one PhD student. Students in Belfast are included in the election process via video conference.

2.29   ISE operates robust processes for student evaluation of modules and courses. All postgraduate modules are subject to student evaluation. ISE participates in the Faculty course evaluation process and, in addition, operates its own paper-based system to elicit student feedback at the end of each module. Students confirmed that the paper-based systems permitted anonymity and that staff at ISE provided feedback on outcomes and possible changes to be made as a result of the feedback. In April 2017, ISE also held a focus group to evaluate the MPhil course. Students felt involved in this activity, and able to communicate their views.

2.30   Student feedback is also gathered through Trinity's online surveys and, recently, students at ISE were invited to complete the International Student Barometer survey. MPhil students have also taken part in the Irish Survey of Student Engagement since its inception in 2015. However, for both the International Student Barometer and the Irish Survey of Student Engagement, the data is only reported at the level of the Confederal School, and results for ISE cannot be disaggregated. These surveys are therefore of limited use as a reporting or enhancement tool for ISE.

2.31   Students consider the responses to their feedback to be generally positive. The review team saw evidence that ISE is responsive to students and has made appropriate

changes to reasonable requests made through the various channels.

2.32   ISE is committed to the engagement of students as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. Effective mechanisms exist for gathering and responding to student feedback, and students feel engaged and listened to. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.33   ISE's MPhil course, as for all courses, is subject to Trinity's Assessment and Academic Progress Policy, which aims to ensure that assessment methods are fair and transparent and that the integrity of awards is assured. Procedures governing assessment, coursework and marking are set out in the MPhil course handbooks. Trinity has in place a Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy. QQI has established an RPL Practitioner Network and, in response to QQI's recent focus on RPL, Trinity is seeking to develop staff and applicant guidelines and system supports for RPL. Students on the ISE MPhil course who wish to apply for RPL for the award of credit do so through Trinity. These policies, procedures and regulations would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.34   The review team tested the Expectation by reading policies, regulations and procedures relating to the assessment of students and recognition of prior learning including the Assessment and Academic Progress Policy, RPL Policy, and course handbooks. The team also met senior, academic and support staff, and students.

2.35   The evidence showed the policies, procedures and regulations to be effective in practice. Modes of assessment vary for each module in the MPhil programme according to the module content; these include a traditional essay-based element of assessment as well as seminar contributions, presentation and reflective portfolios. A policy of second marking is in operation; borderline, fail or distinction graded coursework and all dissertations are second marked internally. All coursework is also made available to the external examiner who provides oversight and evaluation of the standard of assessment methods and marking in line with the External Examiner Policy. The external examiner for the MPhil course has commented positively on the range of assessment mechanisms available and the rigour and transparency in marking systems and their consistent application.

2.36   Since the beginning of the academic year 2015-16, plagiarism-detection software has been used for all coursework. Students confirmed their awareness of Trinity's plagiarism policy.

2.37   Staff provide feedback on assessments via a formal feedback sheet, which outlines areas of strength and perceived weakness. Students commented that they were aware of what was expected of them regarding their assessment tasks and were positive about the timeliness and usefulness of assessment feedback received from staff.

2.38   The annual MPhil Court of Examiners takes place with external examiners, course coordinators and academic staff for each MPhil course in attendance. The record of marks, comments and awards from this meeting forms the official record of results bound and kept by the Academic Registry on the student information system.

2.39   ISE has in place appropriate arrangements to ensure equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment. Students are made aware of the regulations and processes relating to the assessment of their awards. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B7): Higher education providers make scrupulous use of external examiners.

Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External Examining*

Findings

2.40   ISE is subject to Trinity's external examining procedures made available on the Graduate Studies website. These include the External Examiner Policy and the PhD External Examiner Guidelines. The External Examiner Policy outlines the role and responsibilities of external examiners; the external examining process is clearly set out in a process map. The external examining system was reviewed by the Quality Office in 2015, resulting in an updated policy, revised annual report templates and improved administrative procedures. External examiners for taught programmes are appointed for three years; extensions being permitted only in exceptional circumstances. External examiners submit their reports on the external examiner report template, which includes guidance as to how their reports form part of the institutional quality assurance processes, and are reviewed by the Dean of Graduate Studies. These procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.41   The review team examined the effectiveness of these policies and procedures by examining a range of documentation relating to the external examining process including the External Examiner Policy, PhD External Examiner Guidelines, and external examiners' reports. The team also held meetings with senior and academic staff, and students.

2.42   The evidence showed the policies and procedures to be effective in practice. ISE nominates external examiners with appointments being approved by the Dean of Graduate Studies; oversight is maintained through the Graduate Studies Committee and a list of current external examiners is included in the Dean of Graduate Studies annual report.

2.43   Although there is no formal training in place for external examiners, on appointment they receive a range of briefing documentation from Trinity and ISE; all coursework including dissertations for the cohort of students being examined is provided along with module syllabi, the MPhil Course Handbook and guidelines for completing the annual report from the Graduate Studies Office. External examiners review a sample of student work prior to attending the annual MPhil Court of Examiners, which is also attended by course coordinators and academic staff for each course under consideration. Comments made by external examiners at the Court of Examiners meetings are captured to supplement their reports.

2.44   External examiners for postgraduate taught courses are asked to comment on curriculum design and content, assessment methods, quality and standard of marking and feedback. External examiners' reports for postgraduate programmes are submitted to the Dean of Graduate Studies. If recommendations are made, Schools respond and external examiners are asked to confirm that recommendations from the previous year's report have been actioned. The annual Faculty Quality Report provides an overview of issues raised by external examiners' reports and actions taken by the relevant School. In future, external examiners' reports will also be considered through the new School-level Graduate Studies Committee, which is currently being set up.

2.45   External examiners' reports for the MPhil at ISE are positive. Reports are shared with staff through ISE staff meetings. External examiners' recommendations are discussed and actioned by academic staff with a view to programme enhancement, and this was evident from minutes of meetings and in discussions with staff.

2.46   The Recognition Scheme for Educational Oversight monitoring visit report of 2016

noted that students were not aware of the external examining system. In response, as of academic year 2016-17, external examining is explained to students in the MPhil Handbook. The external examiner's report is made available to students on request. Students met by the team were aware of the external examining process for their course.

2.47   ISE is subject to Trinity's external examining policy and procedures. Procedures are generally aligned to the Quality Code and meet national requirements. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated 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

2.48   Trinity requires that all postgraduate courses are evaluated annually. An online course evaluation system is utilised every two years at the end of the taught component and following the dissertation stage of courses; in the alternate year, Schools implement their own systems of course evaluation. ISE's taught modules are evaluated locally through a paper-based system. To demonstrate compliance with Trinity's requirements in relation to module evaluation, Schools report on their module evaluation process through the Faculty Administrator and the annual Faculty Quality Report, which is produced by each Head of Faculty as part of Trinity's quality assurance procedures. The annual Faculty Quality Report highlights themes and issues arising from student evaluation and external examiners' reports for all courses in Schools within the Faculty; the report is submitted to the Quality Committee. A summary of enhancements and good practice is also included. The Dean of Graduate Studies also produces an Annual Report for the Council, which summarises a wide range of data including that relating to admission, progression and examination of Trinity's postgraduate students.

2.49   Trinity's School Review Procedure operates on a seven-year cycle and fulfils its obligations under the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012. A periodic programme review procedure is also in place and is utilised where programmes fall outside the remit of other Trinity quality review procedures such as School reviews; for example where programmes are interdisciplinary. This framework for programme monitoring and review would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.50   The review team tested the effectiveness of the procedures by examining relevant documentation including minutes of relevant committee meetings, module and course evaluation processes, annual Faculty Quality Reports, and external examiners' reports. The team also held meetings with senior and academic staff, and students.

2.51   The results of module evaluation at ISE are analysed by the Head of Department, who follows up issues as required; feedback from students has resulted in several amendments to the MPhil course and this was confirmed by students. ISE has also recently established a course evaluation system involving the use of a focus group to elicit student opinion regarding the MPhil course as a whole; outputs from the process have subsequently been discussed at an ISE staff meeting. Several other sources of information are available to, and utilised by, the course team to monitor and review the MPhil course including external examiners' reports, student feedback, and data resulting from Trinity's online course evaluation system; however, there is no formal process in place that brings together these various sources of evidence. The review team **recommends** that, by April 2018, ISE develop further its recently implemented course evaluation process to consider formally a wider range of data and other evidence.

2.52   The Confederal School, of which ISE is a constituent department, underwent its first School Review in March 2017 as part of the Quality Office's Framework for Quality. Schools produce a self-assessment report that, for the Confederal School, was comprehensive and reflective. The report highlights those areas where the School particularly wanted the external reviewers to consider, including how to better nurture and expand its offering at ISE. Staff, students and alumni at ISE were included in the review

process. For example, support staff attended a workshop series, academic staff contributed to the School's self-assessment report and met the reviewers, and alumni and current students were invited to provide feedback on their learning experiences. At the time of the review, the final report was not available but, once finalised, will be made available publicly on Trinity's website; staff at ISE have commented on the draft report. The team heard that one recommendation is likely to relate to closer working between ISE in Dublin and Belfast, including the provision of funding for ISE students to travel to Dublin. The School Review process, which involves external reviewers, is comprehensive and, in the view of the team, has the potential to enhance the quality of student learning opportunities.

2.53   Procedures are in place to monitor and review provision at ISE on a regular basis; these include module and online course evaluation, the newly implemented course evaluation process, and the periodic School and programme review processes. The review team does make a recommendation for ISE to develop further its recently implemented course evaluation process to consider formally a wider range of data and other evidence. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met. However, the associated level of risk is moderate, as there is no formal procedure in place that brings together the various sources of evidence. Therefore, while quality assurance procedures are broadly adequate, there are some shortcomings in the rigour with which they are applied.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

Findings

2.54   Students on programmes at ISE are subject to Trinity's processes for academic appeals and student complaints, as set out in the College Calendar. Regulations and procedures governing the academic appeals process for graduate students are outlined in the College Calendar Part 3. A revised Appeals Policy (Academic Progress) was published in February 2017. The new Student Complaints Policy was approved in July 2016 and is available on Trinity's website, along with the student complaints form and instructions on how to complete it. Every School has a defined process for dealing with appeals and complaints. Procedures for academic appeals and student complaints on taught postgraduate programmes are summarised in the MPhil Course Handbook and, for postgraduate research programmes, in the PhD Course Handbook. These policies and procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.55   The review team tested the effectiveness of the procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints by examining documents such as relevant policy and procedural documents, the College Calendar, and course handbooks. The team also held meetings with students, and senior, academic and support staff.

2.56   The evidence showed the policies and procedures to be effective in practice. ISE utilises the comprehensive structure of policies and procedures for academic appeals and student complaints published by Trinity. These are made clear to students through the Trinity Calendar, which is available online, and through course handbooks, which are distributed to students at the beginning of their courses.

2.57   The Postgraduate Advisory Service is highlighted to ISE students at the start of term through the MPhil course handbook and provides advice for postgraduate students experiencing academic or personal issues. Although based in Dublin, students can access the service online and by telephone. Students at ISE are encouraged to raise any concerns at an early stage. Due to the small size and nature of the institution, it is usually possible to resolve matters on an informal basis. Informal complaints may be made in the first instance to the Senior Executive Officer, who would escalate matters if required. Complaints can also be raised by students in module evaluations, from which they are extracted and dealt with.

2.58   Students at ISE have access to a robust set of policies and procedures for making academic appeals and student complaints. Formal procedures are summarised and signposted through course handbooks. Students also have access to formal advisory services and informal mechanisms for assistance. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B10): Degree-awarding bodies take ultimate responsibility for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, irrespective of where these are delivered or who provides them. Arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with organisations other than the degree-awarding body are implemented securely and managed effectively.

Quality Code, *Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others*

Findings

2.59   ISE currently runs two modules within the MPhil course that involve learning opportunities delivered by other parties. One optional module, Community Learning and Reflective Practice, requires a mandatory unpaid placement or internship with a community based organisation. All assessment and quality procedures are undertaken by staff at ISE. Teaching for the Conflict Transformation module is facilitated by a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) in Northern Ireland. A formal agreement is in place with the NGO to deliver this module. The module is subject to standard quality assurance processes, with assessment first-marked by staff from the NGO and moderated by academic staff from ISE. The Conflict Transformation module also includes a residential stay at the Corrymeela Community. There are currently no University-wide policies or mandatory procedures in operation to inform the management and oversight of learning opportunities with external organisations. The quality assurance of off-campus learning is a new requirement under the QQI core Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines (May 2016), but will only be introduced throughout Trinity from the beginning of the academic year 2017-18. ISE is cognisant of the requirements of UK Visas and Immigration in relation to placements and internships, and works within these restrictions. The current framework in place at ISE would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.60   The review team tested the effectiveness of the procedures for managing learning opportunities with others by examining documentation including course proposals and approval reports, definitive documents, module outlines, course handbooks, and partnership agreements. The team also met students, internship and placement providers, a member of staff from the NGO, and senior and academic staff.

2.61   The MPhil course offers a diverse and interesting range of co-curricular and externally delivered learning opportunities that are integral to the programme. These opportunities contribute to the feature of good practice in paragraph 2.24 regarding the comprehensive and diverse range of complementary learning opportunities available to students to develop their academic and professional potential.

2.62   The arrangements for the Conflict Transformation module facilitated by the NGO, Beyond Walls Ltd, work effectively both to extend student learning opportunities and to safeguard academic standards. Beyond Walls has a wealth of experience in working in conflict and transitional societies, not only in Northern Ireland but also in South Africa. It is headed by an established and experienced academic in the field. No training or guidance is currently provided for the NGO, as this arrangement has been running effectively for many years. The teaching on the module has been observed several times by academic staff from ISE and is subject to the normal module evaluation process. The module remains under constant review.

2.63   The Conflict Transformation module includes a four-day residential stay at the Corrymeela Community on the north Antrim coast. This visit is popular with students. ISE has a formal agreement in place with the provider to ensure that academic standards are maintained throughout the module and the module is subject to the usual quality assurance processes. The module syllabus is approved by ISE academic staff members,

who also moderate the assessments.

2.64   Students taking the optional module, Community Learning and Reflective Practice, undertake a mandatory and assessed placement or internship. ISE takes great care to ensure that students are allocated to internships or placements that are appropriate to their academic or professional interests. Staff also take care to ensure that recommended students are suited to the specific interests of the provider. Providers spoke highly of the calibre and commitment of students assigned to them. The placements or internships are organised with grassroots peace-building or community organisations based in Belfast, some of which are well known to staff at the ISE. Students comment that selected providers are very engaged with their placements. Students remain in regular contact with ISE staff, and all assessment for the community placement module is carried out by academic staff members.

2.65   ISE does not currently have in place formalised systems for the oversight and management of placements and internships. Notes from the initial meetings are held only on the Course Coordinator's email system, and copies of any risk assessment, insurance check and emergency contact details are not held centrally at ISE. In some cases, but not all, providers undertake a risk assessment. ISE has produced a draft risk assessment and liability form but, although potentially a useful document, this does not address the necessity to identify and assess risk. Some providers arrange insurance for the internees and also provide a formal contractual agreement between themselves and the student. Providers confirmed that they are given information on the MPhil course, and are asked if students have covered the required hours, and to comment on work ethic and contribution. However, neither the provider nor the student is formally made aware of their responsibilities, and there is no system of tripartite or planned learning agreement put in place. There is also no documentation that sets out explicitly what would happen in the case of a placement or internship ceasing or being found to be unsatisfactory. The team notes that ISE has been engaging with Trinity to look at the respective responsibilities of the institution, the provider and the student. ISE is aware of its responsibilities, and is intending to produce a provider handbook, pro forma and a risk assessment document by September 2017. However, there was no evidence of these available at the time of the visit. The review team **recommends** that, by September 2017, ISE formalise and strengthen the procedures for arranging and monitoring placements to ensure that learning opportunities are delivered securely.

2.66   Overall, ISE offers a diverse and stimulating range of learning opportunities offered in association with external organisations. The review team does make a recommendation for ISE to formalise and strengthen the procedures for arranging and monitoring placements to ensure that learning opportunities are delivered securely. While the team concludes that the Expectation is met, the level of associated risk is moderate, as ISE does not currently have in place formalised systems for the oversight and management of placements and internships, and so there is some lack of clarity about responsibilities in this area.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

2.67   The arrangements and procedures for research degrees are set out in the Trinity Calendar and the Graduate Education Policy. Trinity's Supervision of Graduate Students Policy, which sets out a framework for effective research supervision and clarifies the roles and responsibilities of supervisors and research students, has recently been approved. An annual Research Supervisor Development programme is in place. Trinity's Remote Supervision Policy is relevant to students who are required by their research to spend more than 50 per cent of their time outside Ireland for the purposes of research and fieldwork. Procedures governing research degree applications and admission are available on Trinity's website. Information specific to applicants to the PhD programmes offered at ISE is provided on the Course Application Portal. Oversight of research degree applications at Confederal School level is the responsibility of the Director of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate). This framework would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.68   The review team tested the effectiveness of the various policies and procedures by examining the documentation relating to research degrees. The team also met senior, academic and support staff, and students.

2.69   The evidence showed the policies and procedures to be effective in practice. Postgraduate research students are invited to orientation. ISE hosts an orientation morning in addition to the Dublin-based ISE orientation event and the main Trinity postgraduate orientation programme; students confirmed that these sessions were appropriate. Trinity's regulations are summarised in ISE's Course Handbook provided to research students at the start of their studies; the review team noted that, while handbooks are generally up to date and clear, some of the hyperlinks within this handbook were out of date (see paragraph 3.4).

2.70   Postgraduate research students are supervised according to the standards and guidelines outlined in Trinity's Policy on Good Research Practice, which meets the requirements of the National Framework for Doctoral Education; students were aware of the requirement to meet with their supervisors at least once per month. Probation, progress and continuation procedures follow Trinity regulations and are set out for students in ISE's MLitt and PhD Course Handbook; students confirmed their understanding of these processes.

2.71   Information is provided to students on Trinity's research ethics process and policy. The research degree handbooks explain the procedures that all students must follow to obtain research ethics clearance and students were clear about how the process operated.

2.72   Procedures governing the submission and examination of theses are set out in the ISE MLitt and PhD Handbook. While students were generally clear about what is expected of them in relation to the examination process, they commented that certain aspects of the procedures could have been more transparent.

2.73   Postgraduate research students are encouraged to present their work at international conferences; this is supported by a Trinity bursary scheme under which ISE

also commits to provide a proportion of the costs; staff and students at ISE were unclear about the funding available. The CAPSL provides a range of courses to support researchers. All Trinity PhDs are structured courses in which 10-30 ECTS must be taken from taught modules; modules appropriate to a student's field of study, research skills or career development are identified by the student in consultation with their supervisor.

2.74   ISE is subject to Trinity's regulatory framework in relation to postgraduate research degrees. This ensures that the standards of research degrees are secure and the support available to postgraduate research students is appropriate. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.75   In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. Eight of the 10 applicable Expectations are met with low levels of risk. Expectations B8 and B10 are met but with moderate levels of risk.

2.76   The review team identified one feature of good practice in the quality of student learning opportunities: the comprehensive and diverse range of complementary learning opportunities available to students to develop their academic and professional potential (Expectation B4).

2.77   The review team makes one affirmation in this section, which relates to the actions being taken to implement and review Counselling and Careers support (Expectation B4).

2.78   The review team makes two recommendations, which relate to the following: develop further its recently implemented course evaluation process to consider formally a wider range of data and other evidence (Expectation B8); and formalise and strengthen the procedures for arranging and monitoring placements to ensure that learning opportunities are delivered securely (Expectation B10).

2.79   The moderate risks in Part B indicate shortcomings in terms of the rigour with which quality assurance procedures are applied and some lack of clarity about responsibilities.

2.80   The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at ISE **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   Responsibility for the development and oversight of policy in relation to the management of information rests with several units within Trinity, including the Office of Public Affairs and Communications, IT Services, the Information Compliance Office, and Library and Information Services. Work is currently ongoing in respect to Information Management and Security in terms of identifying and documenting policy governance, identifying and documenting ownership of the implementation of associated procedures, identifying policies requiring review, and documenting ownership and implementation of required security controls. Trinity has in place a number of policies relating to the management and quality assurance of its public and student facing information including Data Protection, Data Management, Accessible Information and Social Media policies. A range of information is publicly available on Trinity's website relating to its structures, policies, courses and services; the website has recently been enhanced. Information about ISE is available on the main Trinity website. The Quality Office website provides detailed information on institutional quality assurance processes. The above framework for the management of information would allow the Expectation to be met.

3.2   The review team tested the arrangements for the publication and assurance of information by exploring the availability and accuracy of information on the website and VLE, and within student handbooks and publications. The team also held meetings with senior, academic and support staff, and students.

3.3   Overall, the review team found the procedures for producing and checking information to be effective in practice. Information available to prospective ISE students on Trinity's website includes the postgraduate prospectus and details of application processes, registration, examinations, orientation, student services, and graduation. Prospective students also have access to course information including a course overview document, timetable information and key dates. International students receive an international students' guide. Trinity's Academic Registry provides the majority of this information, with ISE providing supplementary information; information is reviewed annually to ensure it remains up to date. The School Administrative Manager oversees the maintenance of the Confederal School webpages, the production of materials for Trinity undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses, the College Calendar, and other relevant promotional or academic materials.

3.4   Programme specifications are made available through the College calendar. Students receive a range of guides, student handbooks and module syllabi. Handbooks incorporate information concerning Trinity policies such as those relating to assessment feedback, plagiarism and regulations. While students confirmed that handbooks are generally clear and helpful, the review team noted that both the MPhil and the MLitt and PhD Course Handbooks contained some out-of-date hyperlinks, for example linking to the 2015-16 version of Trinity's calendar. The review team **recommends** that, by September 2017, ISE updates hyperlinks in student handbooks to ensure that all information is fit for purpose.

3.5   On completion of their studies, students are provided with a transcript; responsibility for providing transcripts currently rests with individual departments. For ISE, these are produced by the School Executive Office and signed off by the Course Coordinator.

3.6   In line with Trinity policy, several enhancements are planned to the information provided to students including plans for the development of document repositories for registered students and 'frequency asked questions' for the Confederal School website.

3.7   Policies and procedures are in place for the management of information. Website and paper-based information is comprehensive and generally accurate, although student handbooks contain a small number of out-of-date hyperlinks, which the review team has recommended should be addressed. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

3.8   In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The Expectation for this judgement area is met and the associated level of risk is low.

3.9   The review team makes one recommendation: to update hyperlinks in student handbooks to ensure that all information is fit for purpose.

3.10   There are no affirmations or good practice identified in this judgement area.

3.11   The review team concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at ISE **meets** UK expectations.

4   Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

Expectation (Enhancement): Deliberate steps are being taken at provider level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities.

Findings

4.1   Since 2012, Trinity has operated under the legislative environment of the Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012, which now provides the focus for its assurance and enhancement activities. At University level, the key driver for institutional priorities is the Trinity College Dublin, University of Dublin Strategic Plan 2014-19, which sets out strategies and initiatives that drive change in the provision of education through an increased focus on quality assurance and enhancement. The Confederal School Strategic Plan 2015-19 is aligned to the Trinity Strategic Plan. Set within the Framework for Quality at Trinity, the main reporting mechanisms for enhancement through quality assurance processes are the Annual Institutional Quality Report and the annual Faculty Quality Report. Quality enhancement processes are monitored by the Quality Committee through consideration of reports arising from quality reviews and student evaluations. A number of development activities are in place to support Trinity's strategic priorities and intended enhancement measures, mainly through the CAPSL, the Academic Registry, and research leadership through the newly developing ULead. ISE also sets out to improve the quality of students' learning through its expanding opportunities for the consideration of, and responses to, student feedback and evaluations, and by incorporating these processes into its curriculum development mechanisms. ISE's application of institutional strategies and procedures and adherence to quality assurance reporting mechanisms would allow this Expectation to be met.

4.2   The review team evaluated the effectiveness of the strategies and procedures by examining the strategic plans of Trinity and the Confederal School, minutes of relevant committee meetings, student evaluations, and student data. The team also held meetings with senior, academic and support staff, and students.

4.3   While Trinity's Strategic Plan 2014-19 places an increased focus on enhancement, there is no explicit reference to enhancement in the Confederal School's Strategic Plan 2015-19. It is therefore not always clear how deliberate steps at provider level become operational at ISE. ISE contributes fully to departmental, School and Faculty quality assurance activities. It also utilises, and contributes to, key strategic initiatives and priorities within the Trinity and Confederal School Strategic Plans.

4.4   The effective emphasis placed on co-curricular and extracurricular activity within the MPhil course at ISE aligns well with key strategic goals within the Strategic Plan, including some of the strategic priorities of the Trinity Education Project (see also paragraph 2.24). Although intended for the enhancement of undergraduate education, the MPhil provision also continues to be improved and enhanced through the Trinity Education Project by the quality and variety of additional learning opportunities on offer.

4.5   Teaching and learning have also been enhanced as a result of ISE's regular and thorough consideration and use of student feedback and evaluation, and other information such as feedback from external examiners, and staff and student achievement data. Recently, the Confederal School Review was also designed to support enhancement (see paragraph 2.52). However, while ISE is utilising various mechanisms to evaluate and improve courses, there is currently no formal process whereby all data and key information are brought together in order to consider fully ways in which the quality of student learning

opportunities might be enhanced. This resulted in the recommendation in paragraph 2.51 for ISE to develop further its recently implemented course evaluation process to consider formally a wider range of data and other evidence. The review team **recommends** that, by June 2018, ISE applies quality assurance processes more systematically to identify opportunities for enhancement.

4.6   ISE provision is also aligned to the priority Information Technology Strategy and Online Education Project, which continue to enhance online communications. ISE has developed its use of the VLE, online communications technology, and social media platforms. The increased use of technology-enhanced learning within the teaching environment permits enhancement of the student experience. These developments were acknowledged by students. During the academic year 2015-16, the Academic Registry completed an enhancement programme resulting in a range of measures and service commitments, including the embedding of the Student Information Technology Services software. This provides students with an individual online student record incorporating application, fee payment, registration, timetable, course and module information, and results, thus enhancing and supporting transitions throughout the student life cycle.

4.7   Good practice is shared, both formally and informally, within ISE and across the wider School, Faculty and Trinity. The encouragement of the sharing of good practice in research links directly to the Trinity Strategic Plan. The annual Faculty Quality Report, introduced in 2014, serves as a vehicle for the formal sharing of good practice across Schools. However, it is difficult to disaggregate the contribution of ISE within this process. Trinity has recently started to provide more high-level data reports on student experience and student performance. In some reports, including the Survey of Postgraduate Research Students 2016, it is now possible to disaggregate the data for students at ISE. The main formal mechanism for the sharing of good practice within ISE is staff meetings, held both in Belfast and Dublin. CAPSL activities also bring together staff to share and reflect on practice on a University-wide basis. An example of how this has impacted on the MPhil course at ISE was the opportunity to consider and discuss the assessment of reflective practice, and its resulting impact on the curriculum.

4.8   ISE is taking deliberate steps, in line with the strategic initiatives of Trinity and the Strategic Plan of the Confederal School, to improve the quality of student learning opportunities. However, the review team does recommend that ISE apply quality assurance processes more systematically to identify opportunities for enhancement. Therefore, although the Expectation is met, the level of associated risk is moderate, as, while quality assurance procedures are broadly adequate, there remain some shortcomings in terms of the rigour with which they are applied.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.9   In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The Expectation for this judgement area is met but the associated level of risk is moderate.

4.10   The review team makes one recommendation: to apply quality assurance processes more systematically to identify opportunities for enhancement.

4.11   There are no affirmations or good practice identified in this judgement area.

4.12   The moderate risk in the enhancement of student learning opportunities refers to some shortcomings in terms of the rigour with which quality assurance procedures are applied.

4.13   The review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at ISE **meets** UK expectations.

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

e-learning
See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or **e-learning**)
Learning that is delivered or supported through the use of technology.

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

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

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