



# Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of London School of Business and Management Ltd

October 2015

## Contents

<b>About this review .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Key findings.....</b>	<b>2</b>
QAA's judgements about London School of Business and Management Ltd .....	2
Good practice .....	2
Recommendations.....	2
Affirmation of action being taken.....	2
Theme: Digital Literacy .....	3
Financial sustainability, management and governance.....	3
<b>About London School of Business and Management Ltd.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Explanation of the findings about London School of Business and Management Ltd.....</b>	<b>5</b>
1 The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations .....	6
2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities.....	19
3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities .....	42
4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities .....	45
5 Commentary on the Theme: Digital Literacy .....	48
<b>Glossary.....</b>	<b>50</b>

## About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at London School of Business and Management Ltd. The review took place from 13 to 15 October 2015 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Glenn Barr
- Dr Janthia Taylor
- Miss Mishal Saeed (student reviewer).

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

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

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

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

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

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 5.

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

---

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

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

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

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

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about London School of Business and Management Ltd

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at London School of Business and Management Ltd.

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities is **commended**.

### Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at London School of Business and Management Ltd:

- the strong governance framework that goes beyond the requirements placed on the School by its awarding bodies and organisations (Expectation A2)
- the clear strategy and extensive support for improving teaching and learning (Expectation B3)
- the wide range of effective support mechanisms that enable students to develop their academic and personal potential (Expectation B4)
- the effective and full integration of the annual monitoring process into corporate governance and the annual resource planning cycle (Expectation B8)
- the strong strategic approach to enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, which is embedded in organisational structures and processes (Enhancement).

### Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to London School of Business and Management Ltd.

By September 2016:

- fully consult students when developing key strategic and management initiatives that impact on the quality of learning opportunities (Expectation B5)
- clarify the processes for making complaints and appeals in order to more effectively communicate these to staff and students (Expectation B9)
- clearly articulate the difference between placement learning opportunities that contribute to the assessment of learning outcomes and those that are intended to enhance employability (Expectation B10).

### Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms** the following actions that the London School of Business and Management Ltd is already taking to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to its students.

- The steps being taken to improve the oversight of equality, diversity and inclusiveness (Expectation B4).
- The steps being taken to improve the consistency and quality of feedback on assessed work (Expectation B6).

## **Theme: Digital Literacy**

The School has a strategic approach to incorporating support for digital literacy and e-learning. This approach is embedded institutionally as core parts of the School's Planning Cycle. Digital literacy is recognised and supported by senior managers and academics through the School's strategic focus and by its commitment to an effective digital infrastructure. The provider has a reliable IT infrastructure that supports teaching and learning. Students are supported in the development of digital literacy from pre-entry, where computing skills form part of the academic skills assessment, through all stages of their course. Effective use of the virtual learning environment (VLE) by staff is encouraged, supported and rewarded.

## **Financial sustainability, management and governance**

There were no material issues identified at London School of Business and Management Ltd during the financial sustainability, management and governance check.

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

## **About London School of Business and Management Ltd**

London School of Business and Management Ltd (the School) was established as a higher education institution in 2002. The School's mission is to 'Build rewarding careers for our students and our staff. Transform our students' lives through the provision of a high quality educational experience within an academic community, which promotes learning and personal development. Raise the aspirations of our students to become independent and critical learners, to achieve their full potential and to make valuable contributions to society. Raise the aspirations of our staff by developing, supporting and empowering them to deliver excellent teaching, research and scholarship, student support and service provision. Enhance our learning and working environment through the application of Servant Leadership principles, which promote kindness, ethical rigour, creativity and accountability'.

The School is led by the Academic Principal, who is also the Managing Director. The Board of Directors comprises the Managing Director and two non-executive directors.

The School occupies accommodation in central London and has a partnership with Birkbeck College, University of London to provide teaching facilities. All of the School's teaching takes place within Birkbeck College. Students have access to Birkbeck College's library (including borrowing rights), and computer facilities (including wireless access).

The School delivers full-time UK higher education courses in business, computing and law at undergraduate and postgraduate level. Computing courses are in the process of being withdrawn. Accounting and finance courses are being introduced in 2015-16.

The total number of full-time students for 2014-15 was 1,139, of which 944 were undertaking Higher National Diplomas (HNDs); the remaining 195 are enrolled on undergraduate degree courses. There are currently no part-time or postgraduate students.

Staffing during the same period consisted of a total 31.0 full-time equivalent (FTE) permanent academic staff (including sessional lecturers) This included 6.0 FTE academic leadership posts, 4.5 FTE senior academics (for example course leaders), 5.5 full-time or fractional lecturer posts and 15.0 FTE sessional (hourly paid) lecturers. Excluding sessional lecturers, the total permanent academic headcount is 36.

The School's awarding body for degree courses is the University of Northampton. Pearson UK is the awarding organisation for non-degree courses.

Since November 2011 undergraduate courses have been specifically designated by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills for funding through the Student Loans Company (SLC). This enables UK and EU undergraduate students to apply for tuition fee loans and maintenance loans and grants through the SLC.

The School is a subscriber institution of the Higher Education Academy, a member of UCAS and a member of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.

The School had a Review for Educational Oversight (REO) in May 2012. A subsequent annual monitoring visit took place in June 2014. The major change since the last review has been the change in awarding bodies, which was driven by the School's change in strategic direction. The new strategy requires a move away from HND ,followed by top-up degrees towards the provision of full undergraduate degrees. In pursuance of this strategy the School changed its awarding bodies in 2014-15 from Cardiff Metropolitan University and the University of South Wales, to the University of Northampton. All of the programmes awarded by the former awarding bodies have been taught out and closed.

Challenges faced by the School are both external and internal. Externally, the changing political context of higher education provision resulted in the School having to slow the implementation of its strategy for growth and development. Internally, the School has adopted a corporate culture of Servant Leadership, with the mission being to raise awareness of the need to serve and create a culture of integrity. The School has been engaged in embedding the principles of Servant Leadership, which are to: serve people, help people grow, exercise foresight and care about everyone the School touches.

The annual monitoring visit in June 2014 concluded that the School was making commendable progress with the implementation of the REO action plan from 2012. This progress has continued, in that all recommendations had been appropriately addressed. The School has also continued to build on the good practice identified in the previous review report.

## Explanation of the findings about London School of Business and Management Ltd

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

# 1 The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations

**Expectation (A1):** In order to secure threshold academic standards, degree-awarding bodies:

**a) ensure that the requirements of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* are met by:**

- positioning their qualifications at the appropriate level of the relevant framework for higher education qualifications
- ensuring that programme learning outcomes align with the relevant qualification descriptor in the relevant framework for higher education qualifications
- naming qualifications in accordance with the titling conventions specified in the frameworks for higher education qualifications
- awarding qualifications to mark the achievement of positively defined programme learning outcomes

**b) consider and take account of QAA's guidance on qualification characteristics**

**c) where they award UK credit, assign credit values and design programmes that align with the specifications of the relevant national credit framework**

**d) consider and take account of relevant Subject Benchmark Statements.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A1: UK and European Reference Points for Academic Standards**

## Findings

1.1 The School's higher education provision maps against external benchmarks including *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), and the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF), through the awarding body (University of Northampton) and awarding organisation (Pearson). Partnership agreements indicate that the awarding body and organisation are responsible for ensuring that qualifications align with national expectations. The School's Bachelor of Laws programme also conforms to the standards of the Solicitors Regulation Authority and the Bar Standards Board, through the University of Northampton validation.

1.2 The School franchises programmes from the University of Northampton that are identical to those run at the University. It is the University's responsibility to ensure the positioning of programmes at the appropriate level of the FHEQ and alignment with relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. It is Pearson's responsibility to ensure that the School's HND provision meets national expectations. The School is responsible for maintaining the academic standards set by its partner institutions. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.3 Agreements between the School and its awarding body and organisation provided documentary evidence, which was corroborated during meetings with the Academic

Principal and Managing Director, and with senior staff. Meetings with teaching staff and students confirmed that knowledge of academic levels and qualification frameworks was widespread within the School.

1.4 The School relies on its awarding body and organisation to provide assurance that it meets the required academic standards. However, the School has developed its own procedures for validation to ensure that programmes address relevant national benchmarks, are at the appropriate level, and cover all learning outcomes. Programme and module specifications are detailed and informative, establishing the programme within the appropriate national qualification frameworks.

1.5 External examiners' reports confirm the maintenance of academic standards at appropriate qualification levels with alignment to Subject Benchmark Statements. The review team saw evidence that staff and students were confident in using benchmarks, qualification levels and frameworks.

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

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



**Expectation (A2.1): In order to secure their academic standards, degree-awarding bodies establish transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern how they award academic credit and qualifications.**

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

**Findings**

1.7 The School is required to adhere to the academic governance arrangements and regulations of its awarding body and organisation, which are set out in the partnership agreements. The agreements indicate that the School has delegated responsibilities from its awarding body and organisation to undertake assessment activities that contribute to the award of academic credit and qualifications. In the case of Pearson programmes the School writes the assessments, whereas for University of Northampton programmes, the School delivers university assessments. The programme approval processes establish the academic frameworks and regulations within which the School operates. The School has its own academic regulations to supplement those of the awarding body and organisation. For example, regulations on submission of assessment and for mitigation arrangements apply as permitted under the Pearson agreement.

1.8 The School has academic governance arrangements and policies to enable it to meet the requirements of its partners. There is a formal committee structure comprising course committees, which report to the School Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC), and the Senior Management and Leadership Team. These in turn report to the Academic Committee, and ultimately to the Board of Directors. The School's arrangements are subject to regular scrutiny by the awarding body and organisation through the operation of assessment boards and the work of external examiners.

1.9 The design of these processes would allow the Expectation to be met. The documents outlining academic partnerships and arrangements are clearly written and accessible. Academic governance frameworks are comprehensive.

1.10 The review team scrutinised the partnership agreements, and the School committee terms of reference and minutes, to check the operation of academic governance arrangements. Programme specifications and assessment regulations confirmed the appropriate use of assessment frameworks. External examiners' reports and the School's implementation of actions arising from these reports were scrutinised. The team met staff to confirm their understanding of the academic framework and assessment regulations. External examiners' reports confirm that the School meets the requirements of its awarding body for the conduct of assessment and action in response to the recommendations of external examiners. The academic governance framework that the School has established is working effectively, with clear committee minutes demonstrating due consideration of issues and referral in line with their terms of reference.

1.11 The School includes external academic representatives on its Academic Board to provide external assurance of academic standards. The School further strengthened its use of external representation by including a representative from the University of Northampton on its QAEC from September 2015. In establishing a comprehensive academic governance framework with external representation the School has gone beyond the requirements of its awarding body and organisations as set out in the respective agreements. The robust operation of the framework provides strong assurance of the maintenance of academic standards. The review team considers the strong governance

framework that goes beyond the requirements placed on the School by its awarding body and organisation to be **good practice**.

1.12 The review team found that the comprehensive governance and robust management procedures at the School are 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 (A2.2): Degree-awarding bodies maintain a definitive record of each programme and qualification that they approve (and of subsequent changes to it) which constitutes the reference point for delivery and assessment of the programme, its monitoring and review, and for the provision of records of study to students and alumni.**

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

**Findings**

1.13 Definitive documents for the University of Northampton programmes are the responsibility of the University, whereas the School has responsibility for producing contextualised programme specifications for Pearson programmes based on an agreed selection of units from the Pearson standard list. The School is responsible for making the elements of the definitive records available to students and ensuring they are used as a reference point for the delivery of courses, including assessment. This is achieved primarily by the provision of a student induction programme, course handbooks and a Student Guide.

1.14 The School has an internal process for evaluating proposed modifications to the validator's Designate Modules, beginning at course committee level and then progressing to the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC) (for minor modifications) or the Academic Committee (for major modifications). If internal approval is given, the University's approval of a change to the Award Map is sought. The course approval process makes provision for changes to be made in light of annual monitoring recommendations. The awarding body has assessed the working relationship with the School to be effective during its first year. This has provided a sufficient level of confidence for the awarding body to approve the delivery of additional degrees during 2015-16. The processes and procedures for the maintenance of definitive programme records would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.15 In reaching its conclusions about the Expectation the review team reviewed the partnership agreements, definitive course documents, course handbooks and minutes of relevant meetings. To evaluate the effectiveness of procedures, meetings were held with senior staff, teaching staff and students.

1.16 Course handbooks represent a key vehicle for articulating the awarding body and organisation's requirements. Course handbooks are developed by course leaders. Changes to course handbooks have formerly been approved by course leader team meetings, but from 2015-16 this responsibility will transfer to the QAEC.

1.17 The definitive course documents include information about intended learning outcomes, module specifications, credits, assessment details and information about monitoring and review. Students confirmed that they knew how to access information about their course should they need to. Staff the review team met all demonstrated a clear knowledge of the School's responsibilities.

1.18 The School demonstrates compliance with the academic framework and regulations of the degree-awarding body and organisation. However, the School goes beyond compliance, engaging as it does in continuous improvement, which prompts minor or major changes to the validated course.

1.19 The School ensures that the definitive course records are used to guide the delivery of programmes, and students are made aware of the content through appropriate

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

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

**Findings**

1.20 The School operates programmes subject to franchise agreements with the University of Northampton and validation agreements with Pearson. These awarding partners are therefore responsible for course approval processes, and for confirming that programmes meet the qualification descriptors and threshold standards of the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements.

1.21 The overall responsibility for programme and module approval rests with the awarding body or organisation, but the School has an overarching committee and policy framework, including its own internal validation process, that would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.22 The review team scrutinised course approval documentation and processes. It also looked at reports produced to review the validity of assessments and met staff operating at all levels of the School, including those involved with delivery, course design and review, and sought the views of current students.

1.23 Although the awarding body and organisation have the final authority, the School has its own course approval and modification procedures. These are overseen by the Academic Committee, which may give final approval or establish a separate course approval panel to report back with recommendations. The detailed internal process includes consideration of academic themes, marketing and resources.

1.24 Subject to awarding body and organisation approval, proposed modifications are recorded on a template requiring a rationale, clarification as to the category of modification (major/minor) and consideration of additional resource requirements.

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

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

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.26 Given that School provision is approved by either the University of Northampton or Pearson, responsibility for assessments and the award of credit varies accordingly. The School's principles of assessment are contained in the Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Research Strategy, and Assessment Methodology and Procedures Policy, and these guide staff in the operation of assessment processes. The awarding body or organisation ensure that student achievement of learning outcomes receives academic credit through moderation, external examination and the operation of boards of examiners. Through its articulation of these processes the School ensures that credit and qualifications are only awarded where the achievement of relevant learning outcomes has been demonstrated through assessment and that UK threshold standards are maintained.

1.27 In the case of University of Northampton degree courses the assessment instrument is determined by the University. In these instances, the School is responsible for first marking only (with the validator providing moderation of this marking). In the case of Pearson HNDs, the School has responsibility for selecting the assessment instruments and creating and marking assessment briefs. The School is committed to supporting students with learning difficulties and to making reasonable adjustments where appropriate, although this provision is not documented in the Assessment Methodology and Procedures Policy.

1.28 The design of the policy and procedures for assessment would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.29 The review team tested the application of assessment procedures by scrutinising a range of external examiner reports, assessment documents and policies, and student feedback. The team also met students and staff involved in assessment practice.

1.30 The School aims to ensure that students are made aware of what constitutes good academic practice, with particular attention given to plagiarism and its avoidance with the support of plagiarism-detection software.

1.31 The School's feedback and review mechanisms are sufficiently robust to enable it to respond promptly to issues that may be raised about assessment, as evidenced by the School's comprehensive response to a Pearson Standards Verifier's issues about marking standardisation. This resulted in a significant programme of assessment development and good practice, evidencing that the School's processes are resilient and responsive.

1.32 External examiners confirm that credit is awarded for the achievement of learning outcomes in line with UK and awarding body standards.

1.33 Students confirmed that tutors made them aware of learning outcomes and assessment criteria, and that these are clearly set out in the course handbooks. They also

noted that they are able to provide feedback on modules through student module evaluation questionnaires. Staff gave examples of students who had been supported through reasonable adjustments, and described the process for internal verification of assignments and marking standardisation.

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

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

**Expectation (A3.3): Degree-awarding bodies ensure that processes for the monitoring and review of programmes are implemented which explicitly address whether the UK threshold academic standards are achieved and whether the academic standards required by the individual degree-awarding body are being maintained.**

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

## **Findings**

1.35 The School follows the processes for monitoring and review established by its awarding body and organisation. Pearson programmes are reviewed by the external Standards Verifier. The School is responsible for providing monitoring and review information to enable the University of Northampton partnership manager to produce an annual report. This in turn feeds into the University of Northampton's rolling action plan meeting. However, the School has recently developed its own annual monitoring process based on a template, which is completed by each course team. This culminates in a School overview Annual Monitoring and Evaluation Report (AMER), which applies to all programmes.

1.36 The School's process for monitoring and review of programmes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.37 The review team considered the policy for annual monitoring, read examples of AMERs, as well as the School overview AMER, and explored these further with staff and students.

1.38 The AMER facilitates an integrative approach to planning and improvement in that it is an essential part of the School's Corporate Governance Framework and therefore has the potential to impact on both academic and corporate planning decisions. Staff confirmed that the School takes responsibility for maintaining strategic oversight of the processes for, and outcomes of, course monitoring. The AMER system informs departmental business and improvement planning, staff appraisal and staff development. It is articulated through the School's committee structure, with the overview AMER being received by the Senior Management and Leadership Team.

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

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



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

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

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

**Findings**

1.40 The responsibility for engaging external and independent expertise primarily lies with the awarding body and organisation, who engage external members to contribute to validation processes and appoint external examiners to oversee the maintenance of their academic standards. The School has internal processes for working with external examiners and using their reports in its annual review, and in monitoring the actions arising from external examiner reports.

1.41 The School recognises the value of external expertise in informing its activities and maintaining academic standards. Membership of the Academic Committee includes two external academic experts, and a representative from the awarding body sits on the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC). Through these processes the School assures that academic standards and academic quality are consistent with national standards and frameworks.

1.42 The School engages with professional bodies when designing programmes and running programmes with professional accreditation. It does not currently engage with local employer groups.

1.43 External expertise informs academic management. Processes for the validation of programmes include external and independent expertise. The external examiner system provides external scrutiny of the award of credit and the academic standards of awards. The School's processes for monitoring of actions arising from external examiners' reports are effective. These arrangements allow the Expectation to be met.

1.44 Scrutiny of the validation records, external examiners' reports, annual monitoring reports and committee minutes provided documentary evidence to test the Expectation. In meetings with senior staff and teaching staff the review team also discussed the involvement of independent external expertise and actions taken in response to external examiners' reports.

1.45 External examiners' reports confirm that programmes meet the required academic standards at the appropriate qualification levels. The external examiners' reports are being used systematically in annual review and monitoring processes, with action plans created by course teams considered and monitored through the committee system. The School's action in response to the external examiners' report for the Pearson HND in Business in 2014 illustrates the effectiveness of the process.

1.46 The School's engagement with external expertise in academic management through membership of the Academic Committee and the QAEC demonstrates its commitment to maintaining academic standards. The School engages with external bodies such as the Solicitors' Regulation Authority and the Bar Standards Board to assure the standards of its awards receiving external accreditation.

1.47 Overall, the review team found that the School uses independent and external expertise in the maintenance of academic standards. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

## The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations: Summary of findings

1.48 In reaching its judgement the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.49 All of the Expectations for this judgement area were met and the associated levels of risk were low. In all aspects of this judgement area the School complies with the requirements of its degree-awarding body and awarding organisation. There are no recommendations for this judgement area. An example of good practice is identified.

1.50 The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding body and/or other awarding organisations at the School **meets** UK expectations.

## 2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.1 For Pearson qualifications, programme design, assessment strategy and evaluation are the responsibility of the School. For University of Northampton qualifications, the University is responsible for the design, approval and evaluation of the franchised programmes delivered by the School. The addition of more courses to the portfolio is agreed through a formal approval event convened by the University. This is preceded by the School's own internal approval process for evaluating the market and resource implications of potential programmes. Approval documents are presented to the Academic Committee for agreement prior to seeking external validation. The School is in the process of replacing its HNDs with degree courses. The University of Northampton has formally agreed that the School can develop its own provision that will be validated by the University.

2.2 The course approval and modification process outlines the role of the committee structures in designing new provision, sets out the approval criteria and provides templates for course approval, and major changes to a course and minor changes. The School provided an example of the internal course approval process for BA Accounting and Finance, evidencing how the outcomes of the meeting were received at the Academic Committee and how the course was subsequently successfully approved by the University of Northampton (subject to two conditions). It also provided an example of a minor course modification and how this was reported to the Senior Management and Leadership Team, prior to the recent establishment of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee, which is now responsible for minor modifications.

2.3 Externality is achieved through the presence of external members on the Academic Committee and through consultation with employers; professional, statutory and regulatory bodies; and the awarding university. Resource planning for new and existing courses is managed through the School's Annual Planning Cycle and annual resource planning cycle. This is finalised by the end of January in readiness for the next academic year.

2.4 The School manages the design and approval of programmes in accordance with partnership agreements with the University of Northampton and Pearson. Quality processes effectively meet the requirements of the awarding body and organisation, and are aligned with *Chapter B1: Programme Design, Development and Approval*. This would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.5 The review team considered the relevant sections of the self-evaluation document, submitted for this report, and course approval documentation. It also discussed the process with staff and students.

2.6 Staff have a strong awareness of the approval process, including Subject Benchmark Statements and the FHEQ, and the process is implemented effectively.

The School takes the outcomes seriously and responds to conditions and recommendations set by the University of Northampton.

2.7 The student voice is taken into account when designing new programmes. For example, students described how they completed a two-page questionnaire about the proposed new BA (Hons) Business Management course. Feedback has led to a change of proposed course title, a commitment to explore work placements and to seek Chartered Management Institute accreditation.

2.8 Students are also consulted about changes to existing provision. This is achieved partly through student representation on key academic committees, for example the Academic Committee, and partly through course committee representation. Students confirmed that a change required by the University of Northampton involving the replacement of a module was communicated through induction and the course handbook, and discussed at course committee and the Staff Student Consultation Committee.

2.9 There is a strategy for managing courses that are to be withdrawn, for example the HND Computing. This is based on the principle that there will be no change to teaching approach and support.

2.10 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**

2.11 The School is responsible for the recruitment of its students for both Pearson and University of Northampton awards, and although it has to apply the admissions criteria of its academic partners, it can nevertheless articulate its own policy. This has been informed by Supporting Professionalism in Admissions principles, and is subject to an annual review. The policy is coherently articulated and is conducive to promoting equality, diversity and fairness. The School provides fair access to applicants from non-traditional routes, which is in accordance with its commitment to widening participation. There is adequate support for disabled students, for example supporting students in making Disabled Students' Allowance applications. There is appropriate English language testing for international students and these along with additional requirements are clearly articulated. The design of these processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.12 The review team tested the Expectation by examining the School's policies and procedures, and reading the information provided to students at the pre-admissions stage. The implementation of procedures was evaluated through meetings with staff from the School and with students.

2.13 The School's Business and Improvement Plan includes improving student recruitment and admissions, stressing the increase of student numbers, brand strengthening and improvement of the experience of mature learners. Applications are judged on their academic merit and on the applicant's potential ability to meet the requirements of the course. The School has additional options for students who may not meet fully the criteria with respect to certificated learning. This includes a skills assessment and also an interview, which intends to test and ensure students' capability of successfully completing the programme. Applicants with relevant prior experiential learning experience have, since 2014-15, been considered on the basis of a combined score from skills-based assessment and interview. The School recently (in 2014-15) separated recruitment activities from the admissions function. The complaints process, which prompts a response from the Academic Registrar within 21 days, is made accessible to applicants. Support is provided through the recruitment process by student ambassadors.

2.14 The University's policies and procedures for the admission of students are clear and explicit to applicants, and fairly and consistently applied. In line with its widening participation commitment, the School admits a large number of students through Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning. For example, 153 out of 217 HND students were admitted in 2014-15 without level 3 qualifications. However, despite adopting a rigorous approach to screening the potential of applicants from non-traditional backgrounds, by October 2015 only 52 per cent of this HND Business cohort had progressed to the next level. The figure was, however, expected to improve once resit results were available. A positive measure the School piloted with the March 2015 cohort has since been introduced to mitigate the above. This is the establishment of a compulsory pre-sessional academic skills programme for HND students who lack a level 3 qualification. Students whose English language skills are poor are required to contact the Centre for Academic Support and Enhancement (CASE) by the fourth week of their course and are monitored by the director of

CASE. Retention and progression rates on some courses, for example HND Computing, are low, although there is no evidence that suggests this is linked to the admissions process.

2.15 The review team found that the School's recruitment, selection and admissions process works effectively in practice. The School promotes its widening participation agenda by providing applicants from diverse backgrounds and non-traditional routes fair access to its programmes. 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**

2.16 The School mission, vision and values, and corporate goals - to provide students with a transformational and high quality educational experience; to foster independent and critical learning; and to empower staff to achieve excellence in teaching, research and scholarship - establish a clear strategic direction for teaching and learning. The Academic Strategy provides the overall framework for teaching and learning within the School, with clear goals linked to the Quality Code and FHEQ. A draft Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Research Strategy provides detail to the School approach. Responsibility for the policy rests with the Senior Management and Leadership Team, and Senior Academic Leadership Team. This policy includes the School's approach to staff development, research and scholarship, resources, progression and working in partnership with students. The policy sets clear and measurable targets for achievement of the goals. The e-Learning Strategy complements the Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Research Strategy, with the Servant Leadership initiative providing an overarching philosophy for enhancement of the student teaching and learning experience.

2.17 Good practice in learning and teaching is identified in teaching observations and disseminated via the Teaching and Learning Forum. School targets include having all members of teaching staff as members of the Higher Education Academy to the minimum level of Fellow. The School Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) supports teaching staff in their development. An annual staff development conference provides a focus for staff development initiatives, this year focused on Servant Leadership. The School aims to support research and scholarship by staff and students to underpin excellence in teaching and high student achievement. A programme of skills development sessions and financial allocations to staff for external development complete the comprehensive approach to supporting teaching and learning.

2.18 Questionnaires, Student and Staff Consultative Committee meetings, and course committees allow the articulation of student views on their teaching experience. Students can support each other's learning through the Peer Assisted Learning Scheme, introduced in September 2015.

2.19 The School reviews the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices systematically and disseminates documentation to staff, students and other stakeholders. These processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.20 Meetings held with senior staff, students and teaching staff confirmed the implementation of the processes outlined in the documentation. The review team examined records of teaching observations, records of annual conferences and a wide range of policy documents, plans and committee minutes.

2.21 The Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Research Strategy is thorough, detailed and firmly linked to the School mission, values and overall strategy. The principles of Servant Leadership provide an enhancement theme, which particularly supports the achievement of this Expectation. The annual conference provides a focus for staff



development, and in particular the dissemination and implementation of the Servant Leadership initiative. The annual conference provides relevant and ongoing continuing professional development, with the inclusion of student poster sessions in the 2015 conference providing a valuable opportunity for students and staff to share in mutual development. Generous funding underpins the School approach to staff development, with funding at institutional, divisional and individual level, including funds for team coherence as well as academic, pedagogical and skills development.

2.22 A School priority for staff development includes a target for the achievement of UK Professional Standards Framework fellowships for all teaching staff through membership of the Higher Education Academy. In addition, staff attend workshops to maintain their knowledge of School policies and processes, and of e-learning resources and methods. Monitoring of staff development is thorough and linked to personal development.

2.23 Peer and managed observation processes for observing teaching are comprehensive. Records of teaching observations are detailed and supportive. The annual evaluation of peer observations provides examples for sharing good practice, and enhancing collegiate support and professional engagement. The managed observation scheme is clear and the revised process shows that all observers undertake training in order to standardise observations. Management observers of teaching provided the review team with an example of how the School had effectively supported underperformance by a member of the teaching staff, an issue identified by the Student Academic Representative process.

2.24 The CETL supports and enhances teaching. It supports staff in their applications to the Higher Education Academy. Through the Teaching and Learning Forum it hosts discussions and improvements, for example leading to more focused examination of the respective functions of lecture and seminar activities. The CETL is also central to the implementation of the Servant Leadership initiative through teaching and learning, including its ethical dimension.

2.25 The e-Learning Strategy is detailed and comprehensive based on the premise that learning is a priority and not technology. One of the three operational domains of the policy is 'teaching philosophy and pedagogy' providing a clear focus for improving teaching through e-learning. The e-Learning Strategy supports staff to improve their teaching and enhance student learning through a broad range of staff development sessions and guides.

2.26 The School reviews the effectiveness of its procedures relating to teaching and learning, for example the Academic Committee agreed to improvements in the peer observation process to more clearly identify development issues and to provide an overview of outcomes for the Teaching and Learning Forum.

2.27 A range of informal meetings support the formal structures, allowing the development of ideas and the sharing of good practice. The Teaching and Learning Forum and course leader meetings are informal and not minuted in order to maintain the free interaction of ideas. Although forming part of the informal structure, the School minutes the meetings of the e-learning group because it establishes actions requiring communication and monitoring.

2.28 The review team considers the clear strategy and extensive support for improving teaching and learning to be **good practice**.

2.29 School objectives include developing students as independent learners through progression from a taught approach to independent learning. The implementation and benefit of this approach is confirmed by students.

2.30 The School has a range of effective processes in place to monitor student satisfaction with learning and teaching and their overall experience. Students complete module evaluations, which feed into course Annual Monitoring and Evaluation Reports (AMERs), and also surveys on e-learning and student support. Improvements made as a result of student surveys are providing additional help with the maths aspects of accounting and changing an unsuitable classroom. Recent improvements to the AMER template require staff to use data to analyse and improve student use of the VLE.

2.31 Detailed School policies have clear targets and themes, and systems of observation of teaching and support for staff are thorough. Overall, the School has comprehensive processes in place that review, monitor and improve learning opportunities, enabling students to develop into independent learners. 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**

2.32 School processes for supporting student learning are extensive. The Annual Planning Cycle, Business and Improvement Plans (BIPs), and devolved budgets ensure that sufficient and appropriate resources support student learning. Prior to running a programme, internal validation processes include an assessment of resource needs subsequently considered in the overall budgetary process.

2.33 The School ensures that premises are of high quality through a leasing agreement with Birkbeck College, which also provides students access to Birkbeck library and computers. Students on University of Northampton programmes also have access to the University of Northampton library facilities and electronic resources. Two VLEs support student learning: a School VLE to support Pearson programmes and one for the University of Northampton. The School e-Learning Strategy aims to increase the efficacy of the VLE in supporting learning, including the use of packages designed to help staff optimise their VLE sites and data to monitor usage.

2.34 A wide range of human resources also supports student learning. The Centre for Academic Support and Enhancement (CASE) staff provide advice and guidance prior to, and during, study, including academic skills development sessions. The Student Admissions and Success (SAS) division and personal tutors provide careers support, and a Student Employability Coordinator posts relevant job vacancies on the School website, which has a career development section offering opportunities to develop students' employability. The SAS division coordinates the support of both academic and professional services and also oversees the task of ensuring students' engagement with their course. Students are allocated a tutor from the SAS division at the admissions stage, and their academic retention and progression is monitored throughout their study, a retention strategy informing the process. A full-time Disability Coordinator, and an Equality and Diversity Policy complement the support processes.

2.35 The committee structure, notably the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee, and Academic Committee - and working groups such as the Teaching and Learning Forum and course leader meetings - provide opportunities for the School to monitor and evaluate arrangements for student development and achievement.

2.36 There are sufficient structures and processes in place to facilitate the monitoring, evaluation and improvement of students' development throughout their studies, which would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.37 Policy documents, corporate structures, and BIPs provided evidence of the framework for student support, and minutes of meetings provided evidence of the extent of planning and monitoring of student development. Meetings with senior staff, academic staff, support staff and students allowed the review team to test the operation of the processes. The student submission for this report provided written corroborating evidence.

2.38 The School has processes that strategically monitor and evaluate learning opportunities for students. The Annual Planning Cycle plays a key role in measuring the effectiveness of arrangements and resources, enabling student development and

achievement. The effective operation of the committee structure provides constant monitoring and supervision of the structures and processes delivering student support.

2.39 Internal validation processes ensure the availability of sufficient resources to run a programme. For example, prior to the introduction and validation of the Bachelor of Laws programme the School appointed appropriately qualified staff.

2.40 Students view the facilities at Birkbeck College as high quality, with good access to library and computing resources. Electronic library access from the University of Northampton supplements the provision, praised by students as positively supporting their studies. Students appreciate the content and ease of use of the VLEs. Students can access all learning platforms from a single website page with a single login, and can access their attendance and progress records as well as learning resources. Students receive a free e-book for each module of their study, and the School has responded to student views, making the format of the e-books more accessible. Students receive a useful induction to the electronic resources and can subsequently access help desk staff.

2.41 The School supports students well, with effective monitoring of student performance to enhance student support where appropriate. For example, additional classes in numeracy and academic skills were authorised by the Academic Committee, and the Senior Management and Leadership Team, arising from the HND Business course committee, and a Staff Student Consultation Committee meeting. Students confirm effective support for academic skills, such as referencing and the avoidance of plagiarism. Students recognise that support by CASE has a beneficial effect on their learning and achievement. CASE responds effectively to requests from the student body, for example the Student Academic Representative (STAR) attending the Bachelor of Laws course committee asked for, and received, more tailored support for the group. The STAR system allows effective articulation of student views and for prompt communication of the resolution of any issues. For example, students raised issues about a member of staff's approach to teaching and about some of the information provided for overseas students, both of which were resolved to their satisfaction and communicated through the STARS.

2.42 The student intake includes many who gained entry with prior experiential learning or prior certificated learning. The School has identified and refined its admissions procedures to ensure that students recruited are likely to succeed in their chosen studies. Targeted support provides for students from a less traditional academic background to improve their chances of successful completion. The Student Success Strategy aims to maximise student achievement, with actions following the student journey from pre-admission, induction, teaching and learning, a high level of personal contact and engagement of students. The School has three entry points during the year and students receive the same induction and support irrespective of when they start. Students praised the personal approach of the induction programme. A post-induction questionnaire monitors the effectiveness of the induction programme. The Student Success Strategy also includes the use of data to target support through early detection. The compulsory student development module, recognised by the previous review as good practice, provides useful early support for students' studies. Rates of achievement, retention and completion have shown improvement. Retention and achievement rates are high on degree courses, for example, the BSc Computing top-up 2015 achieving 100 per cent retention and 100 per cent achievement, and figures for the Bachelor of Laws year 1 and BA Business Studies year 1 retention and achievement over 90 per cent.

2.43 Tutors monitor student progress electronically for both Pearson and University of Northampton programmes. The SAS division monitors student attendance, retention, achievement and use of the VLE. CASE provides support either as interventions or referrals, for example in providing further English language support and conversation classes.

A peer-assisted learning scheme designed to allow students to share learning is in the early stages of implementation. The School has accredited trainers for the process introduced to students in September 2015.

2.44 The School offers extensive support for student progression. A student success adviser supports the employability agenda with one-to-one CV advice, plus e-mail and online information about job opportunities. The website has a careers section and the School provides joint careers workshops with the University of Northampton. School priorities include developing students beyond the expectations of their programme outcomes. For example, the School's e-learning programme seeks to provide students with digital literacy skills for use outside of the curriculum and to improve employment potential. The Servant Leadership initiative seeks to engage with the Higher Education Academy's call for students to develop ethically with a culture of integrity.

2.45 The review team considers the wide range of effective support mechanisms that enable students to develop their academic and personal potential to be **good practice**.

2.46 Support provided for disabled students is strong and effective, with the School being proactive in securing speedy disability assessments. A designated member of staff supports and guides disability processes. Responsibility for equality, diversity and inclusiveness rests with the Senior Management and Leadership Team, which recognised the need to strengthen its policies and arrangements for monitoring equality and diversity to ensure that they are effective in supporting students. A review of the policies and protocols took place in August of 2015, and a recently established Equality and Diversity Working Group has clear terms of reference. The review team **affirms** the steps being taken to improve the oversight of equality, diversity and inclusiveness.

2.47 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**

2.48 The School emphasises its approach to student engagement through the adoption of a philosophy of Servant Leadership, which has as a principle tenet the requirement to 'engage with each other and our students in an empathetic and inclusive way'. The School's approach is also underpinned by the Corporate Governance Framework that has as one of its principles that 'Students should be recognised as members of the Institution (rather than merely customers of the company) and their views should be effectively represented and acted upon'.

2.49 Students are engaged using a variety of modes, including student representation organised through the Student Academic Representative (STAR) system. Representation occurs at all levels of the committee structure except in the case of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC). This includes the Academic Committee, course committees and the Staff Student Consultation Committee (SSCC). Students also complete surveys and module evaluations; as the School is a relatively small institution there is also some reliance placed on informal approaches to student engagement.

2.50 The processes for engaging students and the system of student representation would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.51 The Expectation has been tested by evaluating relevant committee minutes, such as those from the senior committees, course committees and the SSCC. The review team also met staff and students in order to understand the effectiveness and impact of student engagement.

2.52 Students are represented on the School's key committees: the Academic Committee, course committees and the SSCC. SSCC minutes are reviewed by the relevant course committee, Senior Management and Leadership Team, and the QAEC. The School has various examples of good practice with regards to student engagement, in particular at the course level, for example: workshops for STARs, weekly drop-in sessions by the Student Admissions and Success division for STARs, and the introduction of the role of STAR President. There have been several achievements as a result of feedback from students, such as providing academic skills support sessions, improving teaching rooms, and revising the guidance on lecture start times and lateness. Students speak positively about the various support mechanisms available to them and find staff helpful, friendly and approachable.

2.53 Student module evaluation questionnaires offer students the opportunity to feedback on their learning experience. There is an emphasis on resolving issues informally, via the weekly drop-in sessions, and this system has resulted in many positive outcomes. Students that met the review team welcomed the informal approach. The training manual for STARs contains useful general information about how to raise issues but does not provide any significant guidance on how STARs could improve their skills for gathering and collating the views of their fellow students and represent them effectively. Overall, students expressed satisfaction with the STARs system.

2.54 There is a good level of student engagement at course level. It is, however, not readily evident how students are consulted, as full partners in their education, by senior

members of the School with regards to the various institutional level decisions that impact them. For example, there had been no formal consultation or engagement with students on the School's adoption of the Servant Leadership philosophy or on the development of the Student Charter. Students had been kept fully aware of the developments but this is distinct from engagement and consultation. There is also no student representation on the QAEC. The review team was told that the work of the committee was predominantly operational rather than strategic, and a view had been taken that student input was available through other senior committees where the minutes of QAEC were reported, for example the Academic Committee and SSCC. The review team found that there would be a benefit to the School if a degree of strategic level proactive engagement could be achieved similar to that at course level. The review team **recommends** that the School fully consult students when developing key strategic and management initiatives that impact on the quality of learning opportunities.

2.55 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**

2.56 The School is responsible for applying awarding body regulations and assessment procedures to secure valid and reliable assessment outcomes. For Pearson programmes the School sets the assessments, whereas for franchised programmes the University of Northampton sets the assessments. School staff mark assessments, which are subject to internal and external moderation. That this has worked for Pearson and former Cardiff Metropolitan University and University of South Wales programmes was confirmed by external examiners.

2.57 The Assessment Policy is set out in detail in the Assessment Methodology and Procedures document, which takes account of the respective validators' requirements for developing the assessment brief, standardisation, moderation and staff training. Assessment boards consider and confirm final results. Constructive alignment of intended learning outcomes with teaching and assessment is evidenced in module specifications. External examiners confirm the appropriateness of assessment activities and that they meet intended learning outcomes at the appropriate level.

2.58 Informed by the Higher Education Academy's seven principles of good feedback, the Assessment Policy recognises the value of using different formats (for example, written and verbal) reflecting a recognition of differentiated learner preferences. It also stresses the need for timely feedback. Training of assessors, provided by the Internal Quality and Standardisation Team, is also outlined.

2.59 The School surveys student views on assessments and modules, and students are formally, if indirectly, involved in reviewing the assessment process as members of the Academic Committee.

2.60 Accreditation of Prior Certificated Learning (APCL)/Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) details are set out in the Admissions Policy.

2.61 The recent institutional focus on developing a HEA-accredited continuing professional development framework suggests that there is a genuine commitment to raising the level of academic practice.

2.62 The policies and procedures in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.63 The review team explored the implementation of the policies at staff and student meetings, as well as reading assessment documentation and external examiner reports.

2.64 Students said that assessment was fair and that assessment feedback was helpful from most assessors, and was normally available within four weeks. Students clarified that in addition to written feedback they were also able to seek additional face-to-face feedback from tutors. The School has a policy of offering increased formative feedback across all courses. Students confirmed that feedback was sufficiently timely to enable them to improve before the next assessment. Grading criteria are clear and well explained to students,



with clear deadlines given for submission. Students advised that for each module the learning outcomes and assessment criteria are clearly set out.

2.65 Electronic submission of assessments allows effective tracking of submissions and use of plagiarism detection software. Students said that they experience the use of the latter as developmental rather than as a penalty.

2.66 Internal verification and moderation procedures appear thorough. Teaching staff clarified the moderation process in the event that there are marking differences. For University of Northampton programmes moderation is carried out by University of Northampton staff. For Pearson HNDs the markers and internal verification panel meet to discuss the differences.

2.67 A Pearson Standards Verifier report (2014) identified issues about standardisation of marking, which the School resolved. This acted as a stimulus for a substantial programme of development of assessment practice, including an Assessment Methodology and Procedures Policy; a draft Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Research Strategy; staff training with support resources on assessment moderation; plagiarism-detection software; and student support initiatives in connection with this software. The review team **affirms** the steps being taken to improve the consistency and quality of feedback on assessed work.

2.68 Staff confirmed that APCL/APEL is mapped to modules and that a dedicated member of staff manages the process. Students are also interviewed, with the University of Northampton making the final decision. None of those at the student meeting had experienced APCL/APEL and were therefore not able to comment on it.

2.69 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**

2.70 The University of Northampton and Pearson appoint and train external examiners for programmes. The School is not required to respond to Pearson Standards Verifier or Academic Management Review. The School shares responsibility with the University of Northampton for responding to external examiner reports. External examiner reports are formally considered and actioned through the School committee structure, a process managed by the School registrar.

2.71 After initial consideration at course leadership level to address any urgent matters, course committees consider external examiner reports, building relevant actions into the Annual Monitoring and Evaluation Report (AMER). The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC) receives external examiner reports and monitors course committee responses. Although the QAEC has responsibility for managing external examiner responses the Academic Committee also receives and considers the reports as part of AMER overview reports produced in January and August. The QAEC has approved a new form, designed to provide a School response to external examiners.

2.72 Normal practice is for the Pearson Standards Verifier to meet with a selection of students, and Standards Verifier reports are available for students to access on the VLE. Sections of the external examiner reports for University of Northampton, which relate to programmes delivered at the School, are available on the VLE. The School is required to facilitate discussion of the content of University of Northampton external examiner reports with students. Student representatives are able to partake in discussion of external examiner reports as members of the Academic Committee and as part of the AMER process, but they are not members of QAEC.

2.73 The majority of the Indicators for the Expectation are the responsibility of the awarding body and organisation. For those Indicators that apply to the School, the arrangements in place for monitoring, responding to and informing students of the external examiner reports, would allow the School to meet the Expectation.

2.74 The review team tested the School's procedures by scrutiny of external examiners' reports and School overview reports. Annual monitoring reports, minutes of meetings and templates for responding to external examiner reports provided additional evidence. The team met staff to explore the process by which external examiners' reports are considered, and discussed the sharing of reports with students.

2.75 Committee minutes confirm that the School considers external examiner reports in accordance with its procedures. AMERs, the AMER overview reports, the QAEC and Academic Committee minutes demonstrate consideration and actions arising from external examiner reports. The new external examiner response form is approved and in place for the 2015-16 cycle. The School is proactive in requesting external examiner reports relating to School programmes rather than reports also covering University of Northampton programmes.

2.76 The School responded effectively to a Pearson Standards Verifier report in 2014, which required action relating to assessment and marking.

2.77 Students confirm that they are familiar with the role of the external examiner and that they know where to access the relevant reports.

2.78 The review team found that the School has appropriate arrangements in place to make use of, and respond to, external examiners' reports. There is clear monitoring at School level and examples of effective actions taken. 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**

2.79 The overview Annual Monitoring and Evaluation Report (AMER) feeds directly into the Annual Planning Cycle, as part of the School's Corporate Governance Framework. This entails the updating of institutional strategy, and Business and Improvement Plans, in light of annual review. The overview AMER is informed by the AMER from each course. This is articulated through a template and enables course teams to review key aspects of the learning experience and identify areas for development and enhancement. The School's framework covers the key areas of the student journey - admissions, teaching, learning and assessment, student evaluation and retention and progression data, external examiner reports and student feedback - with the aim of reflecting on performance and informing future planning.

2.80 The completed AMERs are received by the relevant course committees for detailed discussion. The AMERs are sent to the Academic Committee and to the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC) to inform overall quality management. They are also referred to the Senior Management and Leadership Team.

2.81 Subsequently, an overview report is compiled. This is also reviewed at course committee level and by the QAEC, Senior Management and Leadership Team, and Academic Committee for action. As a part of the School's Corporate Governance Framework, it contributes to the revision of the institutional Corporate Plan and divisional/departmental strategic plans, and the annual divisional/departmental Business and Improvement Plans (BIPs). In this way, course monitoring feeds into the Annual Planning Cycle and is embedded in institutional process, with the academic BIP progress report provided to the Academic Committee for information. Through this process the School systematically addresses issues requiring attention at course and institutional level and identifies themes for development or enhancement.

2.82 Students play an important role in the monitoring process by completing module questionnaires. Student Academic Representatives are present on all committees except QAEC.

2.83 Although there are no examples of employer input into the review process, external expertise is achieved through the independent members of the Academic Committee.

2.84 Improvements to the AMER process and template have been made, as recorded in the Academic Committee, so that it is more forward looking, and to ensure data provision is more reliable. This illustrates how the School engages in reviewing the efficacy and appropriateness of its review processes.

2.85 The detailed AMER processes described above would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.86 The review team read a range of documents, including the AMER policy and process. Examples of AMERs were considered in detail and their progress tracked through the committee structure and linked with the Annual Planning Cycle.

2.87 The School makes clear provision in the course approval and modifications policy to protect the academic interests of students when a course is closed and through an exit strategy.

2.88 Senior staff confirmed that, as yet, the School does not have in place its own periodic review cycle, as this is undertaken by the University of Northampton. The School does, however, have this matter under discussion in preparation for its intention to deliver its own programmes.

2.89 Staff confirmed a clear understanding of the AMER process and were able to identify examples of its impact, in particular how student feedback resulted in the introduction of a dual qualification in a proposed new degree, the upgrading of e-books from PDF to epub format, and the updating of the VLE to allow e-books to be downloaded onto multiple devices. Other examples include improvement to admissions, academic support intervention and assessment feedback. Students were also aware that the module review questionnaires they complete bring about change. The review team considers the effective and full integration of the annual monitoring process into corporate governance and the annual resource planning cycle to be **good practice**.

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

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

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.91 The School has an internal complaints and appeals procedure, which applies to all students who have a current registration. Depending on the nature of the complaint, in some cases, the complaint may be referred to the appropriate awarding body or organisation. The procedures would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.92 The Expectation was tested by analysing complaints and appeals policies. The review team also met staff and students to evaluate the practical application of the procedures.

2.93 The procedures are clear and explicit, and are made known to students, primarily through the online Quality and Enhancement Manual, and induction, and are straightforward to follow. There is clear specification of the timescale for submitting a complaint or appeal and within which it should be investigated. Staff within the Student Admission and Success (SAS) division provide advice and support to students for both academic appeals and complaints. The Academic Committee, which includes student representation, takes part in developing and approving these policies and procedures. Lessons are learned at the institutional level by reviewing anonymised summaries at institutional committees. Since January 2015, the School has been a member of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator scheme. In line with current Office of the Independent Adjudicator guidelines, much effort is made to resolve complaints/appeals informally. For complaints or appeals concerning courses delivered by the University of Northampton, students are advised to consult with the Registry in the first instance to evaluate whether the matter is for the University or the School's procedures. General advice and support is provided by the SAS division. To date the number of formal complaints has been low, with only two received.

2.94 The School attempts to resolve issues on an informal basis in the first instance. Although this has been viewed positively by students there is the potential for the School to miss developing systemic trends in complaints and consequently to miss the opportunity for early intervention. Records of informal interventions are only kept if the complaint moves into a formal process. The School may wish to consider if there is any benefit to be derived from recording the nature of informal complaints for subsequent analysis.

2.95 Although staff are enthusiastically dedicated to supporting students, there is a lack of clarity about where students might seek impartial advice and guidance if they do not wish to discuss the matter with School staff. Although students studying for awards of the University of Northampton could access an independent and impartial advice service via the University Students' Union, many of the staff met by the review team were unaware of this facility. Furthermore, there appears to be no reference to this impartial advice service in the course handbooks or the Student Guide. Students were also unaware. Although students welcome the School's informal approach to resolve complaints, they also believe that the process for making a formal complaint could be more clearly signposted. The review team **recommends** that the School clarify the processes for making complaints and appeals in order to more effectively communicate these to staff and students.

2.96 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**

2.97 Strategic documents state the School's strong commitment to employability and placement opportunities. The Corporate Plan; Academic Strategy; and Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Research Strategy all state that the School provides 'the opportunity for all students to engage in work-based learning placement.'

2.98 Information for prospective and current students is available on the website, which has a link to the Corporate Plan and an extensive section on UK and overseas placements, internships and the 'Insight' scheme for short-term work shadowing.

2.99 School documents relating to placement are the School placement handbook, employers placement handbook, and Policy for Career Development and Placement Learning. All of these documents are available on the website and included in the Quality and Enhancement Manual.

2.100 The existence of a work placement policy, and student and employer placement handbooks, would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.101 The website sections on placement and internships provided evidence to test the Expectation. Examination of documentation, and clarifications from the School prior to the visit and during meetings, allowed the review team to further test the Expectation.

2.102 Although the School states that it provides an opportunity for all students to engage in work-based learning placement, the only programmes to offer such an opportunity are the HND Business and Bachelor of Laws. No students have chosen the placement module on the HND to date and the Bachelor of Laws module, 'Law in the Community' only becomes available in 2015-16. An appropriate policy and detailed documentation is in place to support and inform students and employers when work placement modules run.

2.103 The School does, however, provide opportunities for students to become involved in external internships and short term corporate Insight Weeks, which do not form part of assessed learning. Student knowledge of placement opportunities is limited and seen as not appropriate for those in employment or for overseas students prohibited from working in the UK. However, students recognise that internships and other opportunities could enhance their employability. The review team **recommends** that the School clearly articulate the difference between placement learning opportunities that contribute to the assessment of learning outcomes and those that are intended to enhance employability.

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

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



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

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

### **Findings**

2.105 The School does not deliver research degree programmes, therefore this Expectation does not apply.

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

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

2.107 All applicable Expectations have been met and the associated level of risk is judged low in each case. There are three recommendations and one affirmation in this judgement area. All of the recommendations and the affirmation relate to minor omissions or oversights, a need to amend or update details in documentation, or completion of activity that is already underway. The associated level of risk in each of these situations is low. Three features of good practice were also identified in three different Expectations.

2.108 The review team concludes that the quality of learning opportunities at the School **meets** UK expectations.

### **3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities**

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

#### **Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision**

##### **Findings**

3.1 The School has outlined information about their mission, values and overall strategy in their Corporate Plan 2015-18. The approval process for the Corporate Plan is set out in the Corporate Governance Framework. It is implemented in the Annual Planning Cycle and in line with the Information Control Procedures. This information is made available to the public via the School's website.

3.2 The School provides information for prospective students primarily through the printed prospectus and its website. The information on the website, which is subject to a rigorous checking process, is accessible and user friendly. Information Control Procedures are also clearly documented and a newly appointed Head of Communications, based in the Registry, has overall responsibility for compliance. The School has recently introduced a version control procedure for documents. The procedures in place would enable the Expectation to be met.

3.3 The review team read a range of information produced by the School and evaluated the Information Control Procedures. Meetings with staff and students confirmed effective implementation of the procedures.

3.4 The VLE serves as the key medium for accessing information for students throughout their studies. Students are also provided with an induction guide, which contains useful information about their course, learning opportunities and the role of relevant departments in the School (including information about fees, facilities and resources, IT and e-learning, and sources of help). This information is also conveyed to students through induction sessions delivered at the start of the year. Course specific information is available in course handbooks. There are procedures in place that ensure accuracy of this information and also ownership of these documents.

3.5 Although the induction guide and new Student Guide contain the standard information, detailed information about academic frameworks and regulations, policies and procedures, such as deferral or interruption of study, are contained in the Quality and Enhancement Manual, which is available on the School website. In the School's student submission, submitted to QAA as part of this review, it is noted that although the Quality and Enhancement Manual is a valuable resource containing all the policies relating to student life at the institution, it 'does not really resonate well with students and ways should be found to engage the students more effectively with this resource'.

3.6 Information about students' learning opportunities is also contained in the Student Success Strategy, which serves to promote retention and success of students. Students have open access to the Student Admissions and Success division, and can drop in during office hours to speak with a member of staff. Two key documents that outline the framework for managing academic standards and quality are the Corporate Governance Framework and the Annual Planning Cycle. Information in these documents is fit for purpose for the intended audiences.

3.7 Students spoke positively about the accuracy of the information provided to them before they applied for their programmes. They also gave positive reviews about the information provided to them outside the induction period. The School has been proactive about compliance with Competition and Markets Authority legislation and guidance. Students occasionally get consulted during the development of marketing material, for example as a result of student feedback the prospectus will now have more details about career prospects. A Student Charter has been developed that pulls together information provided for learners. Much work is being done to make available to students a more personalised record of progress through the e-Learning Strategy.

3.8 For students who have completed their studies, the academic partners of the School issue them with a record of studies, such as award certificates and transcripts. The School also retain records, enabling them to provide students with academic references for students. A Student Management System is used to keep School records of students. Communication with alumni is undertaken primarily via a business social networking site.

3.9 The review team found that information provided by the School is clear, accessible and appropriate for intended audiences. 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

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

3.11 The Expectation for this judgement area is met and the associated level of risk is low. There are no recommendations or affirmations, and no features of good practice were identified. Information is clear, accessible and appropriate for intended audiences. There are effective mechanisms in place that ensure the accuracy, transparency and ownership of this information.

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

## 4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

### Findings

4.1 The School's Corporate Plan, departmental strategic plans, Business and Improvement Plans, and annual staff appraisal are underpinned by the Annual Monitoring and Evaluation Report (AMER) process. These sit within the Corporate Governance Framework along with the Annual Planning Cycle, the Quality and Enhancement Manual (since 2014), and the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC) (since 2015), and provide the basis for informing, planning, implementing, monitoring and reviewing institutional enhancement activities. The role of the student, whether as a member of an organisational committee or as a Student Academic Representative (STAR), is also made clear.

4.2 A series of initiatives focuses systematically on taking deliberate steps towards improvement and enhancement of the student learning experience. For staff, these include a Peer Observation of Teaching Scheme and a Managed Observation of Teaching Scheme. Both schemes are aligned with the dimensions of the UK Professional Standards Framework and form part of the Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Research Strategy 2015-18, designed to improve teaching and learning. Good practice is shared through the AMER and at the Teaching and Learning Forum.

4.3 For students there is the Personal Academic Tutor System designed to enhance the student's personal and academic development. Student views are systematically obtained through surveys, STARs, Staff and Student Consultative Committees, and student membership of the Academic Committee and course committees.

4.4 Other examples of enhancement include: the induction process designed by the Student Admissions and Success (SAS) division to enable students to settle in and develop a sense of connection to the School; a commitment both to seeking student feedback through surveys, for example on induction and support services, and to increasing student engagement in giving feedback, for example offering weekly drop-in sessions to STARs, in addition to formal meetings and improving student commitment to module evaluation questionnaire completion; targeted learning support devised to address identified issues, for example HND Student Development Module; the provision of formalised revision sessions, which arose through the sharing of good practice identified in AMER; and a dissertation proposal and feedback session for BSc Business Computing top-up students, which was later offered to students on other programmes.

4.5 Steps are also being taken to identify good practice on an annual basis, for example there is a staff prize for the best module pages on the VLE; there is a monthly Teaching and Learning Forum, the latter being used for the internal dissemination of good practice. At the invitation of the QAA, and in conjunction with the Director of Accent International Consortium for Academic Programs Abroad, the School shared its work on exploring effective student feedback.

4.6 What makes these initiatives stand out is the way in which their existence has arisen through systematically identified needs expressed in different forms of feedback brought together in annual monitoring and evaluation.

4.7 The process-based design of the Corporate Governance Framework in which the Annual Planning Cycle and AMER reports are embedded meets the Expectation, affording an extensive range of examples of deliberate steps taken at institutional level to improve the student experience.

4.8 The review team considered a range of documentary evidence, particularly around corporate governance, annual monitoring, and learning and teaching, the role of the Servant Leadership philosophy, and the stage of development of emerging elements of the School's quality framework, for example the QAEC and the new Quality and Enhancement Manual. Meetings with staff and students also took place.

4.9 The new Quality and Enhancement Manual is gradually becoming the source of choice for quality assurance and enhancement information. There is a strong commitment to supporting a diverse constituency of learners from the outset. This has prompted initiatives such as the student survey; the SAS division's induction activities; the Centre for Academic Support and Enhancement's Student Development Module; the Personal Academic Tutor System; and the recently introduced Peer Assisted Learning Scheme. Equally, there is a major emphasis on investing in and developing academic staff through peer observation, Teaching and Learning Forums, achievement of Higher Education Academy accreditation, and providing training in assessment and VLE usage. Staff have access to development funding at individual staff member level, at divisional level and at corporate level. There is also a financial allocation to support team building activities.

4.10 Underpinning this strong institutional focus on enhancement is the School's Servant Leadership philosophy, a humanistic ethical position stressing service, trust, respect and the practice of leadership. This philosophy provides a unifying theme for the School's enhancement programme. Whether the focus is on staff or student development, as staff clarified, Servant Leadership is not regarded as a new development but as a restatement of established practice. For some staff it means an open-door policy and for others it is about initiating a culture of supporting others, for example, through Peer Assisted Learning. Staff seemed knowledgeable about the Servant Leadership concept, although students were less aware.

4.11 That enhancement activities have impacted on the learning experience was evidenced by examples from staff and students, for example surveying students about e-books to enable service enhancement; developing a UK Professional Standards Framework-linked School Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning to support staff in enhancing their teaching practice; responding to student issues, initially quickly and reactively, but also strategically through the Annual Planning Cycle. The review team considers the strong strategic approach to enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, which is embedded in organisational structures and processes, to be **good practice**.

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

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

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

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

4.14 There are no recommendations or affirmations. There is one feature of good practice that is underpinned by widespread examples of enhancement activity. The School has a strategic approach to enhancing student learning opportunities, and has taken deliberate steps to embed this in the organisation as a whole.

4.15 The review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the School is **commended**.



## 5 Commentary on the Theme: Digital Literacy

### Findings

5.1 Each academic year a specific theme relating to higher education provision in England and Northern Ireland is chosen for special attention by QAA's Institutional Review teams. The review team investigated the theme of digital literacy for further analysis. The theme is not a judgement area in Higher Education Review.

5.2 The School has a strategic approach for incorporating support for digital literacy and e-learning, developed by the academic division, the Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (which includes the e-learning team) and the IT department. These strategies are implemented through the School's Annual Planning Cycle. The key documents in this process are the Academic Strategy 2015-18; the Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Research Strategy 2015-18; and the e-Learning Strategy 2015-18. These strategies are embedded institutionally as core parts of the School's Annual Planning Cycle. Thus, digital literacy issues, for example e-learning, e-books, computing, are discussed at key committees. There is also an e-learning steering group, which specifically addresses e-learning issues. All this demonstrates that digital literacy is recognised and supported through the School's strategic focus, by senior managers and academics, and by the School's commitment to an effective digital infrastructure.

5.3 The School has a reliable IT infrastructure that supports teaching and learning, and makes updated information accessible to both staff and students. Outside of formal teaching, students' interaction and engagement with their course takes place through a VLE. Written work is submitted through plagiarism-detection software and feedback is provided via a VLE. E-learning is embedded in the curriculum by the availability of electronic resources on every module. IT systems are used to monitor attendance and students' engagement with learning, prompting relevant interventions when necessary. The School emphasises a 'hands on' approach when it comes to embedding digital literacy in students' learning. Every module has a free e-book available for students. One of the distinctive elements of the School's approach is that, while it is common for institutions to assume that students are digitally literate on entry, the School assumes students have few if any digital literacy skills when they enrol. This approach helps the School to ensure a more level, and therefore more equitable, starting point for all students.

5.4 In recognition of the importance of digital literacy to graduates, the School is in the process of setting up an Employability Centre to further enhance the support offered to students embarking on their careers. The account of how employment potential was enhanced does not, however, suggest how professional bodies and employer's expectations are established and benchmarked. Some useful deployments of applications evidence a commitment to using technology-enhanced learning to improve learning and teaching: for example submitting written assignments through the VLE and marking it online, the use of plagiarism-detection software as a learning and teaching device, not merely as a plagiarism detector; involving students in assessment through the introduction of an online study tool; and making available a series of toolkits designed to improve employment readiness

5.5 Although there is a clearly systematic approach to the development of digital literacy, the focus is a relatively recent one, with significant work being carried out in 2014-15, when the strategies noted above were developed. This is reflected positively in core committee business (for example, the Academic Committee proposed the inclusion of a VLE feedback section in the Annual Monitoring and Evaluation Report, and discussed e-books and staff incentives for good practice). There is a range of learner support opportunities, including a pre-entry computing element of Academic Skills Assessment,

an IT/e-learning Induction, a Student Development Module and online support guides. The Student Development Module is only available to HND students and is justified by the School because HND students have been found to 'have weaker IT skills compared to degree students'. In the student submission, submitted to QAA as part of this review, students highlighted the limitations of one-off inductions and the need for further support, which is provided to HND students through the Student Development Module.

5.6 Staff are encouraged and supported to promote digital literacy. For instance, there is a prize for the staff member with the best module presence on the VLE. Informed by the e-Learning Strategy, training is provided for staff by the e-learning team. While there is a commitment to staff continuing professional development (and the UK Professional Standards Framework), there are obvious challenges for fully engaging sessional staff in training into the digital literacy agenda.

## Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 22-25 of the [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\) handbook](#).

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

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

### Academic standards

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

### Award

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

### Awarding organisation

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

### Blended learning

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

### Credit(s)

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

### Degree-awarding body

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

### Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

### Dual award or double award

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

### e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning

### **Enhancement**

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

### **Expectations**

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

### **Flexible and distributed learning**

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

See also **distance learning**.

### **Framework**

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

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

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

## **QAA1429 - R4813 - Jan 16**

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2016  
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB

Tel: 01452 557 000  
Email: [enquiries@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@qaa.ac.uk)  
Website: [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)

Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786