



# Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of London School of Commerce (a division of St Piran's School (GB) Ltd)

October 2016

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## About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at London School of Commerce (a division of St Piran's School (GB) Ltd).

The review took place from 18 to 21 October 2016 and was conducted by a team of four reviewers, as follows:

- Ms Sally Dixon
- Professor John Feather
- Mr Ahmed Junaid
- Ms Karen Chetwynd (student reviewer).

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

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

- makes judgements on
  - the setting and maintenance of academic standards
  - the quality of student learning opportunities
  - the information provided about higher education provision
  - the enhancement of student learning opportunities
- 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.

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>2</sup> A dedicated section explains the method for [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).<sup>3</sup> For an explanation of terms see the [glossary](#) at the end of this report.

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

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

<sup>3</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 Commerce

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

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

### Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following feature of **good practice** at London School of Commerce:

- the extensive support, induction and mentoring provided to students which enables them to develop their academic, personal and professional potential (Expectations B4 and B2).

### Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to London School of Commerce.

By March 2017:

- develop a more formalised approach to student engagement that enables students to be partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience (Expectations B5 and B1)
- extend the oversight and monitoring of the School's complaints systems for current and prospective students to ensure that appropriate action is taken (Expectations B9 and B2).

By April 2017:

- further develop, document and implement the internal operational procedures and responsibilities for the design, development and approval of programmes (Expectation B1)
- ensure that the internal procedures for annual monitoring are systematic, clearly articulated and implemented (Expectation B8).

By May 2017:

- systematically analyse the outcomes of learning and teaching related activities in the identifying and embedding of academic staff development across the School (Expectations B3).

By July 2017:

- strengthen the mechanisms, at all levels, for the identification, progression, recording and review of strategically-driven enhancement initiatives (Enhancement).

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

The financial sustainability, management and governance check has been satisfactorily completed.

## **About London School of Commerce**

The mission of the London School of Commerce (the School) is 'to provide, within the environment of an independent educational establishment, quality focused and cost effective higher education programmes in the fields of Business, Information technology, e-Commerce, Technology and related fields'.

The School was established in 1999-2000. The current London School of Commerce is the result of the 2015 amalgamation of the School and the School of Business and Law. The School is also part of the London School of Commerce Group which includes international work not considered in the scope of this current HER (AP) review.

The School offers a range of undergraduate programmes: BA (Hons) Business Studies, BSc (Hons) Computing and BSc Accounting. The School offers the following postgraduate programmes: MSc International Tourism/Hospitality Management, MSc Accounting, Master of Business Administration (MBA), Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) and Doctor of Philosophy programmes (PhD).

The School has 183 staff members (June 2016) and this includes numerous fractional academic staff who contribute to the delivery of programmes and the supervision of research degrees.

The School reported a decrease in student numbers from 3,194 in June/July 2015 to 1,632 in the June 2016 data return for the current review (1,393 full-time and 239 part-time students). The School confirmed that there were 1,311 students at the end of September 2016.

The School has faced a number of challenges including the restricted work rights allowed to international students and the associated decline in applications to study in London. Therefore, the School is working with its university partners in redirecting its recruitment towards UK and EU students as well as contributing to the work of the wider London School of Commerce Group.

The School has undergone several changes in its relationships with awarding bodies. The partnership with the University of Gloucestershire finished in summer 2016. At the time of the review visit, the School was working in partnership with Cardiff Metropolitan University (the last intakes for these programmes took place in October 2015), Anglia Ruskin University and University of Wales Trinity St David.

The School underwent a QAA Review for Educational Oversight in 2012 which identified seven features of good practice, one advisable and 11 desirable recommendations. Subsequent annual monitoring visits in 2013 and 2015 have confirmed that the previous recommendations have been addressed.

## Explanation of the findings about London School of Commerce

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

# **1 Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies 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 (FHEQ)* are met by:**

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

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

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

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

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

## **Findings**

1.1 Ultimate responsibility for setting academic standards and ensuring that the requirements of the relevant reference points are met lies with the Schools' degree-awarding bodies. The higher education programmes delivered by the School are validated by Cardiff Metropolitan University (last intake October 2015); Anglia Ruskin University and the University of Wales Trinity Saint David. As a part of this collaborative process, each university, in discussion with the School, requires that each programme offered for delivery is approved and validated by the respective university, as the degree-awarding body. The School is responsible for maintaining the academic standards and evaluating and reviewing the students' learning experiences.

1.2 The process of validation and approval for each programme has meant that School staff 'have developed and written the programmes; programme specifications; content; programme and module descriptors and learning outcomes'. Following this process, programmes are subject to formal validation 'within the requirements of the Academic Regulations and formal programme validation/approval/re-approval procedures of the respective university'. Programme specifications vary according to the requirements of the degree-awarding bodies but, in each case, the qualification is positioned at the appropriate level and there is reference to relevant Subject Benchmark Statements.

1.3 All matters pertaining to the setting and maintaining of standards are managed in the partnerships, and are subject to the appropriate guidance, processes and procedures for design, validation and review which ensure that requirements are met. The processes in place ensure that the awards are correctly positioned at the relevant level of the FHEQ and are aligned with Subject Benchmark Statements. The processes would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.4 The review team tested this Expectation and the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by examining programme specifications, minutes of relevant meetings, the School's academic regulations and awarding partner regulations. The team also held meetings with academic staff, programme leaders and senior staff, including representatives from the degree-awarding bodies.

1.5 The evidence reviewed shows the procedures to be effective in practice. The School has an effective partnership with its degree-awarding bodies. School staff were actively involved in validations and subsequent implementation of conditions. The degree-awarding bodies also provide training on their regulations for School staff. External examiner reports confirm that the School effectively maintains academic standards on behalf of its degree-awarding bodies.

1.6 While the degree-awarding bodies have ultimate responsibility through their own regulatory frameworks for ensuring that the relevant external reference points are adhered to, there is evidence that the School effectively manages its own responsibilities for doing this within its partnership agreements. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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 Responsibility for academic standards and quality are clearly laid out by the partner universities as the degree-awarding bodies. The arrangements for the oversight of the governance of the provision and the academic management of programmes at the School are included in the Quality Handbook and Academic Regulations.

1.8 The Academic Regulations outline the academic management framework for the School and the quality assurance processes for its academic programmes. They also make reference to the academic regulations for degree-awarding bodies. Assessment boards are held in line with the degree-awarding bodies' regulations. Programme specifications for all higher education provision define the names of awards and the level and credit rating of their constituent modules. The School's processes would enable it to meet the Expectation.

1.9 The review team tested this Expectation and considered the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by examining documentation including the School's Academic Regulations, Quality Handbook and contractual agreements with the degree-awarding bodies. The team also held meetings with academic and senior staff and students.

1.10 The evidence reviewed shows the procedures to be effective in practice. The relevant university's regulations and policies are communicated to staff and students through staff induction and development, course handbooks and student induction packs. Staff met by the team confirmed their understanding of where to find, and how to use, programme specifications for their intended purposes. Students confirmed that they were aware of the relevant policies, namely in programme handbooks and on the student portal/virtual learning environment (VLE).

1.11 The degree-awarding bodies have responsibility for academic frameworks and regulations. The School adheres to these requirements and has appropriate processes in place to ensure that staff understand and enact their responsibilities in relation to the academic regulations and the award of academic credit and qualifications. Within the context of the partnership agreements with its awarding bodies, the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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**

1.12 All the School's higher education provision is validated by the universities, as the degree-awarding bodies, and must therefore make use of the formally approved curriculum specifications. The specification defining each programme and module contained therein is validated by the relevant degree-awarding body. The School publishes definitive records, in the form of programme and module specifications, for all its higher education provision. Programme and module specifications are available on the student VLE. Handbooks for each year of the programme are produced in line with the respective degree-awarding body requirements. It is the responsibility of the degree-awarding body to maintain the programme specification which can be found on the School's website and is also signposted in the programme handbook.

1.13 Where minor or major modifications occur to a programme during the period of its approval, then the School proposes these to the relevant university which deals with them within its minor or major modification procedures. The processes to assure the production of definitive programme documents that constitute key reference points for delivery, assessment, monitoring and review would enable the School to meet this Expectation.

1.14 The review team tested this Expectation and reviewed the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by examining programme specifications, programme handbooks, and the student VLE and website. In addition, the team met senior, teaching and support staff, and students.

1.15 Overall, the evidence reviewed shows the practices and procedures to be effective in practice. The review team found that the School fulfils its responsibilities regarding the processes of the respective degree-awarding body. The full programme and module specifications are included in programme handbooks and are accessible on the School website and student VLE. Students met by the team confirmed their awareness of how to access the programme specification via the student VLE and School website and staff confirmed that they were able to access programme module specifications via the student VLE and staff storage drive.

1.16 The core responsibility is with the degree-awarding bodies to retain appropriate records of the programmes, and the School implements an effective process in relation to the maintenance of these. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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**

1.17 The overall responsibility for the academic standards at the School lies with the degree-awarding bodies but the responsibility of programme design and development is shared. The School therefore follows the procedures of the degree-awarding bodies in order to ensure that academic standards are set at an appropriate level.

1.18 The School articulates the application of degree-awarding body procedures through its internal Quality Handbook. The School's Academic Regulations also detail the programme approval procedures along with the regulatory framework for academic programmes. The School's processes would allow this Expectation to be met.

1.19 The review team tested this Expectation by examining documentation such as the Quality Handbook and the procedures for programme approval and validation. The team also met senior staff, representatives from the awarding bodies, programme leaders, teaching staff and students.

1.20 Staff at the School are responsible for designing the programmes and module specifications. All new programmes are taken through the internal committee structure before these are forwarded to the associated degree-awarding body approval/validation panel. Programme validation documents are detailed and incorporate links to external reference points.

1.21 All assessments are created as a part of the validation pack and are subsequently approved by the respective degree-awarding body. The School applies all the assessment procedures as required by the relevant degree-awarding body. Staff demonstrated an understanding of the required procedures and are informed about these through staff induction.

1.22 The School is fulfilling its responsibilities in meeting this Expectation through its adherence to the processes of the associated degree-awarding bodies. The team concludes that this Expectation is met and the 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**

1.23 As the School does not have degree awarding powers, all its students are on programmes validated by, or franchised from, UK degree-awarding bodies, who bear the ultimate responsibility for setting and maintaining standards. The School explicitly recognises this in its UK Quality Code Benchmarking Guide and in its programme specifications and periodic review processes. In the design, monitoring, delivery and review of programmes, the School's teams work closely with the relevant degree-awarding body.

1.24 For taught programmes, assessment requirements are included in programme specifications. Assessment is a three-stage process, beginning with internal marking and second marking, followed by moderation by the relevant degree-awarding body and approval by external examiners appointed by the degree-awarding body. Full details of requirements and processes are in the School's Quality Handbook, which is accessible through the staff and student VLEs. The arrangements in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.25 The review team tested this Expectation by reviewing documentation such as programme specifications and the School's Quality Handbook. The team also held meetings with staff and students at the School.

1.26 The School adheres to the requirements of the associated degree-awarding bodies with staff members and students demonstrating an awareness of the assessment processes used. Further details and a full analysis of the assessment and external examiner processes can be found in Expectations B6 and B7 of this report.

1.27 On the basis of the documentation which it has seen and its meetings with staff from the School and representatives of the degree-awarding bodies, the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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**

1.28 The School works under the procedures set by its partner universities, as the degree-awarding bodies, for programme monitoring and review. Monitoring and review of programmes is done by the completion of annual programme review reports with the reporting templates varying between university partners. School staff work closely with link tutors and other relevant staff from partner universities for the production of these reports.

1.29 Programme leaders work closely with the Head of Quality in the production of the annual programme review reports, which are discussed at programme management committees before being presented to the Academic Board. The arrangements and procedures in place would therefore allow this Expectation to be met.

1.30 The review team tested this Expectation by examining the processes and associated documentation for programme monitoring and review. The team held meetings with different groups of staff members from the School and representatives from the degree-awarding bodies and students.

1.31 There are various reports which confirm that the monitoring processes in place at the School address the requirements and ensure that the threshold academic standards and standards set by the degree-awarding bodies are maintained.

1.32 The School makes effective use of external examiner reports in the review of programmes. These reports are considered in the programme management meetings with responses to any recommendations recorded on response forms and sent to the associated degree-awarding body. While there is some variation in terms of the reporting requirements associated with the different degree-awarding bodies, there is a core set of information that is covered in the annual programme review reports. The School therefore includes student admissions information, performance indicators, external examiner reports and the associated responses, along with reports from moderators or link tutors and student evaluations. This content is used in the evaluation of the associated programmes and links to action planning and the identification of good practice. The School also uses other information sources in compiling these reports, such as the Staff-Student Liaison and Programme Management committees.

1.33 The procedures with regard to monitoring and review of programmes and their application enables the team to conclude that this Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.34 Academic standards are set and monitored by the degree-awarding bodies which validate or franchise the programmes delivered by the School.

1.35 The School's internal processes at all stages of design, delivery and assessment of programmes, and annual and periodic review, are designed to ensure that appropriate standards are set and achieved to the satisfaction of the degree-awarding body and in compliance with the Quality Code, the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements. The Code is explicitly benchmarked against the School's activities; the relationship between the School and the degree-awarding bodies in setting and maintaining standards is further explicated in the School's Academic Regulations. The School's processes along with those of the degree-awarding bodies would enable this Expectation to be met.

1.36 The review team tested this Expectation by considering documentation such as course handbooks, committee meeting minutes and external examiners' reports. The team also met staff members from the School and representatives from the degree-awarding bodies.

1.37 Approval and modes of assessment of the achievement of learning outcomes are included in the validation process, and made available to staff and students at the School through the course handbooks. Externality is the responsibility of the associated degree-awarding body. Through the degree-awarding bodies, the School receives feedback from external examiners. The School considers these reports through its own procedures, including Programme Management Committees and the Academic Board. This is verified through annual monitoring reporting processes. There is evidence of the School following up on comments from the degree-awarding bodies and responding to external examiners' reports. Staff members demonstrated their understanding of how the complex multiple reporting lines work in practice.

1.38 On the basis of the documentation which it has seen and its meetings with staff from the School and representatives of the degree-awarding bodies, the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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

1.39 In reaching its judgement about the maintenance of academic standards, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. There are no features of good practice, recommendations or affirmations in this area.

1.40 The School works effectively with its degree-awarding bodies to ensure that academic standards are maintained. Staff members demonstrate an understanding of the School's responsibilities and the associated processes.

1.41 All seven Expectations in this area are met and the level of risk is low. Therefore, the review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards 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 All of the School's programmes, which are submitted to university degree-awarding bodies for approval or validation are subject to the overarching strategic and operational processes, regulatory requirements and documentation specification requirements of the respective partner.

2.2 The School operates under the procedures set by its degree-awarding bodies with regards to setting and maintaining academic standards as discussed in Expectation A3.1. However, the School does also design and develop its own programmes which are then approved by the associated universities. The School's Academic Regulations set out the overarching procedures with regard to the development and design of programmes.

2.3 The School takes all new staff through an induction where the procedures in relation to respective degree-awarding bodies are made clear. As the School works with multiple degree-awarding bodies, staff members have to be kept updated with any changes to the respective courses. Therefore, for the continuing staff, team-based monthly staff development is carried out by a senior member of the School. This arrangement is designed to ensure that staff are aware of their responsibility in respect of procedures of programme design and development as well as teaching for the relevant awarding partners. The processes of the School in association with the degree-awarding bodies would allow this Expectation to be met.

2.4 The review team tested this Expectation by scrutinising documentation associated with the processes for programme design, approval and validation. The team also held meetings with a range of staff from the School, representatives from degree-awarding bodies and students.

2.5 The Quality Handbook provides comprehensive guidance with regard to the quality assurance and academic standards of programmes. The School also has a guide which articulates all elements of the Quality Code and contextualises this information for staff.

2.6 Staff members demonstrated a variable understanding of the use of external reference points with regard to academic standards and their applicability. It is also evident that staff understanding of their responsibilities with regard to the degree-awarding bodies' procedures for the design and development of programmes is variable. Core, full-time staff members have, however, completed a benchmarking activity using the Quality Code. The outcomes of this activity are embedded within the regulations which staff adhere to.

2.7 The School meets the requirements of the degree-awarding bodies and staff are responsible for designing the programmes and module specifications. Key staff members ensure that the requirements of the degree-awarding bodies are met, however, the internal School processes could be further developed and communicated more clearly to other staff members. The review team therefore **recommends** that the School further develop,

document and implement the internal operational procedures and responsibilities for the design, development and approval of programmes.

2.8 The School seeks student engagement through programme management committees, the Academic Board and the Staff-Student Liaison Committee. Students are able to provide input towards existing programmes and suggest changes to them through these committees. However, as discussed in Expectation B5, students are not involved in the committee at the highest level in the School and do not formally contribute to the design and development of programmes. Therefore, the review team identified that the School should develop a more formalised approach to student engagement as set out in the recommendation linked to B5, paragraph 2.39.

2.9 The review team concludes that the School's procedures, in association with those of the relevant degree-awarding body, and their application allows this Expectation to be met. The level of risk is moderate as although documentation exists and a core team of staff ensure requirements of the degree-awarding bodies are met, there is a lack of clarity about responsibilities and inconsistent understanding of these across the School.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.10 Programme admissions criteria are determined by the relevant degree-awarding bodies through validation agreements. Applicants apply through the website via email, and then send relevant documentation, including examination results and evidence of certification to the School. Applicants have the opportunity to be supported by a School marketing officer throughout the process. If required by the applicant, the marketing officer will provide a checking process of documentation and signpost the applicant through the admissions process. The marketing officer will conduct the first stage interview before uploading information to the School's database, allowing the admissions team and registry staff to conduct a formal interview. After this the final acceptances are signed off by academic staff in line with degree-awarding body requirements. Subsequent confirmation of any offer is made by the School. The offer letter is generated which is passed to the student, at which point the student pays a deposit and the marketing officer completes the application checklist. The process then moves on to Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies and visa stages, which are supported by the marketing team.

2.11 Records are kept of all applications, and accreditation of prior experiential learning procedures are handled in accordance with the degree-awarding body requirements. The School retains individual agreements with each degree-awarding body about marketing and admissions, but the relevant university retains final registration responsibility for students and final approval for applications. It also retains responsibility for ensuring alignment with Border Force regulations. The School's processes along with those of the associated degree-awarding body would allow this Expectation to be met.

2.12 The review team tested this Expectation by scrutinising a range of process documents and example letters, along with staff and student meeting minutes. The team also held meetings with staff and students.

2.13 The School operates cohesive recruitment, admissions and selection procedures across programmes. Students confirmed that the School's admissions process is accessible and straightforward. The School operates six points of intake a year and maintains a flow chart for its admissions procedures. Information regarding application processes including visa and immigration requirements is available online. The School's website has clear information about the stages in the process, with additional sections such as frequently asked questions and an email facility to ask questions. Students commented favourably on the responsiveness of admissions staff to support any questions during the application process and confirmed they understood the process by which they may receive an offer for study at the School. Research students were able to illustrate pre-application guidance and expressed particular appreciation for individualised support during the initial proposal stages of their application process.

2.14 There is oversight of the application process by senior staff at the School and academic and support staff demonstrated that they understood the process at the various stages of recruitment, application and selection. The management of any complaints or appeals at these pre-enrolment stages was unclear; however, senior staff indicated that a

bespoke, case-by-case response was used to support such enquiries. Therefore, while the School does not operate a formal admissions appeals process, staff were able to clearly state what applicants should do if they wished to raise a concern or complaint and this included referral from the admissions team to the relevant programme leader. While current staff members could outline the action that would be taken in response to the management of complaints or appeals at the application stage, the review team concludes that it would be beneficial to extend the oversight and monitoring of the School's complaints systems for current and prospective students to ensure that appropriate action can be taken, as outlined in Expectation B9, paragraph 2.68.

2.15 The review team noted that the support for applicants from a marketing officer who spoke their own language and had an understanding of relevant cultural considerations plus the continuity of the marketing officer in a mentor role through induction is particularly effective as noted in Expectation B4, paragraph 2.31. The School does not operate a formal training programme for admissions staff; however, the marketing officers are supported individually to develop skills to help support students throughout their studies. There was satisfaction among students in relation to the programme details made available to them before they formally enrolled at the School. Students receive an induction pack physically at their first induction session shortly after arrival in the UK which consolidates the mentoring support from their marketing officer and contains information about the student VLE and the importance of attendance. Students met by the team gave very positive feedback on the induction process and identified the constructive steps taken by the School to facilitate provision of local knowledge and full access to course materials, briefing documents and programme specifications.

2.16 The review team concludes that the School's recruitment, selection and admission procedures are broadly effective. While there is not a formal, published process for prospective students to complain or appeal at the pre-enrolment stage, there is evidence that staff members understand how to deal with such cases and therefore this Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

### **Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching***

#### **Findings**

2.17 The School's learning, teaching and assessment strategy forms part of the programme specification of each programme. In each case, the strategy has been developed by the School and 'adapted to suit the context of delivery' and the requirements of the awarding body. At programme level, the team develops and implements the strategy. Consequently, the School learning, teaching and assessment strategy is approved by the degree-awarding body for each programme.

2.18 Information about the expectations on staff and staff responsibilities are outlined in the Staff Handbook. This also lays out the School's approach to staff development, including for non-teaching staff. Staff development opportunities are identified for staff at course review meetings, through peer observation and student feedback questionnaires. Staff development is discussed at committee level. There is a central record of continued professional development activities undertaken by individual members of staff, which forms the basis for an internal audit.

2.19 The arrangements at the School, working in association with the relevant degree-awarding bodies, would enable this Expectation to be met.

2.20 The review team tested this Expectation by examining documentation such as programme specifications and arrangements in place to support learning and teaching. The team also held meetings with staff members from the School, representatives from the degree-awarding bodies and students.

2.21 Monthly staff development sessions are held to deal with issues which arise across the School; staff are required to attend. A list of these meetings for the last three academic years was provided and the meetings are listed in the committee calendar. The minutes of the meetings, however, suggest that attendance is not always extensive, that a wide range of business is discussed and that few if any formal designated staff development activities take place.

2.22 In practice, the observation of teaching seems to combine elements of both peer and management observation. Academic staff met by the team find the system of observation a helpful practice. The team also saw evidence of reflective pedagogic practice by staff.

2.23 The team concludes that there is staff development activity taking place, but that it is not always systematically monitored, analysed or reported. The team therefore **recommends** that the School should systematically analyse the outcomes of learning and teaching related activities in the identifying and embedding of academic staff development across the School.

2.24 On the basis of the documentation which it has seen and its meetings with School staff and representatives of the degree-awarding bodies, the team concludes that the Expectation is met but the level of risk is moderate as there is insufficient priority placed on

the systematic monitoring, analysis and reporting of the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

**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**

2.25 The great majority of students at the School are international (non-EU). They are typically recruited by word-of-mouth recommendation of current and former students. The first point of contact is a marketing officer, normally a student or alumnus from the same cultural, linguistic and national background as the potential applicant. The role of the marketing officer is to help and advise the applicant and then, following admission and arrival, to act as helper and mentor throughout the course. This includes practical help and advice (such as how to open a bank account or buy a travel card), as well as academic induction.

2.26 There is a formal induction process for new students on both taught and research degree programmes including the provision of an induction pack. Students are also able to access information to support their studies through the student VLE. The processes at the School would enable this Expectation to be met.

2.27 The review team tested this Expectation by examining the arrangements in place and documentation such as programme handbooks. The team also held meetings with a range of staff members and students.

2.28 Students have a two-part induction process - the first being formal registration, issuance of key documents and a welcoming event, and the second, about a month later, being a more detailed event including academic induction which appears in the Academic Quality Calendar. Students met by the team considered that these processes, and the role of the marketing officer/mentor, were extremely useful and helpful to them.

2.29 The School emphasised that there is a dual-track approach to student engagement through both formal and informal mechanisms. The formal mechanisms include a Staff-Student Liaison Committee, although its minutes suggest that meetings are largely concerned with responding to student questions rather than more extensive discussion of issues. There are student representatives on programme management committees at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The team was told that the representatives are trained for these roles to enable them to participate fully. The School is aiming to extend student representation to the Council which would enable students to have input at the highest level in the School.

2.30 Throughout their time in the School, students are expected to make use of the extensive student VLE as a primary source of information and learning support. The team was given an extended demonstration of the VLE, which confirmed its content and operability. Students made frequent favourable references to the VLE in meetings with the team, both generically and in specific instances.

2.31 Overall, the review team considers the extensive support, induction and mentoring provided to students which enables them to develop their academic, personal and professional potential as **good practice**.

2.32 On the basis of the documentation which it has seen and its meetings with staff and students, the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.33 The School provides a number of feedback mechanisms for students including facilities for emailing teachers and meeting with them; comments and suggestion boxes; end of module reviews and student representatives. Under the degree-awarding body arrangements, the School maintains responsibility for student engagement.

2.34 The arrangements at the School, in association with its degree-awarding bodies would enable this Expectation to be met.

2.35 Students are included in Staff-Student Liaison Committee meetings, sharing feedback and informing staff of student requirements. The students met by the review team confirmed that they feel supported by induction mechanisms, by their peers and allocated marketing officers. The School operates an effective mentoring-type programme for students through the marketing officers. The officers engage with students and support pastoral care, attendance and student induction.

2.36 The School supports a nomination and, in some cases, an election process for student representatives for each year and programme of study. Student representatives are often self-nominated or suggested by academic staff or marketing officers. The representatives are given an individual induction to answer any questions relating to the role and new representatives are encouraged to hold discussions with other students and staff. The School management team is aware of the opportunity to develop a more formal training approach for student representatives to facilitate their participation in senior committees and indicated a desire to include student representation at the highest level of the School.

2.37 The School does not have a strategic framework in relation to student engagement, or a programme of involvement in course design processes. However, students and staff were able to describe various channels of response to student feedback. Students were able to discuss the surveys and module feedback they provide and the review team heard student appreciation of the responsive and often informal methods of communications used at the School. There was evidence that there were a number of formal and informal mechanisms used by staff to provide a responsive, proactive approach to addressing feedback from students.

2.38 Student representatives attend Academic Board, Programme Management Committee meetings, and Staff-Student Liaison meetings. Students are involved in periodic review through opinions being sought for the annual monitoring reporting cycle for each degree-awarding body. Samples of end-of-module review surveys evidence student satisfaction in their level of involvement with their courses at the School. External examiners' reports comment positively about the ways that the School gathers the student voice, including through the Staff-Student Liaison Committee and lecturer-review performance surveys. Students give feedback on resources and this reflects positive attitudes towards library provision.

2.39 While the School does have student representation on a number of committees, some of the arrangements for student engagement are more informal. Students could be further engaged in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience in

relation to areas such as programme design as discussed in Expectation B1 and could be more formally prepared to contribute to discussions at the highest level in the School. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that the School should develop a more formalised approach to student engagement that enables students to be partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience.

2.40 Although student representation could be further developed and formalised, students are able to contribute to the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. The review team therefore concludes that this Expectation is met and that the 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**

2.41 The structure of assessments alongside the relevant learning outcomes is defined in the overall programme specifications. Programme-level learning outcomes are mapped within the programme specification and clearly articulate how these are covered at a modular level. Entry requirements for standard as well as non-standard entry are also highlighted in the programme specification. The assessment structure for all modules is articulated within the module specifications. All assessments are designed by staff at the School and approved by the degree-awarding bodies through a process of internal verification. The assessments go through internal approval checks before they are sent out to the universities, as the degree-awarding bodies, for approval. Modification to assessments is dealt with by the partner university's minor modification process.

2.42 Setting of assessments is undertaken by the School's academic staff. This is done under the principles set out in respective university's regulations. The processes for assessment in place would enable this Expectation to be met.

2.43 The review team tested this Expectation by scrutinising documentation such as programme specifications and assessment briefs. The team also held meetings with a range of staff members at the School, degree-awarding body representatives and students.

2.44 Staff are well aware of the internal processes of approval of assessments. While the process of approval varies from one degree-awarding body to the other, the overarching principles are the same. Standard forms are used for approval purposes and staff from the School work closely with link tutors from the degree-awarding bodies for the purposes of setting the assessment. Typically, an assessment includes details of tasks, learning outcomes and marking criteria. Standard coursework assessment templates are used for communication of assessment tasks to students. The standard assessment brief moderation forms provide sufficient opportunity for moderators and external examiners to comment and any actions given are addressed by staff from the School where required.

2.45 The School's processes of marking and moderation are derived from the degree-awarding bodies' requirements and staff involved in marking of assessments are well aware of these. The first marking is carried out by School staff who also carry out blind second marking after sampling of work. In some instances, for example projects, all the assessments are second marked. Mark variance is dealt with by the involvement of an independent third marker.

2.46 Overall assessment types are included in the module specification. Assessments are moderated by the degree-awarding bodies and a standard moderator's report is issued to the School. Staff at the School are then required to provide a response to the moderators' reports using a standard form. Moderators' reports are used to highlight areas of development as well as good practices. An action plan is drafted by staff at the School as a part of a response which addresses areas of weakness and disseminates good practices.

2.47 Assessment and moderation processes are effective as there is an element of dual control, with assessments set internally but reviewed by the moderators at the degree-awarding bodies. Moderators' reports and responses to these reports further ensure that the moderation process is conclusive and effective. Students are made aware of assessments through programme handbooks which are given out to them during induction. Postgraduate students are issued with a handbook which outlines the assessment and examination arrangements and students are aware of marking and moderation procedures. External examiner reports are published to students through the online VLE and students are aware of these reports and know how to access them.

2.48 External examiners review students' work and provide detailed comments on the overall achievement at module and course level. These reports are received by the School programme management committees. Academic staff from the School take part in the examination boards and also have opportunities to meet with the external examiners. Staff have a good understanding of the procedures with regard to the marking of assessments.

2.49 Assessment of accreditation of prior learning takes place under the procedures set and approved by the relevant university, as the degree-awarding body. Academic and administrative staff compile all information regarding the application of Accreditation of Prior Learning and forward this to the partner university for approval.

2.50 Overall, the review team considers that the arrangements for assessment at the School, along with those of the degree-awarding bodies are reliable. Students are given appropriate opportunities to demonstrate their achievement of the intended learning outcomes. The review team therefore concludes that this Expectation is met and the 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**

2.51 Each collaborating degree-awarding body appoints external examiners to comment on and provide reports on the academic standards achieved within each programme. External examiners are appointed to oversee the award and to ensure interim or exit awards are awarded correctly. External examiners will therefore moderate work from the School before the module assessment boards are held. The School's procedures and its adherence to those of its degree-awarding bodies would allow it to meet the Expectation.

2.52 The review team tested this Expectation and the effectiveness of these procedures in practice by examining a range of documentation including external examiner reports and associated responses, annual monitoring reports, minutes of relevant meetings where reports are considered, and information on the student VLE. It also held meetings with students, teaching and senior staff.

2.53 The School monitors degree-awarding body reports for standards of assessment, verification and moderation. Where an external examiner raises a concern or area for improvement, School staff include this in the response action plan and feed it into the School's Overview Action Plan. The Overview Action plan and external examiners' reports are discussed at the Academic Board. The reports, along with a summary of external examiners' comments, are also included in a single overview report for the individual university provision which contributes to the identification of themes for staff development. The School has used aspects within the external examiner reports to inform some staff development activities.

2.54 Students met by the team were aware of the external examiner process and confirmed that they could access the external examiner reports. The review team found that most external examiner reports were available on the student VLE although there were some minor omissions which the School explained were due to delays in receipt of reports.

2.55 Overall, the role of external examiners is clear and well embedded in the quality assurance systems, and the School makes effective use of reports in the monitoring and review of higher education programmes. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.56 All of the School's programmes are subject to the monitoring and review procedures set out by the respective university partner, as the degree-awarding body. Programmes are also subject to validation and revalidation procedures.

2.57 The School produces annual monitoring reports and action plans as part of the monitoring process. These reports include information that has been discussed at programme committee meetings, including student feedback, performance statistics and progression and achievement data. As the programmes offered are validated by different degree-awarding bodies, the reporting requirements vary from one to another. Besides the normal university annual and periodic reporting, the School runs its own times-series action planning and this also is provided to the university partners. The arrangements in place at the School, working in association with its degree-awarding bodies, would enable this Expectation to be met.

2.58 The team tested this Expectation by reviewing the processes for programme monitoring and review along with documentation such as annual monitoring reports. The team also held meetings with a range of staff members and students.

2.59 Most of the monitoring activities undertaken at the School are responses to the requirements of the degree-awarding bodies. A key element of this monitoring involves staff members at the School working closely with link tutors and quality assurance staff, at the respective universities, to produce annual monitoring reports. Module review summaries feed into these reports and are used to highlight the strengths of individual modules and to identify future developments and actions arising.

2.60 The School collects student feedback through student surveys. This is fed into programme management committees and subsequently added to annual monitoring reports. Students also have the opportunity to provide student feedback through the Staff-Student Liaison Committee. Student feedback resulting from this committee is considered at the Academic Committee. An action plan is also attached to the annual monitoring reports to summarise the key actions arising for the particular programme.

2.61 The School uses academic/quality planning calendars in the management of its higher education provision; however, these predominantly highlight the assessment dates for different programmes rather than providing a framework for the internal monitoring processes. While there are internal systems and processes in place at the School for the monitoring and review of programmes, the level of understanding of annual monitoring procedures between staff is variable. This variation in understanding includes the links between the different stages of the process and the relationship with formal committees and sign-off procedures. The review team therefore **recommends** that the School ensures that the internal procedures for annual monitoring are systematic, clearly articulated and implemented.

2.62 Overall, the School works effectively with its degree-awarding bodies in operating appropriate processes for the monitoring and review of programmes. Although there is some variation in the understanding of the processes, key staff members ensure that the

requirements of the degree-awarding bodies are met. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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**

2.63 Students are made aware of appeals and complaints procedures during the induction period and via their student handbooks.

2.64 The School's internal complaints procedure first seeks to resolve complaints at an informal level. It is suggested that at this stage complaints should be solved within 10 days and should be documented, with the outcome being sent to the student. Should this fail to resolve the problem, further stages of enquiry involve the use of the procedures linked to the respective degree-awarding body. The processes for academic appeals and complaints at the School, in association with the degree-awarding bodies, would enable this Expectation to be met.

2.65 The review team tested the Expectation by reviewing the relevant process and documentation for academic appeals and student complaints, including any information on the website and the student VLE. The team also held meetings with a range of staff members and students.

2.66 Following a review of student materials, the review team found references to internal processes and links to degree-awarding body procedures relevant to each programme. The School maintains its own complaints and appeals procedures in line with the requirements of the degree-awarding bodies, to whom complaints are referred once internal procedures have been exhausted. Records are kept and reported to the Chief Executive Officer.

2.67 The School has a clear assessment policy present in each programme handbook which also includes the process for appeals, and the Academic Regulations also contain information about appeals and complaints. The students met by the team were generally clear about the process for appeals and complaints and were able to signpost to the student VLE for access to the relevant degree-awarding body's procedures. Complaints are initially dealt with at a local level and the students met confirmed that if they wanted to complain they would first speak to their tutor. There was positive feedback from students for these informal channels. The School indicated that they maintained an informal log of all complaints, managed by the quality department; however, the staff met by the team recognised that complaints dealt with at a local level may not be captured systematically. There is evidence of the management of a formal appeal case fully worked through the stated channels with the inclusion of degree-awarding body processes.

2.68 While the processes for complaints and appeals are accessible for current students, admissions complaints and appeals processes are not clearly made available for prospective students. To ensure that the mechanisms for the recording, monitoring and evaluation of complaints and appeals are consistent and systematic, the review team **recommends** that the School should extend the oversight and monitoring of its complaints systems for current and prospective students to ensure that appropriate action is taken.

2.69 Overall, there are procedures in place at the School, in association with its degree-awarding bodies, for the management of academic appeals and complaints. There is a lack of formal information for the management of complaints at the application stage although staff members are prepared to deal with any issues arising through referral to appropriate

channels. Therefore, the review team concludes that this Expectation is met and that the 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**

2.70 Since the School is not itself a degree-awarding body, the only relevant aspects of Expectation B10 are those related to delivering learning opportunities with third parties. The School does not provide any placement opportunities for its students nor does it delegate any of its responsibility for delivering learning opportunities to any organisations other than the degree-awarding bodies.

**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**

2.71 Research degrees at the School are franchised from the University of Wales Trinity St David (Doctorate in Business Administration, DBA) and Cardiff Metropolitan University (Doctor of Philosophy, PhD). The School's oversight is through a Director of Research Degrees and the Research Degrees Committee. Each student is allocated a Director of Studies and a supervisor who must have appropriate qualifications and expertise. This is monitored through the Collaborative Partnership Committee at the University of Wales Trinity St David and the Research Degrees Committee at Cardiff Metropolitan University. The arrangements at the School in association with the relevant degree-awarding bodies would enable this Expectation to be met.

2.72 The review team tested this Expectation by reviewing documentation associated with research degrees and examining meeting minutes. The team also held meetings with a range of staff members and students.

2.73 There is evidence that, through the processes in place, the School's proposals are challenged if necessary and that there are appropriate responses from the School along with effective oversight by the franchiser. Admission to the PhD programme was, however, suspended from 2014; the School explained that it preferred a more practical approach to research degrees, which had been encouraged by the Advisory Board. The School now offers a DBA programme franchised from the University of Wales Trinity St David.

2.74 Students are provided with an induction pack and various induction events are offered at which attendance is compulsory and monitored. Supervision in small groups and individually takes place to a pre-arranged and published schedule; these sessions are monitored and recorded. Research training is provided and is also compulsory. There are formal records and training and supervision for each. Students met by the team were very positive about the quality and effectiveness of both training and supervision. The School has recently instituted an internal record through a spreadsheet which records the activities, progress and future requirements of individual students.

2.75 Meetings with supervisors are scheduled to take place monthly, and with Directors of Studies as required. Students confirmed that they were satisfied with the supervision arrangements. There are regular research seminars which students are expected to attend. After one year of full-time equivalent study, students are required to undergo a formal interview process to confirm their registration and progress; this is described in the School's handbook and reported through the Research Degrees Committee and to the degree-awarding bodies. Students reported that they were well prepared for this event from the beginning of their programme, and that they found it a useful exercise. Similarly, a graduate from the PhD programme reported that students had felt well prepared for the viva.

2.76 There is student representation on the Research Degrees Committee which staff and students find useful. The degree-awarding bodies receive annual reports of the franchised activities which meet the requirements of the franchise agreements.

2.77 Overall, the School provides an appropriate research environment and opportunities for students on research degrees. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

2.78 In reaching its judgements about the quality of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. Eight out of the 10 applicable Expectations in this area were met with low risk, and two were met with a moderate risk. The team has identified one feature of good practice and five recommendations.

2.79 The team identified good practice in relation to the support given to students, particularly in preparation for and during the induction period for their programmes. The use of marketing officers who also fulfilled a mentoring role and were familiar with the cultural background and language of the students is regarded as a valuable component of this support.

2.80 In addition to recognising the good practice at the School, the review team also identified five recommendations in the quality of student learning opportunities. The School has internal processes to ensure that it meets the responsibilities of the degree-awarding bodies. However, in some areas such as programme design, development and approval and in monitoring and review, there was variable understanding at the School in relation to how the processes work in practice and with the committee structures. Key staff members ensure that the processes are implemented and respond to triggers linked to the procedures of the associated degree-awarding bodies. However, the review team identified the need for the School to ensure that the internal operational procedures and responsibilities are clearly articulated and implemented in these areas.

2.81 There are arrangements for staff development at the School along with a system for the observation of learning and teaching. Time is allocated for staff development sessions and attendance records suggest that a core team of support and academic staff attend. However, the review team considers that a more systematic approach to the analysis of learning and teaching activities across the School would help to maximise the effectiveness of staff development initiatives.

2.82 The School has made arrangements for students to provide feedback on their programmes and to attend most of the committees. The School also intends to increase this student engagement by including student representation at the highest level committee. While arrangements are in place for students to be engaged in the quality assurance and enhancement of their educational experience, the review team identified that a more formalised approach including the development of further training for student representatives would be beneficial.

2.83 The School has procedures for dealing with academic appeals and complaints. However, the arrangements for dealing with any appeals or complaints associated with the admissions stage are less clear and information on the process is not published. The School is prepared to deal with any issues on an individual basis, but the review team considers that extending the oversight and monitoring of the School's complaints systems for current and prospective students would help to ensure there is consistent practice.

2.84 Overall, the review team found good practice at the School in terms of the support for students. The recommendations relate to amendments that will not require or result in major structural, operational or procedural change. The review team therefore concludes that the quality of student 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 provides information for prospective students through the website and marketing officer guidance. Information on the website is updated by the Director of Operations along with marketing and IT staff. It is the responsibility of each programme leader to agree course information and once signed off from the degree-awarding body, it is uploaded by operations staff.

3.2 Consistent with its partnership agreements, the School is responsible for all publicity and marketing information once agreed with the relevant degree-awarding body, with information about this contained in the relevant partnership agreements. This includes the School prospectus, programme specifications, student support materials, course handbooks, module information, and teaching and assessment strategies. There is an annual review process for information. The processes for the management of information about the higher education at the School would enable this Expectation to be met.

3.3 The review team tested this Expectation by examining the information produced about higher education provision, including course documentation, the student VLE and the website. The team also considered the processes for managing this information and held meetings with staff at the School, degree-awarding body representatives and students.

3.4 Evidence of meetings indicate that the School seeks approval for marketing material from each degree-awarding body before publication and upload. Students who met the team were generally positive about the quality of published information which they had received, confirming its accuracy and value in providing them with realistic expectations about the content, delivery and assessment of their programmes.

3.5 All students are provided with handbooks. Information in these handbooks includes the School's complaints and appeals procedure, information about the management of programmes, seminars, term dates, assessments, academic malpractice, ethics and resources. It contains information about the relevant degree-awarding body and links to the awarding body's policies and procedures. Students met by the team confirmed that this information was suitable for them and fit for purpose. Students can access a wide range of additional programme information, learning materials and careers advice on the School's VLE for which there is a process of ongoing development.

3.6 The School's VLE is widely used by students on all programmes. The system is designed to only allow students to access materials that are relevant to them and their specific programme, although in some instances students could see electronically published external examiner reports relating to other programmes. This was explained as enabling students to view all of the external examiner reports across the higher education provision. Additional resources, such as handouts, session outlines and links to external resources are easy for students to access and are clearly presented and organised.

3.7 Staff confirmed the use of internal electronic storage drive to manage document version control. In addition, the School designs and provides staff with policy statements, as well as various codes of practice and guidance materials relating to staff activity.

3.8 Overall, the School in conjunction with its degree-awarding bodies, has in place effective quality assurance policies and procedures for checking the accuracy of information about its higher education provision. Both staff and students confirm that the main sources of information are fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and that the level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

3.9 In reaching its judgement relating to the quality of information about learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low. There are no features of good practice, recommendations or affirmations in this area.

3.10 The School produces a range of information for students including handbooks and learning resources. The School makes good use of its student VLE to share this information for current students as well as using the website for a wider audience. The School is committed to the continued development of the VLE and to the provision of information for staff through a shared drive.

3.11 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 outlines its strategic approach to enhancement as working with stakeholders to focus on the 'secure and robust development and delivery of higher education provision' and the effective mapping of academic standards and quality assurance requirements against reference points such as the Quality Code.

4.2 The School cites its use of action planning, informed by student feedback and external examiners' reports as part of the mechanism for the enhancement of student learning opportunities. Key areas of development have included the use of the management information system in evaluating module performance and an overall focus on employability which drives the higher education provision offered. The processes at the School would enable this Expectation to be met.

4.3 The review team tested this Expectation by examining a range of documentation, including policy documents, committee meeting minutes and external examiner reports. The team also held meetings with a range of staff members and students.

4.4 The School uses an action plan approach to report on enhancement and change development. Enhancement initiatives are taken by different committees and their members. In some instances, these initiatives are responses to students or market needs. There are indications of emerging themes in relation to enhancements and the School, at the highest level, emphasises the importance of the employability of students and the development of their entrepreneurialism.

4.5 The advisory board includes a number of external contacts and the School aims to use this knowledge base to initiate enhancement objectives. An initiative of introducing a Doctorate in Business Administration (DBA) was triggered by the advisory board in response to the identification of market needs.

4.6 An academic overview report is produced which aims to bring together information from various annual monitoring reports and highlights enhancement action plans. As part of the emphasis on employability, the School has made changes to the curriculum and assessment of final projects for several programmes. Students now have opportunities to choose from a dissertation, project or case study in the Master of Business Administration programme (MBA). These changes were triggered by responding to the student voice, taken through the internal committee structure and approved by the degree-awarding body. In line with the aim of encouraging students to develop their entrepreneurial skills, the School also offers an entrepreneurship award to students for successful projects.

4.7 There has been enhancement of the use of student data to monitor student engagement and provide student support. The School has its own customised data management system which allows members of staff to draw up regular reports on student attendance and performance data. This data is used by members of staff from various departments and ensures early intervention and provision of support. This system further enables staff to compare different cohorts, modules and programmes.

4.8 The School has produced a Quality Code benchmarking guide which contextualises all relevant Expectations of the Quality Code into its activities. However, the use and impact of this contextualised guide for the purposes of enhancement is limited. While there is evidence of enhancement priorities and themes, the method that the School applies to initiate deliberate steps at a provider level with regard to its enhancement agenda and an ongoing review of its effectiveness could be further developed. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that the School strengthens the mechanisms, at all levels, for the identification, progression, recording and review of strategically driven enhancement initiatives.

4.9 Overall, there is evidence of the enhancement of student learning opportunities. However, the School's approach with regard to the collection of information from students and other stakeholders and the analysis of such information so that it can be used for initiating enhancement objectives should be more consistent, along with the overall monitoring of the enhancement process. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met but the level of risk is moderate as the procedures for enhancement are broadly adequate, but have some shortcomings in terms of the rigour with which they are applied.

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

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

4.10 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. There are no features of good practice or affirmations in this area, but the review team identified one recommendation.

4.11 The School is committed to enhancing the quality of student learning opportunities. There is evidence of initiatives that have been implemented as a result of feedback from stakeholders, including students, through the processes in place to review the higher education provision offered. The School also uses its information technology systems to assist with the identification of areas for development and enhancement.

4.12 The School has developed a Quality Code mapping guide, along with its policy documents. However, the use and impact of this contextualised guide for the purposes of enhancement is limited. There are opportunities for staff members to share good practice, although these could be extended to ensure a consistent understanding of the strategic approach of the School. Therefore, while there is evidence of enhancement initiatives, the review team recommends that the processes for ensuring the enhancement of student learning opportunities could be further developed.

4.13 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met but the level of risk is moderate as the procedures for enhancement are broadly adequate, but have some shortcomings in terms of the rigour with which they are applied. Overall, the School does take deliberate steps at provider level to improve the quality of learning opportunities and therefore the enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

## 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 21-24 of the [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\) handbook](#).

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

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

### Academic standards

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

### Award

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

### Awarding organisation

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

### Blended learning

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

### Credit(s)

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

### Degree-awarding body

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

### Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

### Dual award or double award

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

### e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

### **Enhancement**

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

### **Expectations**

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

### **Flexible and distributed learning**

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

See also **distance learning**.

### **Framework**

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

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

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

### **Good practice**

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

### **Learning opportunities**

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

### **Learning outcomes**

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

### **Multiple awards**

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

### **Operational definition**

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

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

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

**Programme specifications**

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

**Quality Code**

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

**Reference points**

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

**Self-evaluation document**

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

**Subject Benchmark Statement**

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

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

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

**Threshold academic standard**

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

**Virtual learning environment (VLE)**

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

**Widening participation**

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

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