



Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of London School of Theology

June 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 Theology](#). The review took place from 13 to 16 June 2016 and was conducted by a team of four reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Colin Fryer
- Ms Ann Hill
- Dr Peter Rae
- Mrs Kanyanut Ndubuokwu (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by London School of Theology 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)¹ setting out what all UK [higher education providers](#) expect of themselves and of each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

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

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

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

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

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 6.

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

¹ The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code

² Higher Education Review themes: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2859

³ QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us.

⁴ Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers): www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Educational-Oversight.aspx

Key findings

QAA's judgements about London School of Theology

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

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

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at London School of Theology.

- The effective system for interviewing all applicants, which ensures the compatibility of students with programmes (Expectation B2).
- The comprehensive opportunities provided to students to engage effectively at all levels of the institution (Expectation B5).
- The inclusive system of placements for all Level 4 programmes, which encourages students to base their learning in practice (Expectation B10).

Recommendations

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

By January 2017:

- formalise processes to facilitate the production of a clear, comprehensive annual staff development plan, which is mapped to the School's strategic priorities (Expectation B3)
- document and monitor the student representative training arrangements to ensure that they are consistent and effective (Expectation B5)
- ensure that internal annual monitoring and review processes are comprehensive and owned by all staff (Expectation B8)
- establish clear systems to ensure that placement provision for online learning students addresses issues of risk in remote locations (Expectation B10)
- formalise and strengthen the systems and frameworks that support the relationship between the strategic priorities and enhancement practices (Enhancement).

By September 2017:

- ensure that there is a more systematic and strategic approach to teaching and learning that articulates the School's key initiatives (Expectation B3)
- further develop the structure and content of the VLE to ensure parity of access for all students (Expectations B4, C)
- strengthen the systems and processes for the detection of plagiarism (Expectation B6)

- clearly define mechanisms for monitoring research student engagement (Expectation B11).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The steps being taken to ensure that part-time distance research students are drawn into the School's research community (B11).

Theme: Student Employability

The London School of Theology (the School) has a longstanding commitment to improving the employability of its students and aims to ensure that its graduates gain the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to be effective and successful in their chosen future vocations and careers. The system of placements makes a fundamental contribution to student employability, fostering greater understanding and preparedness for the world of work as well as increasing the likelihood of success in securing employment after graduation.

Employers take their roles seriously and offer placements based on individual student strengths. The BA Theology and Counselling programme has British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) validation. Other theology undergraduate provision includes mandatory church-based placements at Level 4 and optional placements at the higher levels as part of the Personal, Spiritual and Skills Formation modules.

The placement system enables students to develop a greater understanding of employment requirements in an environment where their gifts, skills, Christian character and leadership potential can be shaped for future life and ministry.

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

About London School of Theology

London School of Theology (LST) is a Christian Theological College situated in Northwood, London. Its vision is to 'bring theological education within reach'. The School has approximately 350 students and currently offers a range of programmes at Levels 4 to 8 of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), validated by Middlesex University. The School currently employs 25 permanent and full-time academic staff, as well as 24 full-time and 14 part-time support staff.

The School underwent a QAA Review for Educational Oversight in 2012 and received subsequent monitoring visits in 2013, 2014 and 2015. The 2015 monitoring visit noted commendable progress and that recommendations outstanding from the previous visit have been satisfactorily addressed.

Since the last review the School has undertaken a major strategic review and consequently created a new Business Plan for 2015-20. Work has begun on the revalidation and major revision of its suite of undergraduate programmes in line with this plan. There have also been a number of changes made at management and senior leadership levels of the School.

The key challenges currently being faced by the School are identified as the maintenance of academic standards and the quality of the student experience in the context of financial

retrenchment and reduced resources; the maintenance of staff and student morale during a period of change; and the rolling out of the School's new strategic plans.

Explanation of the findings about London School of Theology

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

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

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

a) ensure that the requirements of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (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 The School has a collaborative partnership with Middlesex University that has been in place since 2005. There is a comprehensive Collaboration Agreement and transparency of partnership confirmation. The School provided a 'responsibilities checklist' which identifies the levels of delegated authority offered to the School by the University. It offers the School a substantial degree of autonomy in the delivery and assessment of the programmes of study. To further support this, there is a statement that the University safeguards the standards and mapping to the FHEQ. The School follows the University programme approval process and produces definitive programme documents. The approach would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.2 In testing the Expectation the review team considered programme handbooks and specifications, module descriptors, external examiner reports, and University procedures for programme design, development and approval. The team tested its findings through discussions with members of staff.

1.3 The School delivers undergraduate programmes leading to Level 4, 5 and 6 awards, postgraduate programmes leading to Level 7 awards and research degrees leading to Level 7 and 8 awards, all with students being registered with Middlesex University. The partnership agreement with Middlesex University requires the School to allocate the quality

of teaching, learning and assessment at the appropriate level within the FEHQ. The School works closely with its awarding partner in the approval and review of its programmes.

1.4 Middlesex University validates the programmes delivered by the School in accordance with its own academic regulations, policies and procedures, which engage the FHEQ, Higher Education Credit Framework for England and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. Establishment of threshold academic standards takes place at the validation event, within the oversight of external panel members. The programmes are developed, delivered and assessed by the School with the University having ultimate responsibility for academic oversight. There is a Partnership Agreement that sets out the programme operation, together with programme specifications and mapping to the FHEQ, and in relation to both the Theology and Religious Studies and Music Subject Benchmarks Statements. Programmes are set at the appropriate level of the FHEQ through differentiated learning outcomes and assessment criteria at each level of study.

1.5 New proposals for programmes leading to the awards of Middlesex University follow its approval processes and regulations. Changes in programme learning outcomes require approval from the School's Academic Board and the University. The validation of new modules to be added to an existing programme requires external examiner approval and consultation with the University and link tutors from the School. Programme specifications and associated handbooks describe the target qualification, and any intermediate exit awards; Subject Benchmark Statements; programme structure, defined by FHEQ level and credit; and programme learning outcomes, differentiated by knowledge and understanding, cognitive, practical and graduate skills.

1.6 The external examiner reports for academic year 2014-15 reflect that academic standards are being met at appropriate levels and that learning outcomes are being met. Together with external examiner reports, the School conducts an annual monitoring review of all of its programmes, which further assures the maintenance of academic standards. Revalidation provides a further check of the School's conformity to external reference points. The School monitors conformity through the auspices of Academic Board.

1.7 The review team considered that programme materials provide a secure framework for the allocation of qualifications at the appropriate academic level. The team therefore concludes that the School meets the Expectation and that the level of risk to academic standards 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

1.8 The School is required to comply with the University's academic regulations and quality enhancement policies and procedures for the award of academic credit and qualifications. The policies and procedures contained within these documents are comprehensive and are overseen by the University's Link Tutor, who attends Academic Board and assessment boards. The School operates a range of policies and procedures, including a Learning, Teaching, Supervision and Assessment Policy, an Academic Appeal Policy, an Academic Misconduct Policy, an Accreditation of Prior Learning and Credit Transfer Policy, and an Extenuating Circumstances Procedure, which together constitute the School's academic framework. Academic Board retains ultimate responsibility for maintaining the standards of the awards and delegates aspects of the monitoring and review of programmes to programme boards.

1.9 The School has policies, systems and procedures for the delivery, assessment and quality assurance of its programmes. External examiners, appointed by the University, report on the operation of assessment and appropriateness of standards. The School's academic framework is sufficiently robust, and the design of policies and procedures allow the Expectation to be met in principle.

1.10 In considering this Expectation, the review team looked at the terms of reference, agendas and minutes of deliberative committees, job descriptions of senior quality managers, and policies and procedures for teaching, learning and assessment, and met senior staff, academic staff and students to explore governance arrangements, management responsibilities, the implementation of academic policies and procedures and the application of academic regulations.

1.11 The School's Senior Leadership Team (SLT) comprises the President, Financial Director, Academic Dean and Executive Director, and has delegated authority from the Board of Governors. The SLT oversees strategic decisions, operational planning and quality assurance and enhancement, including awarding body partnerships. Senior management responsibility for higher education resides with the Academic Dean, to whom the programme leaders, Director of Research, Academic Secretary, Training Unit Coordinator and Librarian report. Responsibility for the partnership lies with the SLT and is largely exercised by the Academic Secretary in the capacity of School link tutor. Programme leaders manage individual curriculum areas and oversee the teaching team.

1.12 Academic Board is accountable to the Board of Governors through the SLT and holds overall responsibility for the academic work of the School, including the monitoring and maintenance of academic standards. Attendance includes the President, Academic Dean, Community Dean, Academic Secretary, Director of Research, programme leaders and Middlesex University Link Tutor. Students are also members, with at least one representative covering undergraduate, postgraduate and research provision. Programme boards are responsible to Academic Board for the oversight, delivery, development and enhancement of its academic programme. Membership includes the programme leader, teaching staff and student representatives.

1.13 The primary responsibility and authority for establishing transparent and comprehensive regulations to govern how academic credit and qualifications are awarded rests with Middlesex University. Full details of assessment regulations are published on the University's website. The academic regulations are communicated to students at induction and are included in programme handbooks, which are made available on the School's intranet. The Research Students' Handbook sets out the programme regulations.

1.14 The University operates assessment boards which meet twice yearly to consider marked and moderated work from the School, and to confirm progression and awards. Meetings are chaired by a member of staff from the School and attended by the programme leader, module leaders and the University Link Tutor. Minutes of the meetings clearly show the consideration of student performance, grade profiles, degree classifications and progression outcomes. External examiners are expected to attend assessment boards and are required to comment on the conduct of the meetings. This is evidenced in the reports provided, which confirm that the assessment boards are conducted in a professional manner. The correct application of the regulations is overseen by assessment boards. No credits or awards can be made until confirmed at the appropriate assessment board and with the approval and confirmation of the external examiner. The School's system of academic governance and its adherence to the Middlesex University academic regulations ensure the transparent award of credit and qualifications.

1.15 The School has an appropriate academic framework and an adequate system of governance in place to secure academic standards. The review team concludes that the Expectation is **met** and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.16 The School is responsible for the production of definitive programme information (such as programme specifications) in accordance with the policies, procedures and regulations of its awarding body, Middlesex University. The School works closely with the University to ensure that these records are maintained and updated as necessary, and these are submitted to the awarding body for approval.

1.17 The definitive record of the programme specifications for the School's programmes of study are provided in programme handbooks. The specifications are mapped against FHEQ standards, Subject Benchmark Statements and professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) requirements; they also contain definitive module descriptors and, by means of a skills map, indicate how the learning outcomes of the programme are delivered in specific units. Detailed programme specifications are prepared by the School and submitted to the University for approval, as are subsequent revisions.

1.18 Programme handbooks and programme specifications conform to Middlesex University's templates, and are submitted to the University for approval. Handbooks are revised annually, submitted to the University for approval, and are available to students electronically (on LSTOnline).

1.19 When programmes undergo major or minor revision, this is reflected in the new handbook.

1.20 Every course unit has a module descriptor, which is a formal record of its content, structure, assessment scheme and intended learning outcomes as approved by the Academic Board and the University's Academic Provision Approval Committee. This information is published in student handbooks and on the School's virtual learning environment (VLE).

1.21 These mechanisms would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.22 The review team tested the effectiveness of the School's procedures by examining a range of documentary evidence, including programme specifications, module syllabi, course unit descriptors and programme handbooks, and by verifying their presence on the VLE. The team also met senior and teaching staff as well as full and part-time students.

1.23 The programme specifications provide evidence that the School's awards are based on an appropriate credit structure; module outlines within the course handbooks indicate appropriate allocation of learning hours.

1.24 Definitive records of student progression and record of achievement are maintained by the registry of the School; these contain comprehensive data on the award and the student's performance in it.

1.25 Students reported that they have full access to all information about their programmes and course units and that they understand the intended learning outcomes and assessment criteria.

1.26 The University's most recent revalidation confirmed that the validation process works effectively and that both the University and the School are satisfied with the nature and delivery of the collaborative provision. The School's continued adherence to the University's regulatory requirements and quality assurance processes is demonstrated in the Annual Monitoring Reports and Action Plans.

1.27 The team concludes, therefore, that the Expectation is met, and the 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

1.28 The School holds the primary responsibility for the design, development and revision of awards, while the awarding body carries responsibility for approval and validation of the programmes, and for assuring that appropriate standards are achieved. Since Theology and Religion is not a subject area where the awarding body offers its own awards, much of the subject specialism comes from the School.

1.29 Detailed programme design and development within the School is delegated to programme teams, or, in the case of new programmes, to ad hoc committees. This is subsequently brought to Academic Board for academic approval, with the SLT maintaining strategic oversight and ensuring fiscal viability. The School also works closely with the University Link Tutor, whose role is to ensure that programmes are at an appropriate level and generally meet the University's requirements.

1.30 Programme approval follows the frameworks and regulations of the University, which detail the quality assurance procedures that must be followed by the School to ensure that UK threshold standards are maintained.

1.31 Programme teams engage with UK academic thresholds to ensure that awards align appropriately with required academic standards, and are in harmony with the University's protocols and the requirements of PSRBs. The School operates in harmony with the University's Principles of Curriculum Design, and this guides the School's engagement with UK threshold standards.

1.32 Though the School does not have external members on its Academic Board, it makes full use of its external examiners when designing or revising programmes, and Middlesex University ensures that there are external members on validating panels.

1.33 These structures and frameworks would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.34 The team reviewed documentation related to programme approval, including that relating to a revised programme specification and to a new award. The team also met academic staff, support staff and senior managers, and the University Link Tutor.

1.35 The School follows the relevant regulations of the University. It fulfils its responsibilities for programme approval within the framework of the agreements with the University, and the programmes delivered by the School are appropriately aligned to the FHEQ and mapped against the relevant Subject Benchmark Statements.

1.36 The recent programme development and revalidation confirmed that the programme development process works effectively and that both the University and the School are satisfied that the School meets the standards expected by the awarding body.

1.37 The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met in practice and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.38 The awarding body has overall responsibility for the awarding of credit and qualifications. The University's Learning and Quality Enhancement (LQE) Handbook sets out expectations in relation to assessment practices, including the design and aggregation of individual elements to show achievement of learning outcomes at module and programme levels.

1.39 The School is responsible for setting and marking assessments in accordance with the policies, procedures and regulations of its awarding body. The academic faculty of the School is involved in the maintenance of academic standards through second marking and oversight of students' study materials.

1.40 Assessment at the School is supported by clear policies and practices that are aligned to the Quality Code. Assessment policies are consistently implemented and external examiner reports are discussed at programme boards. The awarding body confirms that recommendations from external examiners are appropriately actioned.

1.41 Definitive course documentation for all programmes includes programme specifications, which are included in programme handbooks. Learning outcomes and formative assessment information are contained within the module narratives provided. These are scrutinised at validation to ensure that the assessment activity matches the credit value of the unit and is in keeping with the rest of the University's framework.

1.42 All programmes have an assessment strategy, which is detailed in module descriptors and programme specifications. Each programme has a transparent marking process, and assessments are internally verified. An annual marking exercise takes place to enable faculty to maintain and ensure consistency of assessment across modules and programmes and to share good practice.

1.43 The School is responsible for setting, marking and moderating assignments in compliance with the University's assessment regulations. The generation of assignment briefs is viewed as an integral part of the teaching and learning process at module level, with the Module Leader identifying appropriate assignment tasks. There is no internal moderation process before assignments are submitted to students; however, all set assignments are approved by an external examiner.

1.44 Internal assessment and moderation processes are articulated within the School's Learning, Teaching, Supervision and Assessment Policy. Student submissions of work, both formative and summative, are assessed with full regard to relevant published grading criteria, which are provided within programme handbooks.

1.45 In respect of the design of assessments, the School complies with the awarding body's guidance regarding the operation of assessment boards for each programme to ensure the maintenance of UK threshold academic standards. Terms of reference are clear and membership includes attendance by the University Link Tutor.

1.46 The School and its awarding body have partnership agreements that are supported by a management structure and processes to enable oversight of the higher education provision. This would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.47 The review team considered the effectiveness of the approach to the award of credit and qualifications by examining relevant University and School policies, regulations and procedures, programme specifications, module narratives, student handbooks, assessment information and minutes from assessment boards. The team also met academic staff, professional support staff and senior staff to discuss the effectiveness of the procedures in place.

1.48 Assessment is designed to ensure that programme learning outcomes can be met. Programme specifications and module descriptors contained within programme handbooks demonstrate that each qualification is allocated to the relevant level of the FHEQ, and the University validation processes ensure that the level and volume of study are appropriate.

1.49 Staff and students met by the review team demonstrated a clear understanding of the assessment regulations, policies and requirements to achieve credit, and they provided evidence of engagement with processes in place. There is a thorough understanding of the key role that assessment plays in the demonstration of learning outcomes.

1.50 Students confirmed that the academic credit of individual modules and intended learning outcomes is clearly communicated to them by faculty staff at the three-day Freshers' induction sessions, at the start of each module, and also through the programme handbooks, which are available online. They know what is expected of them to achieve the requisite learning outcomes and are familiar with the range of assessment strategies identified within programme handbooks.

1.51 The operation of assessment boards is clearly articulated within the awarding body's definitive documentation. Assessment boards are chaired by the School and attended by School faculty staff, the University Link Tutor and an external examiner. The Boards are chaired by a senior member of staff to ensure independence from the programme team and they follow a clearly defined procedure.

1.52 External examiners are responsible for the external moderation of student submissions as well as approving marks at assessment boards. They confirm that the standards set are being maintained and are comparable with similar programmes run by other providers, reported through programme boards and to the School's Academic Board.

1.53 The School has developed appropriate mechanisms with its awarding body for the award of credit and qualifications. In order to ensure that threshold standards are met, the decisions to award credit or qualifications are based on robust evidence which demonstrates that learning outcomes at both module and programme levels have been achieved. Therefore the team concludes that the Expectation is met and that the corresponding level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.54 The responsibility for annual monitoring and periodic review is shared between the School and the awarding body. The University offers the School a substantial amount of autonomy in the delivery and assessment of programmes of study, as well as safeguarding the standards in alignment with the Quality Code.

1.55 Processes for internal and external moderation, discussed in detail at Expectation B6, ensure that programmes are delivered as approved and that standards of the University, aligned with the FHEQ, are met. The academic health of the programmes is addressed through annual monitoring processes and procedures.

1.56 Programmes delivered with the awarding body are subject to periodic reapproval, which checks that standards are appropriate. The University undertakes a revalidation of individual or clustered programmes every six years, in accordance with the partnership agreement and the guidelines of the Learning and Quality Handbook. The BA Theology provision delivered at the School was successfully revalidated in May 2016. Membership of review events includes external representation and student participation. The process assures both the School and the University that threshold standards are being met.

1.57 External examiners, appointed by the University, annually monitor the academic standards on individual modules and programmes by sampling students' work and through attendance at assessment boards, and they submit reports to the awarding body. There is no overall monitored annual action plan formulated by the School which brings together issues arising from external examiner reports. The reports are submitted to the University, which monitors them prior to forward transmission to the School. External examiners' reports are received by the School's Academic Secretary, who generates an initial response. This is sent to the external examiner and copied to the University. Following deliberations at programme boards, a more detailed response is generated by the School's Programme Leader to action areas of recommendations and best practice, and these are included in annual monitoring reports.

1.58 As permitted by the University, the School prepares, in consultation with the University Link Tutor, a single annual monitoring report covering all the higher education provision. The template is provided by the awarding body, and brings together module reflection, data tables, external examiner views, CVs, student feedback, and minutes of assessment boards and programme boards.

1.59 Feedback on the annual monitoring report is provided by the University Link Tutor, who identifies progress against actions taken, issues to be addressed and good practice. The process identifies emergent themes to be built into the action plan, although actions are ascribed to individual programmes as appropriate. The School does not operate its own internal annual monitoring process or individual programme-level reports, which would provide increased granularity.

1.60 Strategic oversight of monitoring and review lies with the SLT, Academic Board and the Board of Governors, whose duty is to satisfy itself of the academic integrity of the awards made. However, the annual monitoring report is not formally approved by Academic Board before submission to the University. This is discussed in more detail at Expectation B8.

1.61 The policies and procedures in place for programme monitoring and review are designed to ensure that academic standards are aligned with those of the awarding body and with UK threshold standards. These policies and procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.62 The review team tested the approach to monitoring and review by meeting with staff and analysing documentation, such as validation papers, governance papers, committee minutes, action plans and academic oversight structures.

1.63 A wide range of evidence is used in the School's preparation of the annual monitoring report, including student feedback, external examiner reports, engagement with external agencies, minutes of assessment boards and programme boards. The review team heard that there is no School procedure which would enable professional support staff to directly contribute to, or comment upon, the annual monitoring report and they do not routinely see it. Also, it was unclear to the review team how actions are comprehensively monitored, or how impact is measured within the School's deliberative structures.

1.64 Annual monitoring complies with the requirements of the awarding body and follows those arrangements that are set out, and which explicitly address whether the UK threshold academic standards are achieved and maintained. These arrangements are understood and followed by School staff.

1.65 The review team concludes that the School, with the support of the awarding body, has the appropriate policies in place for ongoing monitoring and review of programmes, and is applying them appropriately. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.66 The School's main source of external and independent expertise in maintaining academic standards are the external examiners and assessors appointed by the University. The roles and responsibilities of external examiners and assessors, including consideration of reports, are clearly defined in University documentation. The School expects the reports to be used as a source of evidence for other quality assurance activities.

1.67 The validation and reapproval of programmes requires the involvement of independent external assessors to provide academic and vocational insight to programmes. They are responsible, together with other panel members, for ensuring that threshold academic standards are being met. Externality is secured by engaging with the University's processes at the point of validation.

1.68 The design of the School's processes for the use of external examiners would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.69 In testing the Expectation the review team considered the procedures for, and reports from, programme approvals and external examiners. The team also held discussions with senior and academic staff.

1.70 The School's honours degree in Theology and Counselling is accredited by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy. The School takes appropriate action to safeguard the accredited status. The School does not use employer feedback as a regular feature of its quality assurance process and there are few formal opportunities to engage a broader range of external perspectives in the quality assurance process.

1.71 The School places reliance primarily on external examiners for the ongoing oversight of academic standards. External examiners are nominated by the School prior to formal approval by the University. They provide annual reports that comment on whether academic standards have successfully been achieved and maintained by the School. To do this they attend assessment boards whereby student assessed work is reviewed, grades are verified and threshold standards are confirmed.

1.72 External examiner reports are discussed at Academic Board and programme boards in addition to being considered by the University. Formal responses are submitted. Report responses and actions are collated by the Academic Secretary in consultation with programme leaders. An action plan summarises areas for improvement, which are monitored by Academic Board. Consideration of reports, responses and action plans through the deliberative structure assures oversight of academic standards and confirms that they have been maintained appropriately.

1.73 In line with the extent of its responsibilities, the School makes appropriate use of external expertise in the maintenance of academic standards. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

1.74 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.

1.75 The School follows the requirements of the University to maintain academic standards effectively. These processes are supported by the School's own internal procedures and guidance. There are no areas of good practice, affirmations or recommendations identified in this section.

1.76 All seven of the Expectations in this area are met and the level of associated risk is low for each. The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies **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 Programme approval follows the relevant frameworks and regulations of the University. The first stage of the University's process is for the School to gain approval in principle for the development of new programmes. The second stage entails the development and approval of the detailed structure and content of the programme. The approval stage includes input from external advisers.

2.2 Programme design and development within the School is delegated to, or initiated by, programme teams, or, in the case of new programmes, to ad hoc committees that include student representation. Proposals are subsequently discussed and approved by Academic Board, the body within the School charged with ultimate responsibility for academic approval and decision making. The SLT carries responsibility for 'policy, directions, and operation', and so there is some overlap in the strategic identification of programme development priorities: the SLT 'is responsible for the ratification of Academic Board decisions', to ensure the strategic direction and the fiscal viability of programmes.

2.3 The design of these policies and processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.4 The team reviewed the minutes of relevant committees, including those of the Academic Board, programme boards, and the Strategic Planning Group, and examined documentation related to programme approval. The team also met a range of academic staff, academic support-related staff, senior managers, and students.

2.5 Programme teams engage with UK academic thresholds to ensure that awards align appropriately with required academic standards and are in harmony with the awarding body's protocols and the requirements of PSRBs. The School is aware of, and engages with, appropriate Subject Benchmark Statements.

2.6 Strategic plans for future programmes and revision of current programmes are discussed by SLT and at Academic Board; staff and students are part of both Academic Board and programme boards, and so play an active part in much of this discussion.

2.7 The University Link Tutor is an active participant in supporting key School committees, and advises the School on matters of University policy and procedure. Programme design, development and submission draws on the University's Learning and Quality Enhancement (LQE) Handbook, and external examiners are invited to comment on revisions to programmes.

2.8 The School follows University policies and procedures as they relate to programme approval. There is extensive and vigorous internal discussion of the development of new programmes by School faculty, and the School exercises oversight of the development of new provision.

2.9 The School operates effective processes for programme design and approval and these are underpinned by clear guidance and support. Therefore, the team concludes that the School meets the Expectation in operation and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.10 Recruitment and admission to the School is by direct application. The Recruitment Admission Policy, available on the School's website, was approved in 2015 and scheduled for review in 2017. Admissions are conducted by faculty in conjunction with Registry. Programme leaders and the Director of Research (in the case of doctoral student applications) work closely with the Admission Administrator and Programme Administrator with oversight by the Academic Secretary. The College's approach to recruitment, selection and admission would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.11 The team reviewed documents relating to recruitment, selection and admissions and met senior staff, teaching staff, support staff and students to test the operational effectiveness of the policies and procedures.

2.12 LSTOnline provides comprehensive information for applicants, including general advice, application packs, fee sheets, financial advice, disability support and the contact details of the Admissions Administrator. Application packs and fee sheets are available to download on the website.

2.13 The applicant is able to download and complete the application form for the appropriate course from the website; it is then returned to the Admissions Administrator. Once the application pack is received, it is assessed by the Registry Department. There is no formal application deadline for any of the programmes. Applicants with accredited prior learning (APL), seeking exemptions from individual modules or an academic year, include a transcript of their previous studies with their application. APL can only be considered from validated educational institutions. The assessment of prior learning or of prior experience is conducted according to the School's established policy.

2.14 The School follows the University's guidance on minimum requirements for entry. Non-traditional entry applicants are requested to contact the Admissions Administrator and are considered on an individual basis. The Admissions Administrator checks all qualifications. There is an effective system for interviewing all applicants to ensure the compatibility of the students and programmes. For international students this will be arranged via a videoconferencing interview. The students whom the team met confirmed that the recruitment and admission process is effective and fit for purpose and that it supported them in making informed decisions. The effective system for interviewing all applicants, which ensures the compatibility of students with programmes, is **good practice**.

2.15 The recruitment, selection and admission policies and procedures are monitored, reviewed, updated and enhanced at least every two years. Responsibility for the regular review of these policies lies with the Academic Secretary, in consultation with the Academic Board and the Registry team. Changes must be approved by Academic Board and ratified by SLT.

2.16 Successful applicants are provided with sufficient information to enable them to make the transition from prospective to current student. New students are given thorough

inductions and there is also an online induction available. Many students had attended a discovery day, which they found very useful.

2.17 Where there is a significant change to a programme, the School informs both prospective and current students at the earliest opportunity and provides advice regarding options available.

2.18 The team concludes that the College has consistent procedures and clear admissions policies which are understood by students and staff. Therefore, the 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

2.19 Academic Board is responsible for learning, teaching and assessment, including those concerning the library and other learning resources. Responsibility for teaching and learning on particular programmes is delegated to programme boards, which report to Academic Board. The Peer Observation Policy outlines the processes of peer observations, which aim to evaluate teaching standards and set expectations while identifying opportunities for tutor development and the sharing of good practice. Staff possess relevant academic qualifications and participate in continuing professional development that is informed by monitoring processes, including teaching observations, module feedback forms and student feedback at programme boards.

2.20 The School states that the Learning, Teaching, Supervision and Assessment Policy articulates its strategic approach to learning and teaching and that this promotes a shared understanding by staff and students. The policy, together with the partnership agreement and validation documents, form the basis for teaching and learning arrangements within the School. The policy sets out in the broadest terms the School's commitment to high quality learning, teaching and assessment, and how this is supported through existing systems and processes, for example teaching observations, internal moderation and assessment boards. The Online Education Strategy briefly sets out the School's two-year plan to increase accessibility to its educational provision through its VLE platform. The School does not have a stand-alone learning and teaching strategy but considers this to be integrated within the School's overall Learning, Teaching, Supervision and Assessment Policy, and articulated through module descriptors and programme specifications.

2.21 The School has policies and procedures in place that would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.22 In testing this Expectation, the review team examined relevant documentation provided by the School, including the strategic documents and policies. The team also had discussions with senior staff, academic and administrative staff, students and employers.

2.23 All teaching staff are appropriately qualified and the team noted evidence of staff development and support for research and scholarly activity. Staff qualifications are checked by the University as part of the approval process to run a programme. All new teaching staff are assigned a mentor who provides support and guidance during the initial period of the tutor's employment. Teaching staff who met the team reported that annual appraisals take place with the line manager. These set targets for teaching and are graded.

2.24 The Peer Observation Policy, implemented in 2014, outlines the process for peer observation of the delivery of teaching and learning. It aims to evaluate teaching standards and set expectations while identifying opportunities for tutor development and the sharing of good practice. Outcomes of teaching observations are recorded on teaching observation forms with evaluative comments and a summary of key strengths, good practice and areas for development. The use of a standardised observation form enables a coherent and consistent approach to the reflective process across subject specialisms and disciplines.

The observations form the basis of discussions with programme leaders as part of annual appraisal. The review team was informed by staff that observations were scheduled in 2014-15, but that arrangements during 2015-16 have been informal. The student submission to this review indicated strong satisfaction with the support provided by tutors, which was reinforced by students during the review visit.

2.25 The School has a strong culture of research and scholarship. Academic staff are encouraged to enhance the level of their academic qualifications and to engage in research and scholarly activity. There is evidence of publishing in a wide range of journals, membership of academic societies and professional bodies, and external examining. Full-time members of the academic staff have one day a week for personal study and development and have access to a sabbatical scheme. The Learning, Teaching, Supervision and Assessment Policy makes reference to continuous professional development and scholarly activity, including professional updating. This is underpinned by the Faculty Development Policy and the Institutional Research and Study Policy, which articulate the School's commitment to support and develop academic staff. However, staff development is primarily focused on the needs of the individual and is not supported by an institutional staff development action plan underpinned by a coherent and strategic framework. The review team was unable to discern a School-level drive to ensure that staff development is aligned to the teaching and learning priorities. The review team **recommends** that the School formalises processes to facilitate the production of a clear, comprehensive annual staff development plan, which is mapped to the School's strategic priorities.

2.26 An Online Education Strategy and a Library Resource Strategy contribute discretely to the School's approach to learning and teaching. The review team considered that these strategies are not strategic in the conventional sense, as there are no aims or propositions that set out a systematic approach to learning, teaching and assessment. The School does not have in place an overarching Learning and Teaching Strategy that articulates a coherent approach to learning and teaching, and sets out the key initiatives and how these will be achieved to promote enhancement. The five-year Business Plan makes reference to estates, IT and course provision but this is in the context of financial planning. There is little evidence of a joined-up strategic approach to learning and teaching. The lack of a standalone strategy, which draws together the various School initiatives, places an over-reliance on discrete policies, strategies and developments at the programme level. The review team therefore **recommends** that the School ensures that there is a more systematic and strategic approach to teaching and learning that articulates the School's key initiatives.

2.27 The School's VLE provides a platform for the delivery of the postgraduate online programmes and the recently validated Level 4 modules for the BA Theology. Learning materials developed for individual modules will also be made available to students studying on-campus as they become available. The School's intranet, which provides access to the VLE, is the main repository for learning resources to support all other programmes. The intranet has not been significantly adopted at the School as a result of priority being given to developing the VLE, as discussed in section B4. Consequently the intranet hosts a limited range of learning resources, such as programme handbooks, placement information and past examination papers. The information presented is not aligned to individual programmes, and learning resources at the module level are not available. Students who met the review team valued the portal access to library resources, but were of the opinion that the VLE needs to be enhanced.

2.28 The School evaluates the quality of learning and teaching through various channels of communication with students. These include module feedback forms and the Student Participation Forum. Students are represented formally on their relevant programme boards and Academic Board. These are important conduits linking staff and students, and issues on

quality can be promptly and appropriately addressed. Teaching and learning is reviewed on an annual basis as part of the programme review process.

2.29 The undergraduate programmes contain work placements that help to develop students' employability. Programme approval processes consider the management and delivery of placement learning opportunities. A Student Placement Handbook covers risk assessment, including health and safety; supervisor and student responsibilities; and preparation and support for students on placement. Programmes use ecclesiastical practitioners to deliver guest sessions as well as hosting placements.

2.30 The review team concludes that the School's learning and teaching intentions are formulated through the deliberative structure and articulated through relevant policies and programme documentation. Staffing is considered during programme approval and monitored through formal teaching observation and performance review processes. Scholarly activity to underpin teaching is supported as part of the School's research agenda and employers are actively involved in the delivery of placement learning opportunities. The Expectation is therefore met in practice. However, there is moderate associated risk, as the lack of an overarching learning and teaching strategy does not facilitate a coherent approach to the enhancement of learning opportunities and teaching practices that is embedded within the staff development process.

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

2.31 The School has a structured approach to enabling students to develop their academic and personal achievement. Students receive a general introduction to the School. Programme handbooks detail the entitlement to support, including personal tutors and pastoral support, and this is clearly understood by students. Oversight of pastoral support is the responsibility of the Pastoral Care Committee, which meets once a term and includes student representation. The services available to students are provided in the School's Pastoral Handbook.

2.32 A wide range of resources are made available to students to support their learning. This includes the website, VLE, the library, careers advice, placements, counselling and disability support. Resources are scrutinised through an approval process. The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) maintains oversight of resource requirements, supported by the School's deliberative structure, which is responsible for monitoring and reviewing the adequacy and effectiveness of the learning resources. Student engagement in quality assurance processes forms an important element of the evaluation process. Funding of resources is identified through the annual School budget round and through discussions with the SLT.

2.33 These arrangements reflect the Expectation to monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential, and would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.34 In testing the Expectation the review team considered a range of School strategies, policies and procedures. The team also held discussions with senior staff, academic and professional support staff, and students.

2.35 All students receive an induction, though the nature and length of this is dependent on the mode of delivery and level of qualification. At induction, students are provided with a range of useful information about their courses and the support available to them, including support for students with disabilities. This information is also available in the programme handbooks. For on-campus students induction is incorporated within the three-day Freshers' week which is organised by the Student Committee in consultation with academic and professional support staff. Research students attend a three-day induction process that sets out expectations and academic regulations, and explains how to access resources. An online induction module provides students with information on the VLE, study skills, library resources and the programme. Students unanimously expressed satisfaction with the inductions they had received.

2.36 Each undergraduate and taught postgraduate student is assigned a personal tutor who is available for academic advice and support. An open-door policy facilitates a high degree of access by students to academic staff. Study skills modules and workshops are provided for first-year undergraduates covering essay and assessment preparation and for third-year undergraduates concerning their project or dissertation. English language support is provided through a study skills programme, which includes several lectures on specific language issues such as punctuation and grammar. There are established procedures for identifying additional support for students with physical and mental medical conditions and specific learning difficulties. Students are provided with information on how they can access

that support, including the Disabled Students' Allowance. Additional pastoral support is provided by the School's pastoral support provision. The Training Unit provides dedicated careers support with links to career opportunities, and includes help with interviews, putting together a curriculum vitae, and other useful information. Professional support staff whom the review team met described a holistic support strategy, from pre-entry and admission to on-programme support and preparation for employment.

2.37 The resources and facilities required to deliver new provision are identified as part of the approval process, when development teams are asked to comment on the human, physical and learning resources needed. Resources are reviewed annually as part of the programme review process. Academic Board is responsible for advising the Board of Governors and SLT on the resources required to implement the School's ongoing and proposed academic programmes. The Library Committee, which includes student representation, advises Academic Board on resourcing to maintain, develop and enhance the library's contribution to the School's academic provision. The Library Resource Strategy identifies key priorities. Students have the opportunity to provide feedback on resources through the student representative system. They confirmed that, in general, they are satisfied with the learning resources, particularly the library's book stock and access to electronic resources.

2.38 The School's Online Education Strategy sets out the key areas for development of the VLE to support the delivery of the BA Theology and the two postgraduate programmes. The strategy is overseen by the LSTOnline Group, headed by the Director of eLearning. While headway has been made to progress the e-learning agenda, notably in relation to the VLE, staff engagement with it, and the design and accessibility of the site, current priorities are narrowly focused on developing learning materials for the BA Theology programme. Learning resources developed for online modules will also be made available to on-campus students for programmes that share common core modules. However, support for other programmes is limited and therefore significantly reduces parity of experience. The School's intranet, which also provides access to the VLE, currently holds programme handbooks, minutes of meetings, placement information and past examination papers. Information and learning resources at the module level are not hosted, and the intranet is not structured around individual programmes. The use of the VLE in supporting student learning is not evidenced in any of the School's strategies, and the current remit of the LSTOnline Group is too narrow to encompass all modes of study and the full range of academic provision. The School recognises that the use of the VLE needs to be enhanced so that learning resources can be developed throughout the student journey, which would support the transition of learners from undergraduate study through to research. The review team therefore **recommends** that the School further develop the structure and content of the VLE to ensure parity of access for all students.

2.39 The review team finds that the School operates systems and processes that support students academically, personally and professionally and which take account of the diverse needs of learners. The Expectation is therefore met in practice. However, given that the School's current strategy for developing the VLE does not encompass the full range of academic provision which impacts on the parity of the student learning experience, the level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

2.40 The School's approach to student engagement is defined in the Student Engagement Policy and conforms to the expectations and requirements of Section 9 of the University's LQE Handbook. The Student Engagement Policy and the LQE Handbook are available on the VLE and the School's website. The policy aims to engage students in influencing their learning experiences and programme improvement and includes a system for higher education student representation within the College's decision-making structures. The College is committed to involving all students in its strategic decision making and operational management processes and to offering an opportunity for students to have direct involvement in assessing and shaping their own learning experience.

2.41 The design of these arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.42 The review team tested the effectiveness of the School's approach to student engagement through discussions with staff and students, and consideration of support documentation including the student submission, student feedback summaries, and student representation policies and systems.

2.43 The Student Committee is the main student voice at the School but there is also a Student Participation Forum which gives the opportunity for any students to engage in educational enhancement and quality assurance.

2.44 Students are engaged in various ways. There is an open-door policy encouraging students to meet with staff without prior appointment and students have access to module tutors, programme leaders and an assigned Academic Tutor. Student feedback is collected and analysed, including data generated by module feedback forms, by programme boards and Academic Board, revalidation events and QAA reviews. The Student President and Vice-Presidents also meet with the SLT weekly.

2.45 There is student involvement and engagement at all levels of the School's committee structure, including programme boards, Academic Board, the Library Committee, the Board of Governors and the Student Participation Forum and the Student Committee. For example, student reps and staff meet at programme boards to discuss the programme and to look at future developments, student feedback results and reports from external examiners. The minutes are made available on the LST website. There are comprehensive opportunities provided to students to engage effectively at all levels of the institution. This is **good practice**.

2.46 Academic Board chairs and administrators provide support to student representatives, and the Academic Secretary has oversight of the support available for undergraduate student academic representation. Student representatives are elected annually and are emailed feedback on the actions taken following the meetings and events that they attended. The Student Committee plays a significant role in training all student representatives. Through discussion with students it was noted that this training relies on the provision of handover notes, informal discussions and shadowing of the incumbent representative, rather than by the provision of documented training materials. The team **recommends** that the School documents and monitors the student representative training arrangements to ensure that they are consistent and effective.

2.47 The School monitors the effectiveness of student engagement via meetings with the Student President and Vice-Presidents, and through the Student Participation Forum. The Student Participation Forum considers specific areas of concern, assesses each on a 10-point scale, and explores opportunities for improvement.

2.48 The team concludes that students understand how the representation system and other mechanisms operate and that the School monitors and responds effectively to the student voice. Students are deliberately and actively engaged. The Expectation is met with low associated risk.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.49 As outlined in Expectation A3.2, the School's processes for assessment operate in accordance with the academic frameworks and regulations of its awarding body, including the allocation of responsibilities for setting, marking and moderating assessments.

2.50 The School operates its own Teaching and Assessment Policy, which provides faculty staff with brief guidance in terms of setting and moderation of assessments and provision of feedback to students. The University monitors the School policy and practices through attendance of the University Link Tutor at all assessment boards, scrutiny of external examiner reports, receipt of annual monitoring reports and the periodic review process.

2.51 All student work is first-marked and, where appropriate, second-marked prior to scrutiny by the external examiner. In recognition of the need to have a more holistic and consistent approach to the quality of feedback provided to students, the School has established an annual Marking Exercise Workshop, which also enables the sharing of good practice.

2.52 There is no internal approval system for assignment briefs prior to receipt by the external examiner for external moderation, apart from modules where students are able to generate their own assignment briefs, for example the Integrative Theology Project at Level 6 of the BA Theology. Module leaders generate assignment briefs and the School relies on the external moderation process to ensure quality control.

2.53 The internal process for considering extenuating circumstances is aligned to the requirements of the awarding body. To ensure consistency of practice all extension requests in respect of assignment deadlines are considered by the Academic Secretary with the decisions directly communicated to students and the relevant module leader. Assessment Board minutes confirm that students have achieved the standards set for the award of credit and qualifications.

2.54 Policies for dealing with plagiarism and other academic misconduct are incorporated into programme handbooks. The School has its own Academic Misconduct regulations and appeals process, which is articulated within programme handbooks and available on the School website. Students are informed about plagiarism during induction processes.

2.55 The policies and procedures of the School, together with the regulations and procedures of the awarding body, would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.56 The review team tested the effectiveness of the approach and procedures in respect of assessment by scrutinising awarding body regulations and guidance handbooks, programme handbooks, Assessment Board terms of reference and arrangements, minutes of Assessment Board meetings, the Teaching and Assessment Policy, the Teaching,

Learning and Supervision Policy, the Marking Review Exercise, external examiner reports and the Accreditation of Prior Learning and Credit Transfer Policy.

2.57 The team also held meetings with teaching staff, including the University Link Tutor, professional support staff, employers and students, and viewed content within the School's online platforms.

2.58 The evidence reviewed showed the procedures, which are aligned to the Quality Code, to be effective in practice. The School's policies and procedures, considered within the framework of the University's academic regulations and quality enhancement policies, ensure that effective assessment strategies allow students to demonstrate competence to meet the intended learning outcomes of their programmes of study. The School operates equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment, which are closely monitored by external examiners who ensure that assessments are being set at the appropriate level. Programme assessment boards meet at least biannually and membership includes senior School staff, the University Link Tutor and external examiners.

2.59 The University's regulations, programme handbooks and the School's assessment policies are available to staff and students on the College's intranet and these include information relating to admissions criteria and extenuating circumstances. Students confirmed that they are familiar with these policies and understand, for example, the process in place for extenuating circumstances.

2.60 Details of assessment criteria are contained within the programme handbooks and students are familiar with these and the range of assessment strategies, such as individual and group projects, examinations, portfolios and reflective practice logs. Students confirm that they are made fully aware of assessment tasks, understand what is required of them, and that they find the differentiated assessment criteria appropriately challenging. Processes exist to support students with additional learning needs, and staff and students confirmed that individual reasonable adjustments are made when necessary, which provide students with an equal opportunity to demonstrate their achievement.

2.61 Students commented that the School adheres to its agreed timeframe of a 28-day turnaround time and that following constructive feedback, they have sufficient time to prepare for their next assignment. Currently, students deliver completed assignments to the Academic Registry in person or by post. They told the team that they would prefer to submit assignments electronically. The team heard that this is a planned feature for the improvement of the VLE, along with the development of student e-portfolios and a plagiarism-detection tool.

2.62 The team heard that there is a lack of consistency in the processes for gathering systematic module feedback from students, with some teachers ensuring that students complete feedback forms while others do not, preferring a more informal approach. In discussions with staff and students, the team could not discern a systematic process for the formalised consideration of module feedback from every programme, though it was clear that issues are responded to in most cases, and verbally reported on at programme boards.

2.63 There is a coherent process for internal moderation and second marking, which helps to ensure the quality of marking and feedback within individual modules. Module leaders report on the quality of submitted assessed work. A moderation summary form is completed for every module, providing opportunities to identify generic strengths and areas for development in students' work. This process includes an evaluation of the spread of marks, which some module leaders use to compare with those of previous years. The internal moderation process is formally documented and the team heard that moderation processes have been improved by an external examiner request to see all comments on the scripts, which are now scanned and available to external examiners.

2.64 The team heard how the School takes into account the varying academic abilities of students, with details of the processes put into place to support weaker students, such as the delivery of intensive essay-writing skills. Students confirm that these mechanisms are supportive and enable them to achieve, although some postgraduate students would welcome the inclusion of dedicated modules on research skills.

2.65 The School has in place procedures to be able to recognise prior learning of students. These are based upon the regulations of the awarding body and applied for a small minority of applicants. The School's Accreditation of Prior Learning and Credit Transfer Policy adheres to the principles laid out by the University, which include consideration of the relevant chapter of the Quality Code. The School's policies and procedures, and programme handbooks, ensure that students are made aware of the assessment processes and strategies and are supported throughout the application procedure. The School admits students who fulfil the APL criteria and there is evidence of a detailed and considered approach to the admission of students.

2.66 To impress upon students the seriousness of academic misconduct, students found guilty may be required to undertake a piece of work to demonstrate their understanding of the offence. The team was concerned about the relatively low numbers of students suspected of plagiarism and the School's approach to establishing and ensuring consistency of practice related to academic malpractice.

2.67 In response to this concern, the team was told that plagiarism-detection tools are not particularly effective for the academic disciplines that are taught at the School, and that therefore there is a reliance on the subject expertise of individual staff members to identify plagiarism. The review team does not consider that this approach is sufficiently robust and therefore **recommends** that the School should strengthen the systems and processes for the detection of plagiarism. This would ensure that unacceptable academic practice is responded to consistently and equitably.

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

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining

Findings

2.69 The School has limited responsibilities for external examining. Middlesex University is responsible for defining the role, approval, training and recognition of the work of external examiners, whereas the School is primarily responsible for putting into effect the recommendations of external examiners and making effective use of their reports in quality assurance and enhancement. External examiner reports are initially reviewed by the Academic Secretary who generates responses. Reports are considered by programme boards and the agreed responses are reported to Academic Board and assessment boards. Actions emanating are monitored by programme boards, with oversight by Academic Board through the receipt of the minutes of meetings.

2.70 The design of the School's processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.71 The review team considered procedural documents, minutes of Academic Board, programme boards and assessment boards, and samples of external examiner reports and responses. The team also held discussions with senior and academic staff, and with students.

2.72 The responsibilities for the nomination and appointment of external examiners are set out in Middlesex University's LQE Handbook Section 4 - The External Examiner System. The School has input to the nomination for the external examiner of the University, though the final decision and responsibility for appointment, induction and training rests with the University.

2.73 External examiners receive supporting information and guidance, including programme handbooks, assignment briefs, marking criteria, assessed coursework and internal moderation records, to undertake their role. University assessment boards are attended by external examiners, who verify marks and comment on the appropriateness of the assessment process and the standards set for, and achieved by, students.

2.74 External examiners use the template forms provided by the University to confirm that academic standards have been set appropriately and are being maintained in relation to FHEQ level descriptors and Subject Benchmark Statements, and that the standards are comparable with those of providers of similar qualifications. Examiners of the University awards comment on the conduct of assessment boards in accordance with awarding body regulations. External examiners also provide informative comment on features of good practice with potential for wider dissemination, as well as on how their previous recommendations have been responded to.

2.75 At School level, the Academic Secretary considers all reports and provides a brief response to each external examiner. Reports are then forwarded to faculties whereby programme leaders are required to make a more detailed response, following discussions at programme boards, outlining any actions to be taken. Programme board minutes show that programme teams consider individual reports together with the response. Academic Board has oversight of the external examining process through the receipt of programme board minutes. Student representatives on programme boards have access to external examiner reports and responses, and are responsible for feeding back to other students on progress against actions. Minutes of programme boards are made available to students on the School

website. However, external examiner reports and responses are not hosted on the intranet or VLE.

2.76 The review team finds that the School has effective procedures for using external examiner reports. The Expectation is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review

Findings

2.77 As outlined under Expectation A3.3, the School's programmes are subject to the annual monitoring and periodic review processes of its awarding body. Revalidation of programmes takes place every six years and there is a process that is outlined in the University's LQE Handbook. Periodic review processes are set out by the University and the latest event took place in May 2016, where the BA Theology programmes were successfully revalidated. There are processes in place to protect the academic interests of students should a programme be discontinued.

2.78 Annual monitoring of the programmes delivered on behalf of Middlesex University requires the School to complete a template provided by the University and to submit it together with an action plan relating to the previous academic year; this includes any outstanding actions to be taken in respect of external examiner reports. This report covers all programmes in the form of a composite action plan. In preparing the report, evidence is drawn from a wide range of reference points including external examiner comments, student feedback surveys, minutes of the deliberative structure, assessment board minutes, engagement with external agencies and good practice.

2.79 The University appoints a Link Tutor who makes at least one visit to the School and provides advice as appropriate on all matters relating to the operation of the provision, including feedback on progress, staff development requirements, and any outstanding actions to be taken in respect of the annual monitoring report.

2.80 The ongoing monitoring of programmes occurs by way of twice-yearly Programme Board meetings. Programme Board meetings include student representation, programme leaders, relevant tutors, programme administrators, the librarian and IT support.

2.81 External examiners appointed by the awarding body have an important role in programme review in respect of regular reports, and these reports form standing items on Programme Board meeting agendas.

2.82 Module and tutor feedback forms are incorporated within every set of study material. Module forms examine each taught module. The School's programme handbooks state that programmes are reviewed and adjusted in order to assure and enhance their quality, and modules are presented in some detail. Programme feedback forms are sent to students with their last set of study material for each level. Tutor forms allow students to report on any problems they may experience with individual tutors and the process of trying to work with someone at a distance. Programme questionnaires invite comment upon the programme in general. Students receive a report on any issues that they have identified and the measures taken to resolve them. Reports are normally considered at the Programme Board meeting in the autumn session for the previous academic year and are, where necessary, reported upon during the annual monitoring process. The whole feedback process is reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that it is effective in helping students' learning experience.

2.83 The School follows the University's processes for programme monitoring and review and has a range of its own internal processes. This framework would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.84 The review team tested the effectiveness of the School's arrangements for programme monitoring and review by examining relevant documentation, including procedural documents, annual monitoring reports, validation documents, Academic Board minutes, Programme Board minutes, responses to annual monitoring reports and module evaluation reports. The team gathered evidence from meetings with students, professional support staff, academic staff, senior staff and a representative from the University.

2.85 Overall, the processes for programme approval, monitoring and review work well. The periodic review of the validated provision remains the responsibility of the University and the School complies with their requirements, whereby a single annual monitoring report is prepared that aligns with the requirements of the LQE Handbook. Contingency plans are in place to protect the academic interests of students, and the School's Business Plan is thorough in its approach to both academic and scenario planning.

2.86 The Academic Board is accountable to the Board of Governors through the SLT for the planning, development and operation of the academic work of the School. The annual monitoring cycles and regulatory processes are adhered to, as set out in the partnership arrangements.

2.87 Although the Academic Board is responsible for monitoring and reviewing action taken in respect of annual monitoring activities, the team could not discern any process whereby the annual monitoring report is formally approved by the Board before it is submitted to the University. Responsibility is devolved to specific individuals and committees identified in the action plan. There is a lack of direct involvement from students, professional support staff, employers and placement providers, although there is clear evidence that the process does take account of staff and student concerns and that these are appropriately addressed where identified. There is also no institution-level report which collates and brings together the full range of activities relating to the School's operational issues.

2.88 Additionally, the review team found that there is a lack of self-critical or reflective analysis, which demonstrates that the School is drawing on its own evaluative systems. For example, there is no evidence to support the interrogation of quantitative data to support qualitative judgements. Also, there is no clearly articulated system to ensure that individual programme teams develop monitored action plans for each programme of study or that all School staff systematically contribute to the development of the annual monitoring report. Some staff did not know what the annual monitoring report was, and they had not had sight of one. Staff who were aware of the annual monitoring report did not use it as a working document, but rather as a report to the validating body, produced by one person. Similarly, the team heard that employers and placement providers do not have the opportunity to contribute directly to the compilation of the report. The team **recommends** that the School should ensure that internal annual monitoring and review processes are comprehensive and owned by all staff.

2.89 Student participation in programme monitoring and review is aligned with the requirements of the awarding body's LQE Handbook. The School has in place a range of opportunities to engage with students, which feeds into the monitoring and review of quality and standards. These include consideration of module feedback forms, programme surveys and formal representation throughout the School's committee structure and validation boards. Some students do not routinely receive module feedback forms to complete, although they generally were able to make their views known by other methods, including through the student representative system. However, it is not clear to the team how the

student input directly informs the annual monitoring report in a coherent and aggregated way.

2.90 The School is managing its responsibilities for monitoring and reviewing the programmes delivered on behalf of its awarding body. The review team concludes that although the Expectation is met, there are some weaknesses in the operation of the annual monitoring process, particularly regarding the lack of an inclusive approach, systematic contribution and institutional consideration of the annual monitoring report, and as such the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Moderate

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

Quality Code, Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints

Findings

2.91 The School has a Student Academic Complaints Policy and Procedure. Details about the appeal and complaint procedures are included in the programme handbook. The Academic Appeal Policy and Procedure and form are also available on LSTOnline. Procedures set out in the Academic Complaints Policy and Procedures, Non-Academic Complaints Policy and Procedures, and Disciplinary Policy and Procedures are time specific and ensure that formal decisions are made by independent panels that are clearly documented. They include details of the possibility of an appeal to the University in the first instance, and if necessary to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for higher education. The policies and procedures for handling students' complaints and academic appeals are fair, effective and timely and would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.92 The review team discussed the arrangements with support staff, academic staff and students. The team examined the procedures available to students on the VLE and the college website, in student handbooks and through awarding body regulations.

2.93 The Student Academic Complaint Policy identifies two informal steps to be taken prior to the instigation of a formal complaint. The formal complaints procedure requires the Academic Secretary to convene an Academic Complaint Panel within 10 working days of receipt of a complaint, and for the Panel to seek to resolve any justifiable complaint through specific and time-related recommendations. In the case of formal complaints, the Academic Secretary makes the decision of the Complaint Appeal Panel known to all relevant parties in writing and ensures, in consultation with Academic Board and the SLT, that decisions of the Panel are implemented in full within the agreed time. Failure to complete actions are reported to the Academic Dean and Executive Director.

2.94 The student submission to this review stated that some aspects of the complaints process were unclear and that clarification about the complaints procedures and swift responses would be helpful. However, students met by the review team raised no issue but instead confirmed that they could find information about both complaints and appeals in their programme handbook. Students feel that appeals are dealt with effectively and advised that they are aware that the non-academic complaints process is currently being reviewed.

2.95 Overall, the team found the system for academic appeals and student complaints operated by the School to be effective and concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.96 Since the School does not award its own degrees, the consideration of this Expectation relates to arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with organisations other than the degree-awarding body, such as placement-based learning and the management of those opportunities with various organisations.

2.97 All undergraduate students are required to complete a placement. Students have input to the placement that they will undertake, but it is the School's responsibility to identify, organise and manage that placement. Students on the Theology and Counselling pathway are required to undertake a placement with a professional counselling organisation; other students are normally assigned a church-based placement as part of the required Formation unit. The training unit carries the responsibility for managing most placement learning, and for liaising with both students and placement organisations; the Theology and Counselling Team takes a parallel role for Counselling students.

2.98 The placement handbook offers an outline to church-based supervisors and placement hosts of the expectations they can have of students, and the responsibilities they carry as supervisors in delivering placement learning for the School.

2.99 These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.100 The team tested the Expectation by meeting with placement supervisors, students who have undertaken placements, and staff and faculty involved in the placement process. The team also evaluated documents including handbooks, employer feedback, and orientation materials.

2.101 There is a robust structure in place to ensure that students are being appropriately supported at the placement site and that their learning needs are attended to in a structured way. This includes appropriate assessment and monitoring, and respect for the awarding body regulations. Students are provided with Placement Handbooks that are comprehensive and provide a thorough explanation of the expectations, aims and logistics of the fieldwork experience.

2.102 The School operates a careful process for assessing the quality of placement learning opportunities, and for ensuring that the duty of care is fully in place. The placement sites are carefully vetted by training unit staff. Placement learning is also a requirement in the newly validated distance learning mode, which is to begin in September 2016, but the precise process for supporting distance students in their placements is not yet fully in place. The team **recommends** that the School establishes clear systems to ensure that placement provision for online learning addresses issues of risk in remote locations.

2.103 The School supports the placement provision through the training unit, and supports students' practice through the Formation course unit. Students are assigned a supervisor at their placement location. If a student fails a placement, they have the opportunity to complete an alternative placement, often in the summer, in order to progress to the next

level. The inclusive system of placements for all level 4 programmes, which encourages students to base their learning in practice, constitutes **good practice**.

2.104 The placement providers who met the review team are very positive about the range of support they are offered by the School. There is a supervisors' training event each year and these events are useful in developing a community of placement supervisors and sharing good practice. Supervisors help the School to assess whether the student has met attendance requirements of the placement, but assessment is undertaken by the Training Unit staff. Students are given pastoral support both from the Training Unit and from the placement location.

2.105 The team concludes that the consistent and robust approach to placement management works well in practice. The Expectation is met on the basis of the strong links between placement providers and the School, and the effective management of placements by the Training Unit and the Theology and Counselling team. The associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Findings

2.106 The School offers supervision for research degrees as part of its validated provision with Middlesex University. Currently, there are three research degrees covered by this provision (the MTh, the MPhil, and the PhD), with a further award, the DProf, having completed the internal stages of design, and awaiting validation.

2.107 With respect to research degrees, the School's partnership with the University differs from the arrangements that govern taught degrees. The School's Director of Research recommends the admission of postgraduate research students to the University, but it is the University that issues a formal offer of admission. Research degrees are overseen by the Research Degrees Committee, which reports to the Academic Board. Day-to-day management of research provision is overseen by the Director of Research and the Programme Administrator for Research.

2.108 Admission processes for research degree students have recently been revised to follow more closely the model of the awarding body, to ensure that the student has successfully completed a developed proposal and negotiated the registration interview before formal admission.

2.109 All students are provided with a Research Degrees Handbook, which outlines policy, procedure, and regulations. Each student has a primary and secondary supervisor. One of these supervisors will be assigned as the student's Director of Studies; normally a member of the LST academic staff, this person is the one 'responsible for managing the student's research project through the critical stages of its life cycle'.

2.110 Supervisors are expected to be part of twice-annual research supervisors' meetings, at which 'good practice is identified and shared, and training issues are addressed'. The School ensures that supervisors are appropriately qualified, seeks prior approval from the awarding body for all new supervisors, and ensures that all of its research degree supervisors undertake appropriate supervisory training. New and inexperienced supervisors are provided with mentors, and normally act as 'second supervisors' to gain experience before being appointed as primary supervisors.

2.111 The Chair of the University's Research Degrees Board, acting on behalf of that Board, approves the Chair for the PhD oral examination, the examiners, and all exam arrangements, though the School is responsible for recommending suitable external examiners for each research candidate. This is, in each case, a recognised expert in the field in which the student is researching but who is not part of the supervisory team.

2.112 The School's procedures and processes for the provision and management of research degrees would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.113 The team tested the School's approach through meetings with staff and students (campus-based research students, and overseas students by videoconference). The team also reviewed a range of documentation, including University regulations, the Research

Student Handbook, supervisor training opportunities, orientation documentation, progress monitoring processes, committee papers, and policies and procedures relating to thesis submission and examination.

2.114 The processes for the provision and management of research degrees work well overall. Admission processes are in line with those expected by the awarding body; approval, mentoring, and training of supervisors are robust and secure; processes for annual review, progression, and examination of students are appropriate and consistently applied; resources for student learning are sufficient; and opportunities are made available for students to develop appropriate research skills.

2.115 Research students are registered students of both the School and the University, and have full access to the range of resources available from both institutions. The research environment is supported by an institutional commitment to research, and support for the research activities of the school's own academic staff, which indicates that research excellence is celebrated and encouraged.

2.116 At the end of the 2015-16 academic year there were 67 students registered on MPhil/PhD programmes; of these, 41 were part-time international students, most of whom lived outside the UK. Part-time distance research students are now required to be in residence at or near the School for two weeks each year, a revision to requirements introduced in the current year, so that they can engage more fully with the research community at the school, and take advantage of research training offered by the School and University. Not all research students with whom the team spoke were yet aware of this requirement. The team **affirms** the steps being taken to ensure that part-time distance research students are drawn into the School's research community.

2.117 The School expects supervisors to meet with candidates at least four times a year, or two to three times for part-time students, and to supply records of such meetings to the Research Administrator for the student's file. However, there is no robust process for ensuring that regular supervisory contacts consistently take place, and are monitored, recorded, and reviewed. The team **recommends** that the School establishes clearly defined mechanisms for monitoring research student engagement.

2.118 LST ensures that student progress is assessed annually, and that concerns are raised and identified. Students first register on the MPhil, and formal transfer to the PhD normally takes place at the end of the second year of full-time study, through successful completion of the Transfer Interview, where experienced supervisors who are not part of the student's own team determine whether the candidate has met the required standards to transfer to PhD. Students who do not meet the requirements for transfer will remain registered as MPhil students.

2.119 The team concludes that the Expectation is met in practice and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

2.121 All 11 Expectations are met and there are three areas of good practice identified that relate to the effective systems for interviewing all applicants, the opportunities available for student engagement, and the inclusive system of placements for Level 4 students. However, eight recommendations and one affirmation have also been made by the team and three Expectations have moderate levels of associated risk: B3, B4 and B8.

2.122 The review team 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's approach to meeting this Expectation is set out in its Public Information Policy, and outlines the route by which the School ensures that all information produced by the School is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The policy is designed to ensure that all published information is accurate, transparent and accessible, and that all stakeholders can form an accurate impression of the School and make properly informed decisions, as well as securing compliance with legal obligations and data protection regulations. Overall responsibility for information lies mainly with the Director of Communications; public information relating to academic programmes must be developed in consultation with the Academic Secretary and the Registrar. All digital or printed material is commissioned or approved by the Director of Communications who, along with web gatekeepers, ensures accuracy and accessibility of the information.

3.2 The University approves all published information, and monitors and reviews the systems that the School uses to review that information.

3.3 The School's website and prospectus provide stakeholders with a wide range of appropriate, accessible and accurate information about the institution, its programmes of study, its validation arrangements, and its mission and values. They include comprehensive information on the curriculum, the academic, social and pastoral environment, and the facilities and support services offered by the School. The website and prospectus provide extensive information on entry requirements and admissions procedures for both undergraduate and postgraduate courses, including research degrees, and an outline of the programmes of study, though not, currently, access to programme specifications. Fee details are also published on the website, together with information about student loans, scholarships and bursaries. Information for international students, including guidance on visa restrictions and language requirements, can be found in a clearly signposted area on the website.

3.4 The School also runs a series of Discovery Days for prospective students.

3.5 The School uses the LSTOnline facility to communicate information to students (using the 'notices' facility), and within the School a range of methods are used to convey information to students, including noticeboards, email, the internal mail system and regular face-to-face meetings between students and staff at such places as the regular coffee break time.

3.6 These practices and procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

3.7 The team tested the School's approach through meetings with staff, employers and students, and viewing the VLE and the website. The team also reviewed a range of documentation, including University regulations and procedures, handbooks, transcripts, advertising materials, and school policies and procedures relating to information.

3.8 Students are provided with a range of printed and electronic information to support their induction and studies. The student handbooks contain detailed and comprehensive guidance on all aspects of School life and helpful information about the local environment. Students whom the team met confirmed that they find the information on the website and the VLE to be clear, accessible, informative and accurate, though uneven in its coverage, with some modules not engaging with the VLE. The team makes a recommendation regarding this issue, which is primarily situated within Expectation B4.

3.9 The School has provided training to support all staff engaged with online learning platforms. The use of social networking platforms is encouraged, subject to the guidelines laid down in the School's IT Policy.

3.10 Programme handbooks are published on LSTOnline and these provide extensive information for students on a range of appropriate topics, including a copy of the programme specifications, module specifications, learning support, and assessment information. The Pastoral Handbook offers information on support avenues for students, while the Supervisor's Handbook provides essential information for placement organisations. The programme handbooks and research student handbooks are produced by programme leaders, and reviewed by the Director of Communication. They are submitted annually to the University's Centre for Academic Partnerships for review and approval prior to distribution and circulation. New programme specifications and any subsequent amendments are also submitted to the University for approval and the Director of Communications ensures that the website and VLE are updated accordingly.

3.11 On completion of their programme of study, following the meeting of the Board of Examiners, students receive a copy of their academic transcript as a record of their studies. The formal award certificates are produced by the University and forwarded by the School to the student.

3.12 Overall, the team considers that information about learning opportunities at the School is clear, comprehensive and trustworthy. In light of this, the Expectation is met, and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

3.14 The Expectation in this section is met and the associated risk level is low. There are no areas of good practice or affirmations recorded in this judgement area. There is one recommendation relevant to this section that recognises the need to further develop the contents of the VLE; however, this is primarily situated in Expectation B4.

3.15 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 has developed enhancement initiatives that derive from a strong institutional commitment to further improve the quality of learning opportunities for students within a context and ethos of evangelical interdenominational theological Christianity.

4.2 A recent successful revalidation event for the BA Theology programmes demonstrates the School's systematic approach to the development of enhancing the quality of students' learning opportunities by revising the programme content and developing a distance learning strategy. The School's Academic Board has strategic oversight of all annual monitoring outcomes and is responsible for approving student outcomes, meeting the academic thresholds.

4.3 The School's strategic approach to enhancing the student learning experience is embedded within a culture of continuous improvement in several areas, including learning and teaching, student engagement activities, individualised student support and placement provision, which encourages students to base their learning in practice.

4.4 The School invests time and effort into individual and team initiatives to improve the student experience and to increase opportunities for extended extracurricular learning activities, such as field trips to monasteries and orthodox churches, thereby complementing and enhancing the opportunities provided by the range of academic programmes.

4.5 The School has a set of strategic aims and policies that, taken together, would allow the Expectation to be met.

4.6 The review team considered the effectiveness of the School's approach by reviewing a variety of documentation, including data, business plans, annual monitoring reports, revalidation documentation and committee minutes. The team raised questions in meetings with staff, students, employers and placement providers, with a focus on how the various enhancement initiatives were organised, planned and monitored in a systematic way.

4.7 In exploring the School's approach to enhancement and the approach to strategic oversight, the review team was able to confirm the productive nature of the relationship with the awarding body, Middlesex University, and how the School uses this relationship to support learning and teaching and clearly align its activities to the Quality Code.

4.8 Although the School does not have a formal enhancement strategy, the review team was able to identify the School's enhancement approach through the meetings it held with staff, students and external stakeholders. The School claims that enhancement initiatives are planned and systematically integrated. Academic teaching staff confirmed during staff meetings that a number of initiatives were underway with the aim of enhancing students' learning opportunities, for example through online and distance learning provision. However, in evaluating the manner in which approaches to enhancement had been considered at different levels in the School, the team found limited oversight of the School's enhancement activities.

4.9 Staff met by the review team demonstrated an understanding of the processes in respect of the awarding body procedures and their responsibilities, but were unclear as regards the School's own processes for annual monitoring and how the outputs of the awarding body processes feed into the annual monitoring report to strengthen the School's own quality assurance and quality improvement cycles.

4.10 Additionally, staff were unclear as to how, where and when actions arising from the annual monitoring review processes are addressed or completed or how they result in systematic continuous improvement. It is not clear how individual programmes respond directly to the annual monitoring review report or how actions are differentiated according to the programme level. The School does not routinely collect qualitative and quantitative data from employers and placement providers to inform annual monitoring processes or enhancements.

4.11 There are no indicators of success or impact measures so it is not clear how the School knows that it has improved, by, for example, the systematic and robust interrogation of data. Furthermore, the annual monitoring report is not directly reported upon through the committee structure or formally considered by the Academic Board prior to submission to the University. This has led to a recommendation at Expectation B8. The review team noted that although there is an effective committee structure, terms and remits of committees do not include deliberative consideration of enhancement as a standing item, although enhancement initiatives are reported upon in, for example, programme boards.

4.12 Quality assurance processes are intended to be used to inform enhancement initiatives, principally through the annual monitoring processes. These processes provide a foundation for enhancement initiatives that, if systematically planned, evaluated and disseminated to all School staff, would usefully inform the College's overall approach to enhancement, beyond the standard operational activities for improvement. The review team therefore **recommends** that the School should formalise and strengthen the systems and frameworks that support the relationship between the strategic priorities and enhancement practices.

4.13 Despite the lack of an overall strategic approach to enhancement, it was clear to the review team that the School enhances the quality of students' learning opportunities. The elected representatives of the Student Body meet regularly with the Executive Director, and student issues are a standing item on the agenda at the Academic Board and programme boards as well as other appropriate management meetings.

4.14 The contribution of employers and placement providers to improve the quality of students' learning experience is positive. The team heard that placement providers are well supported by the School's Training Unit and students told the review team that they have regular supportive contact with the Training Unit, which helps them with employment prospects.

4.15 The review team concludes that the Expectation in respect of enhancement is met and that the level of associated risk is moderate, because of the lack of a well-founded relationship between priorities and practice in respect of enhancement.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

4.17 The Expectation in this section is met and the associated risk level is moderate. One recommendation regarding the need to formalise and strengthen the systems and frameworks relating to enhancement practices has been made. There are no areas of good practice or affirmations identified.

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

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1 The School has a long-standing commitment to improving the employability of its students. The School states that its key goal is to ensure its graduates are imbued with the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to be effective and successful in their chosen future vocations and careers. The School does not judge what students might choose as their role in life and so provides a range of generic but high-level graduate and employability skills.

5.2 The School clearly considers employability as a standalone, holistic concept at a higher level than their graduates simply 'getting a job', and offers its undergraduate students support in developing relevant skills and knowledge above and beyond that which might make them attractive to an employer. The School places a high emphasis on generic graduate skills and develops them progressively across Levels 4 to 6, which is evident from the guidance provided to students in programme handbooks, the consideration given to assignment design and the careful planning of teaching and learning activities to ensure consideration of related career paths.

5.3 Opportunities for student employability are nurtured through the provision of placements of varying lengths with a range of employers. All placements are overseen by the School and are intended to give students new experiences and to challenge them. Employers take the role seriously and offer placements based on individual student strengths. Some students also undertake block placements and are involved in a range of different activities.

5.4 The BA Theology and Counselling programme has British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) accreditation. BACP accreditation is given to counsellor practitioner training courses of at least 450 face-to-face taught hours and a minimum of 100 client hours of an integral supervised placement. This accreditation is recognised by training providers, employers, prospective students and those already in training as a mark of a good practitioner training course.

5.5 Supervised work experience learning is also integral to the other theology undergraduate provision and church-based placements are mandatory at Level 4 and optional at the higher levels as part of the Personal, Spiritual and Skills Formation modules. All placements are overseen by the School and are intended to give students new experiences and to challenge them. Students are supervised by external practitioners and assessed by tutors through the submission of a portfolio of work. Students may undertake work experiences in a range of learning environments and, in conjunction with their supervisor, are expected to set specific and measurable training objectives. First year students are required to complete a total of 70 hours of placement averaging three to four hours a week. For second and third year students the 70 placement hours can either be achieved on a weekly basis or in a block during school vacation.

5.6 While on placement, the supervisor is responsible for initial objective setting with the student followed by formal assessment at mid-year and end of year. Placement supervisors also meet students from time to time to discuss their progress and provide support and advice. The placement system enables students to develop a greater understanding of employment requirements and fosters a likelihood of an informed decision as they prepare for the future world of work. It also provides students with an effective training environment, where their gifts, skills, Christian character and leadership potential can be shaped for future life and ministry.

5.7 The system of placements makes a fundamental contribution to student employability, fostering greater understanding and preparedness for the world of work as well as increasing the likelihood of success in securing employment after graduation.

Glossary

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

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

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

Academic standards

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

Award

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

Awarding organisation

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

Blended learning

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

Credit(s)

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

Degree-awarding body

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

Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

Dual award or double award

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

e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning

Enhancement

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

Expectations

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

Flexible and distributed learning

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

See also **distance learning**.

Framework

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

Framework for higher education qualifications

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