Higher Education Review (Plus) of Medipathways Ltd

May 2014

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Plus) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Medipathways Ltd. The review took place from 6 to 8 May 2014 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Ms Penny Renwick
- Ms Deborah Trayhurn.

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Medipathways Ltd and to make judgements as to whether or not its academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. These expectations are the statements in the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (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 (Plus) the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
  - the setting and/or maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards
  - the quality of learning opportunities
  - the information provided about higher education provision
  - the enhancement of 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 summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 5.

In reviewing Medipathways Ltd the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland. The themes for the academic year 2013-14 are Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement, and Student Employability,[2] and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

The QAA website gives more information about QAA and its mission.[3] A dedicated section explains the method for Higher Education Review (Plus)[4] and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents. For an explanation of terms see the glossary at the end of this report.

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[1] The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code.
[2] Higher Education Review themes: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106.
[3] QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us.
[4] Higher Education Review (Plus) web pages: www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Educational-Oversight-.aspx.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Medipathways Ltd

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

- The maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **does not meet** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information produced about its provision **does not meet** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **requires improvement to meet** UK expectations.

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Medipathways Ltd.

By 1 October 2014:

- further develop Medipathways' deliberative structures and terms of reference to ensure sufficient oversight and recording of key decisions relating to academic quality, and the quality of the student learning experience, enhancement and information (Expectations A4, B8, C and Enhancement)
- provide applicants with detailed and specific information regarding the institutions that admit international students who are referred via the Medipathways website (Expectations B2 and C)
- fully describe the arrangements for complaints and appeals and ensure that these arrangements are communicated effectively to students (Expectation B9)
- establish a process within the development and monitoring of programmes to ensure that sufficient resources are secured to enable the provision of a high quality learning environment (Expectations B10, B1 and B3)
- establish and monitor formal agreements with its support providers to safeguard the quality of learning opportunities (Expectation B10)
- ensure that all recruitment and admissions-related information and services are transparent to all applicants, home and international (Expectations C and B2)
- establish an overall policy for the production and monitoring of Medipathways' information about its higher education provision (Expectation C).

By 1 January 2015:

- further develop and formally implement the draft Teaching Ethos in order to facilitate a more strategic and comprehensive approach to teaching, learning, assessment and professional development (Expectation B3).

By 1 April 2015:

- embed the equality and diversity, and disability policies in relevant staff and student-facing policies and materials (Expectations B4 and B2).

By 1 September 2015:

- develop an explicit support framework to facilitate progression into medicine, dentistry and other scientific careers taking into account relevant benchmarks and including closer relationships with a wider range of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (Expectations B4 and A2)
- take deliberate steps to facilitate student representation at all relevant levels in the deliberative structure (Expectation B5).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- Medipathways' actions to support students' professional development (Expectation B4).

Theme: Student Employability

Medipathways is committed to maximising the employability of its students and considers this to be central to their provision and practice. While an Employability Strategy is currently under development, Medipathways has a number of initiatives either envisaged or already in place.

Further explanation of the key findings can be found in the Higher Education Review (Plus) handbook available on the QAA website.

About Medipathways Ltd

Medipathways Ltd (Medipathways) is a small, independent, specialist higher education provider which has been offering university-level courses for aspiring medical and dental students since it was established in 2011. Medipathways was formed in close association with the University of Buckingham (the University), which is setting up a School of Medicine in October 2015.
All current programmes and qualifications offered are validated by the University. Medipathways has its origins in an associated organisation, M&D, which ran a Pre-Med course, validated by the University of Sussex, for over 10 years, and which was designed primarily for entry to overseas medical and dental schools. M&D continues in being as a recruiting agency.

The mission statement of Medipathways is:

> At Medipathways we recognise that the inspiration to study medicine or dentistry of students who have the focus and aptitude, should not be hindered merely by competition for places. We understand that a secure progression pathway for our students is just as crucial as achieving academic excellence. Medipathways strives to perfect in both these areas, putting the needs of students first. Our courses not only provide innovative progression routes but also enable students to become competitive.

Medipathways is based in the Bloomsbury district of London and since 2012 all teaching has been undertaken using University of London teaching and laboratory facilities at Birkbeck, University of London. All provision is full-time and there are currently three courses offered; one at level 3, one at level 4 and one at level 6. Enrolments on higher education courses at the time of the review totalled 20, all being home students.

Higher education programmes at Medipathways are validated by the University of Buckingham, which therefore has ultimate responsibility for the academic provision at Medipathways. The University has established a Faculty of Medicine and anticipates that Medipathways will contribute to the provision within that faculty.

While Medipathways is not in a position to admit international students, any such students who have applied through M&D are referred to Abbey College, a neighbouring institution which has recognised franchise status from the University of Buckingham.

Explanation of the findings about Medipathways Ltd

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

1 Judgement: Maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards

Expectation (A1): Each qualification (including those awarded through arrangements with other delivery organisations or support providers) is allocated to the appropriate level in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ).

Quality Code, *Chapter A1: The national level*

Findings

1.1   Medipathways has delivered programmes and qualifications validated by the University of Buckingham since 2011. An Academic Affiliation Agreement outlines the relationship of cooperation between Medipathways, as the delivery organisation, and the University. The University provides explicit statements of responsibility and processes for management and assurance of the academic quality and standards of awards conferred by the University, and to be followed by Medipathways, providing these in the Collaborations Handbook 2014. The University processes for new provision outline that programme proposals are formally considered by external reviewers. External reviewers comment expressly on the programme content in respect of the FHEQ and relevant subject benchmark statements. The University's Academic Regulations indicate that all modules align with the FHEQ.

1.2   The University requires periodic review for collaborative programmes to be undertaken in the fourth year after the start of the programme, but the programmes at Medipathways have not yet reached this stage.

1.3   The proformas, provided by the University for external examiners, expressly request consideration of the proposal against the FHEQ; seek reviewers' comments about programme comparability with other provision elsewhere; and ask whether the curriculum enables students to demonstrate the intended learning outcomes. Programme specifications capture the documentation for the programme.

1.4   The review team tested these arrangements by reviewing documents such as programme specifications, external reviews, discussion with staff during the visit and the records of meetings of the Medipathways' Learning and Teaching Committee.

1.5   Formal processes to approve programmes lie with the University. Medipathways has recommended a new three-year BSc Biomedical Sciences programme, which is a variation of the accelerated two-year programme, to be run at Medipathways. This is currently working through the University approval stages, going finally to the University School Learning and Teaching Committee. The practices and records of external reviewers' comments confirmed that formal processes and arrangements proceed as stated.

1.6   Medipathways meets respective quality assurance obligations, though developments have been undertaken to date in an informal manner and have not been formally discussed and recorded. The programme specifications are high-level documents currently without outcomes for levels, modules and scheduling details (see also Expectations A3 and B1).

1.7   The review team concludes that, notwithstanding the need to strengthen the formal discussion and recording of deliberations within Medipathways itself, University support, guidance and processes are in place to ensure that the provision is arranged appropriately

against the FHEQ levels for the award. Expectation A1 is **met** and the associated risk is deemed to be low.

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

Expectation (A2): All higher education programmes of study take account of relevant subject and qualification benchmark statements.

Quality Code, *Chapter A2: The subject and qualification level*

Findings

1.8   The University processes use proformas to develop programme specifications. These clearly indicate the appropriate subject benchmark statements which the programme meets. External reviewers are asked to comment expressly on the programme content in respect of relevant subject benchmark statements. The Collaboration Handbook requires that proposers of programmes verify that the requirements of any relevant professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) are met.

1.9   The review team tested this by examining programme specifications, relevant Medipathways papers, handbooks and records of the approval processes. The team discussed the use of benchmarks and engagement with professional bodies with Medipathways staff and students.

1.10   The team confirmed that the programme specification for the BSc Biomedical Sciences states that no appropriate PSRB engagement applies in this instance. Discussion with Medipathways staff confirmed that no formal arrangement existed for programmes with any relevant PSRB, though Medipathways had arranged access to The Royal Society of Medicine library for students.

1.11   The review team recommends under Expectation B4 that as part of developing an explicit support framework to facilitate progression into a range of scientific careers, that it develops closer relationships with a wider range of PSRBs. Establishing such relationships would enable learner achievements to address the broader scientific realm to be developed.

1.12   External examiner reports confirmed that skills developed on the foundation programme was providing effective exit progression to dental and medical programmes for the successful student. Staff indicated that they focus on medical careers for students on these programmes in the first instance, though they were beginning to explore ways that more direct references could be made to professional skills practices (such as statistical methods). While the student handbook for the BSc Biomedical Science programme indicates that personal mentors from Medipathways will provide appropriate advice or referral on the regulations of professional bodies, little direct discussion on PSRB activity has yet taken place with students.

1.13   Overall the review team considered that while processes are in place to ensure that relevant subject benchmark statements are taken into account, further development is required in respect of the possible wider range of programmes likely to be offered. Expectation A2 is **met** but the associated risk is deemed to be moderate

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

Expectation (A3): Higher education providers make available definitive information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements for a programme of study.

Quality Code, *Chapter A3: The programme level*

Findings

1.14   The Medipathways programmes aim to prepare students to enter medical or scientific careers. Using the approaches set out by the University, Medipathways provides definitive information on programmes through a specification which gives information on the programmes' intended learning outcomes and the cognitive, transferable and personal enabling skills which the programmes seek to develop. The programme specification provides information on programme design. The student handbooks provide statements on the Teaching and Learning and Assessment Strategy, and pre and co-requisite modules.

1.15   The review team considered this by examining relevant handbooks, programme specifications and Medipathways' virtual learning environment, MediMoodle, including module information.

1.16   The team found that information about programme achievement and academic standards requirements to achieve awards is limited. Requirements for embedded awards are not stated in the programme specification and the modules used to deliver the intended learning outcomes are not mapped to the outcomes, nor is any indication provided of the sequencing of the learning outcomes as they are to be experienced.

1.17   Students are provided with delivery and assessment schedules and module profile information through Medipathways' MediMoodle learning system. Though indicated in the student programme handbooks, module handbooks are not in widespread use. The need to develop a more comprehensive assessment schedule has been indicated by external examiners and was raised by students in the review team meeting.

1.18   The team found that modules are validated as part of the programme approval activity and are discussed in full module review processes, contributing to an annual monitoring and evaluation report. The team found staff were aware of the processes for modification of modules.

1.19   The team concluded that information provided regarding professional development is not clearly presented. Programme specifications are high-level and these, together with information placed on MediMoodle, provide basic information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and achievements for the Medipathways programmes. Information provided is not developed to indicate the range of wider information related to the medical and scientific professional context, outside of medical practitioner careers.

1.20   The review team concludes that Expectation A3 is **met**, and the associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A4): Higher education providers have in place effective processes to approve and periodically review the validity and relevance of programmes.

Quality Code, *Chapter A4: Approval and review*

Findings

1.21   Medipathways operates processes for approval and review according to a handbook of the University's Academic Regulations (Handbook of Academic Regulations), produced by Medipathways, managing its provision through processes and procedures described in the Collaborations Handbook and through an Academic Link Tutors Handbook (currently under review). The Collaborations Handbook makes explicit the responsibilities of the University and its partner institutions for the management and assurance of the academic quality and standards of awards conferred by the University. Medipathways exercises authority over its provision through its Learning and Teaching Committee chaired by the Director of Learning and Teaching. Medipathways publishes a Course Leadership and Management Handbook and describes course and module leader roles. Close engagement is maintained with the external examiner for all proposed modifications and developments.

1.22   These documentary activities are supported through operation at the University of a Collaborations Committee. An academic link tutor and the Director of Collaborations operate a close relationship with partners, attending regularly for meetings with staff and students and for Examination Boards held at Medipathways.

1.23   Programme design follows University practices, using proformas and meeting the requirements of the School Learning and Teaching Committee, before finally being approved by the University Senate.

1.24   Periodic review takes place in the fourth year after the start of the programme. The programmes at Medipathways are not yet in a position to undergo a full periodic review. Annual review processes are undertaken gathering module leader reports and creating action plans which are confirmed in an annual monitoring report.

1.25   Medipathways governance includes an External Advisory Committee with responsibility for oversight of annual and periodic review reports but the team found that the External Advisory Committee was yet to meet (see Expectation A5).

1.26   The team examined handbooks, policies, reports and minutes from the Learning and Teaching Committee. Discussion was held with Medipathways staff and representatives from the University and students.

1.27   The team found that the work of the Learning and Teaching Committee was at an early stage and no systematic review had been undertaken and recorded for formal consideration of monitoring and review activities at Medipathways. Limited attention had been paid to strategic action planning. The proposal for a three year version of the BSc Biomedical Science programme had not formally been considered. The focus of the Course Leadership and Management Handbook was on managing programme events such as induction, with little information about monitoring and review activities. A new course approval flow chart indicated that Medipathways acknowledged these points.

1.28   Medipathways' strong relationship with the external examiner was noted. The external examiner routinely provided development support on programme activity. Extensive discussion occurred at the Examination Boards where detailed consideration was given to the module delivery and assessment practices. These were undertaken using module

reports which included some evaluation of activity and achievement statistics. Medipathways is seeking a phased handover at the end of the external examiners' terms of office to smooth this arrangement and intends to increase the number of examiners involved as the programmes mature and delivery extends to level 6.

1.29   The team found that while approval and review took place at the module level, managerial oversight of the processes to approve and periodically review the programmes was weak. The review team **recommends** that by 1 October 2014 Medipathways further develops its deliberative structures and terms of reference to ensure sufficient oversight and recording of key decisions relating to academic quality, and the quality of the student learning experience, enhancement and information (see also Expectations B8, C and Enhancement).

1.30   Overall the team concludes that Expectation A4 is **not met** as there is a lack of strategic oversight of the arrangements and processes are not embedded. Risk is moderate in this respect as Medipathways' mechanisms for approval and review are not yet established.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Moderate

Expectation (A5): Higher education providers ensure independent and external participation in the management of threshold academic standards.

Quality Code, *Chapter A5: Externality*

Findings

1.31   The processes for ensuring independent and external participation in quality assurance processes are described in University handbooks. External reviews are sought as part of the University's approval process. These are distinct from processes for appointment of external examiners which are detailed in the Collaborations Handbook, along with the responsibilities of the external examiners.

1.32   The University's Collaboration Committee provides opportunities for Medipathways to engage in peer consideration in quality assurance processes. The Academic Link Tutor reports regularly on Medipathways activities and responses to the external examiner are made jointly by Medipathways working with the Academic Link Tutor.

1.33   The External Advisory Committee includes external membership to provide externality in assuring standards and quality at Medipathways, though this has not yet met. The team examined handbooks, policies, programme review outcomes and external examiner reports during the review. Discussions with Medipathways staff included engagement in opportunities to work with external expertise, awarding body representatives and students.

1.34   The team found that staff relied heavily on the current external examiner arrangements with a very facilitative external examiner currently providing extensive support to Medipathways. Thorough reports indicate that there is examiner oversight of assessment practices and these confirm that standards are met. Staff meet with the examiner and respond to external examiner comments, reflecting these in their module evaluations. Reviews are discussed at Examination Boards. Medipathways was not found to have taken any systematic opportunities to develop actions beyond this discussion. Learning and Teaching Committee governance practice has not shown clear consideration and management of recommendations in module reviews, enabling Medipathways to consider, plan and arrange resources to manage any developments arising from these (see Expectations A4 and A5).

1.35   Staff at Medipathways are mostly medical practitioners who value their professional networks highly. A small number of engagements of visiting tutors have been made to deliver sessions to students and these had been well received. Staff engage enthusiastically with the Academic Link Tutor from the University and are developing views of collegial practices and discussion of approaches to academic delivery at the Learning and Teaching Committee. At present most of the academic staff have current experience of academic work at other higher education providers. Medipathways is responsible for arranging placements and laboratory-based projects and the arrangements for these activities are at an early stage.

1.36   A small number of staff are in the process of seeking Higher Education Academy (HEA) membership.

1.37   The team found the arrangements and working relationships with the awarding body to be effective. Medipathways does respond positively to external examiner comments and Expectation A5 is therefore **met**. The risk is regarded as low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A6): Higher education providers ensure the assessment of students is robust, valid and reliable and that the award of qualifications and credit are based on the achievement of the intended learning outcomes.

Quality Code, *Chapter A6: Assessment of achievement of learning outcomes*

Findings

1.38   Medipathways is responsible for all assessment activity, planning and supporting the variety and development of these processes on the validated programmes. Each module proposal must include the module learning outcomes and assessment criteria; these are approved through the programme validation/review process and may only be amended through this formal modification process.

1.39   The principles of assessment for the University are laid down in the Medipathways Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy statements for each programme and indicated in the programme specifications. These inform the Handbook of Academic Regulations and are also articulated as processes in the Collaborations Handbook. A grid showing the types of assessment by module has been produced recently at Medipathways, enabling the Registry to assist in scheduling assessments fairly.

1.40   Medipathways plans and submits all assessment for internal review to the University following a synoptic overview by Medipathways' Director of Learning and Teaching. Examinations are conducted to meet the University's regulations. Marking takes place to meet University requirements and marks are moderated by the Director of Learning and Teaching before being entered onto the mark recording systems. Examination Boards are arranged at Medipathways, attended and chaired by the University. The external examiner attends meetings of all the programme levels to confirm validity and reliability of the assessment.

1.41   The review team examined documentation relating to assessment in hard and soft copy, and held meetings with Medipathways and awarding body staff and students.

1.42   The assessment requirements for coursework are provided to students using MediMoodle. Medipathways has adopted the University's Disability Policy. Medipathways does not have a specific Assessment Strategy, or an internal or external verification policy which is applied across its provision. Staff have not formally discussed the changing requirements for assessment at differing levels of study, required at a faster pace in an accelerated mode. The Director of Learning and Teaching intends to provide a module developers guide to assist staff in setting assessment.

1.43   To date, Medipathways has not had any students requesting any implementation of reasonable adjustments. The team found that a range of assessment approaches are indicated in the programme specifications and across the assessment grid recently produced. Some staff were introducing problem-based learning to reflect contemporary medical education practice. MediMoodle records demonstrated assessment requirements, provided guidance to students and feedback on their work. External examiner reports and direct student feedback are considered by staff in developing assessment approaches, using these directly in module review processes.

1.44   The team found Medipathways broadly operates practices in accord with the University regulations and guidance, and relies heavily on the University for these arrangements. The lack of formal recording of moderation practices of design and post-marking responses makes oversight more difficult to track and communicate. Processes though, do ensure that assessment is robust, valid and reliable.

1.45   The review team concludes overall that Expectation A6 is **met** since Medipathways has effective relationships with the University and the external examiner. Systems are beginning to be established and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards: Summary of findings

1.46   In reaching its judgement about threshold academic standards, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.47   Of the six expectations in this area, five are met, one with moderate risk. For the Expectation which is not met, the risk is also judged by the team to be moderate.

1.48   There are no features of good practice, no affirmations and one recommendation. The recommendation under Expectation A4 has implications for a number of other Expectations within the Quality Code as it refers to the need for Medipathways to ensure that it has sufficient oversight of key decisions both through its deliberative structures and in the formal recording of these decisions. A recommendation under Expectation B4, which relates to the need for Medipathways to facilitate progression from its growing range of provision into all the relevant career areas, take account of relevant benchmarks, and foster relationships with a corresponding range of PSRBs, is also relevant here.

1.49   While Medipathways is aware of these issues, nevertheless the review team took the view that the University's plans for addressing them are currently underdeveloped.

1.50   Five of the Expectations are met and the level of risk under two Expectations is judged to be moderate. Taking into account Medipathways management's acknowledgement of the issues, the review team concludes that the maintenance of the threshold academic standards **meets** UK expectations.

2   Judgement: Quality of student learning opportunities

Expectation (B1): Higher education providers have effective processes for the design and approval of programmes.

Quality Code, *Chapter B1: Programme design and approval*

Findings

2.1   Medipathways, as a delivery organisation, is required to adhere to the University of Buckingham's validation and review procedures and the University's Collaborations Handbook makes explicit the responsibilities of partner institutions for the management and assurance of the academic quality and standards of awards conferred by the University. Oversight of collaborative arrangement is provided by the University Collaborations Committee. Programmes are approved via the University School Learning and Teaching Committee. External reviewers formally comment on new course proposals and comment explicitly on alignment of course content with the FHEQ and relevant subject benchmark statements. The Handbook of Academic Regulations states all modules align with the FHEQ.

2.2   The review team tested this approach by consulting the minutes of Medipathways' Learning and Teaching Committee and talking to staff during the review visit.

2.3   External reviewers comment on new course proposals and helpful University proformas ensure they are explicitly asked whether proposed programmes meet the FHEQ, comparability with programmes elsewhere, and whether the curriculum will enable students to demonstrate the intended learning outcomes.

2.4   Formal processes for the approval of programmes lie with the University and Medipathways relies on informal internal mechanisms for the generation of documentation. Programme specifications are produced at a high level and the way in which the programme meets relevant subject benchmark statements is not documented, nor are individual module specifications included.

2.5   A Learning and Teaching Committee has recently been established and its terms of reference explicitly give it responsibility for the oversight of the development of programme specifications and for recommendation of new and revised programmes. To date, the Learning and Teaching Committee has not discharged this responsibility fully. This is of particular note as a new three-year BSc Biomedical Sciences is now progressing through the University approval processes and a revised programme specification has not been formally considered by the Learning and Teaching Committee. Resource considerations for new programmes are not formally considered or documented within the committee mechanisms (see also Expectations B3 and B10).

2.6   Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation B1 is **not met** since Medipathways does not have in place robust and effective processes that enable it to discharge its responsibilities for programme design, including resources, and in approval. Risk is considered moderate as the staff team have not made use of their recently formed Learning and Teaching Committee to provide scrutiny and oversight of the new three-year BSc Biomedical Sciences, these have not been addressed for the new programme.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Moderate

Expectation (B2): Policies and procedures used to admit students are clear, fair, explicit and consistently applied.

Quality Code, *Chapter B2: Admissions*

Findings

2.7   The Collaborations Handbook requires collaborative provision to conform to the University's general admissions requirements. The selection and admission of students is undertaken by Medipathways using the criteria set out by the University. Oversight of admissions within Medipathways is the responsibility of the Senior Management Committee.

2.8   The review team tested Medipathways' practice in relation to admissions by scrutinising guidance provided by the University; browsing online information provided for potential students; and in meetings with staff and current students.

2.9   The programme specification contains high-level admissions requirements. The prospectus and the website set out the A Level requirements for each programme. Applicants may apply through UCAS or through an organisation M&D Group on payment of a fee. Information on the UCAS website indicates the BSc Biomedical Sciences is suitable for students who wish to progress onto graduate and undergraduate courses in medicine, dentistry and veterinary medicine.

2.10   The website is welcoming with opportunities for online chats, and positive messages about the number of possible routes into medicine or dentistry are promoted throughout. Information for potential overseas students was confusing with detailed entry requirements provided on one page, while also stating at other points that international applications are considered with partner colleges or not considered at all, leading to a lack of transparency (see Expectation C). The team also learned that overseas applicants are referred to Abbey College and understood that the College had an arrangement with the University whereby successful applicants were able to take an identical programme at that college. The team **recommends** that applicants and students are provided with detailed and specific information regarding the institutions that admit international students who are referred via the Medipathways website (See Expectation C). Medipathways has adopted the University's Equality and Diversity Policy and Disability Policy, but these should be embedded within the admissions processes (see Expectation B4).

2.11   Students reported that they had found Medipathways via the internet and that they had been able to visit and see the facilities prior to entry. These students all felt that Medipathways was providing them with an alternative route into medicine and two students whom the team met had secured offers of a place at a UK university (one was from overseas who was registered as an Abbey College student). Not all students are interviewed prior to being made an offer, but where interviews are conducted these involve the Director of Learning and Teaching and a colleague interviewing together. Overall the review team concludes that Expectation B2 is **met** as Medipathways is operating to the requirements of the University. However, risk in this area is moderate as the information for applicants, whether home or overseas, needs to be more transparent.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

2.12   Working within the frameworks set by the University, Medipathways has developed an academic programme in biomedical science in which the learning approaches to be used are clearly set out. Medipathways' mission is to provide innovative progression routes into medical or dental schools and to support this Medipathways is currently developing its Teaching Ethos, which addresses students' academic and professional development, and this will be supplemented by the Employability Strategy under consultation. A Teaching and Learning Committee has recently been established.

2.13   The review team evaluated the effectiveness of Medipathways' approach to learning and teaching by consulting the draft Teaching Ethos; Employability Strategy; reviewing the Terms of Reference of the Teaching and Learning Committee; reviewing programme documentation; reviewing staff CVs; browsing the Medipathways virtual learning environment, MediMoodle; holding meetings with staff; and talking to students about their experiences of learning and teaching at Medipathways.

2.14   The recently formed Learning and Teaching Committee has a responsibility for the development of programme specifications and for issues related to quality and standards. Evidence from the Learning and Teaching Committee, Examination Board meetings and annual monitoring reports, together with discussions with staff, demonstrates a culture of continuous improvement and development among the staff. These discussions are reactive in response to feedback from students, external examiners or staff. There are plans for staff to do more to bring research into their teaching and staff were able to provide examples of real-world experiences that they had incorporated into the classroom.

2.15   Many staff teaching at Medipathways work part-time, bringing with them experience of teaching at other places. Medipathways has high turnover of staff and a number of the staff we met during the review had been appointed recently. There is a policy for the induction of new staff and a welcome pack for new staff. There are helpful detailed handbooks for course and module leaders. A formal process of personal development review or peer support for teaching in not currently in place, but staff spoke positively about opportunities for team teaching. Staff are able to undertake external staff development and work towards HEA recognition. There are resources for staff on MediMoodle, including a discussion forum called Insight where staff discuss a range of teaching, assessment and curriculum issues. Medipathways has recently appointed a Director of Teaching and Learning, who chairs the Learning and Teaching Committee and has a responsibility to delivery CPD sessions. Building on work undertaken as part of a higher degree, a staff development event on problem-based learning has recently taken place and the approach is now is being piloted with students.

2.16   The review team observed that there was a high degree of change as a response to feedback but that there was an absence of a strategic approach. The review team **recommends** that by 1 January 2015 Medipathways further develop and formally implement the Teaching Ethos, currently only in draft form and not yet discussed at the Learning and

Teaching Committee, in order to facilitate a more strategic and comprehensive approach to teaching, learning, assessment and professional development.

2.17   Oversight of learning resources is the responsibility of the Senior Management Committee. Students are taught in facilities provided by Birkbeck, University of London and Medipathways is currently seeking to secure sufficient access to laboratories needed for student projects at level 6. International students, registered at Abbey College, have additional tutorials provided at that college. Access to library borrowing rights and to relevant electronic journals has recently been secured at the Royal Society of Medicine. In meetings with staff it was evident that they are working hard to secure the necessary teaching spaces and learning resources but that these are not securely in place (see also Expectation B1 and B10).

2.18   Overall the review team concludes that Expectation B3 is **not met** as although staff are actively committed to the student learning experience and seek to make incremental improvements there is a lack of a strategic and systematic approach. The Teaching and Learning Committee has only recently started its work and policies such as the Teaching Ethos are not yet in place and thus risk is moderate in this area.

Expectation: Not 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

2.19   The Medipathways mission is to provide progression routes onto medicine or dentistry. The focus of Medipathways is the provision of an academic programme that will meet the requirements of medical and dental schools, and additional vocational support to support onward applications.

2.20   The review team tested the arrangements to ensure support and resources that enable students' academic, personal and professional development by reviewing the terms of reference of the formal Medipathways committees; examining the draft Teaching Ethos; reviewing the programme specification and handbooks for students and staff; meeting with students and staff; and observing the use of MediMoodle.

2.21   Medipathways seeks to provide a particularly focused and specialised academic and support route for students aiming to secure a place at medical or dental school. It has developed an academic programme in biomedical science that is specifically designed to meet the admissions requirements of UK, and some overseas, medical and dental schools. The programme does not have additional accreditation from any professional or statutory, regulatory bodies.

2.22   Students are supported into study at Medipathways through a clearly organised induction programme, which is supplemented by appropriate handbooks provided in hard copy and online. Transition to higher education and the needs of mature learners are specifically and helpfully addressed within the course handbooks. The new two-year BSc Biomedical Sciences programme is currently rolling out and students will be moving through to academic levels 5 and 6; this is new for Medipathways. All staff have experience of teaching at higher academic levels elsewhere and students studying on the programme are academically well qualified, however, explicit approaches to how academic transitions are fully supported are not yet in place. Informed by a Personal Mentoring Policy, all students have a personal tutor and feedback on assessment is discussed in personal tutor meetings. In the absence of specialised pastoral care staff personal mentors have a wide ranging role in supporting their tutees. Medipathways has adopted the University's Equality and Diversity Policy and Disability Policy, but currently no specific disability support or guidance is provided. The review team **recommends** that by 1 April 2015 Medipathways embed the equality and diversity, and disability policies in relevant staff and student-facing policies and materials (see also Expectation B2).

In order to support students in their aspirations for medical or dental school, Medipathways offers a range of services; students can request feedback on personal statements; advice is provided on specific tests such as UKCAT; mock interviews are provided; and work experience is encouraged.

2.23   In addition a mentor scheme 'Medimentors' is being established and opportunities for work placements through an external organisation are being put in place. Professional development opportunities are provided by the recently secured arrangements with the Royal Society of Medicine through RSM Events. The review team **affirms** Medipathways' actions to support students' professional development. Currently, the focus of support is for medical school applications though data demonstrates that, in the past, a number of students have pursued dental careers. The review team recognises the contribution that

these activities can make particularly to an application for medicine, but more needs to be put in place to support progression onto dentistry and other scientific careers. The review team **recommends** that by 1 September 2015 Medipathways develops an explicit support framework to facilitate progression into medicine, dentistry and other scientific careers taking into account relevant subject benchmark statements and including closer relationships with a wider range of PSRBs (see also Expectation A2).

2.24   The physical resources required to deliver the programme are provided via external organisations, with the teaching taking place in accommodation provided at Birkbeck, University of London. Physical teaching resources, including laboratories are also provided via Birkbeck, University of London, but access to laboratories for level 6 projects are not currently secured. Up until very recently students did not have library borrowing rights or sufficient access to online journals. This issue has been resolved with access being secured at the Royal Society of Medicine. Students have access to a virtual learning environment called MediMoodle, which is a repository for handbooks, contains a discussion forum and details of modules and teaching sessions, and also incorporates a useful newsfeed from the Royal Society of Medicine. Students reported making use of the discussion forum particularly in support of medical school applications and to access course materials. The review team recognised the dynamic and responsive way in which Medipathways reacts to issues, but formal mechanisms to monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources which enable students' development were not securely in place.

2.25   Overall the review team concludes that Expectation B4 is **not met** as there is a lack of strategic oversight of the arrangements and professional development opportunities are not sufficiently embedded. Risk is moderate in this area as Medipathways mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation of arrangements and resources are not yet developed.

Expectation: Not 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

2.26   Medipathways has in place an established system of student representation that involves elected student representatives participating as full members of course committees. Individual students provide formal feedback on their experiences through the paper-based mid-term module review process, the data from which is explicitly expected to inform the module leaders' reports, which are provided to external examiners at the Examination Boards, and which in turn informs the annual module evaluation and annual programme review.

2.27   The review team tested out how well these arrangements were working in practice by studying annual monitoring reports, reading the minutes of meetings where student representatives were present, and talking to staff and students about the effectiveness of the arrangements to make sure the student voice is heard at Medipathways.

2.28   Through meetings with staff and students, a responsive and student-centred philosophy was evident, ranging from the Director providing regular opportunities for students to meet with him informally through 'Kal's Corner'; active discussion of student concerns at the Learning and Teaching Committee; and incorporation of student feedback in module evaluation reports. Student representatives are elected via nomination and a student ballot. There is a helpful course rep handbook. Students are members of the course committee and their voice is clearly heard through these deliberations. The Terms of Reference for the newly formed Learning and Teaching Committee makes provision for a student representative, but to date they have not attended. The team **recommends** that by 1 September 2015 Medipathways take deliberate steps to facilitate student representation at all relevant levels in the deliberative structure.

2.29   Discussions with staff demonstrated a listening culture and a willingness to address student concerns. There is an active online discussion forum, initiated by both students and staff where students can discuss current issues. Course rep meetings are held termly and students are able to feedback on what is working well and areas for improvement by module. Staff address issues openly and conscientiously.

2.30   Medipathways has recently recruited a student experience officer who is building good informal relationships with students. The student experience officer is publishing newsletters called 'Medezines' covering a mixture of social and academic matters.

2.31   Overall the review team concludes that Expectation B5 is **met** and that risk in this area is low since a collaborative and responsive relationship has been established between students and academic staff.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B6): Higher education providers ensure that students have appropriate opportunities to show they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the award of a qualification or credit.

Quality Code, *Chapter B6: Assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning*

Findings

2.32   The regulation of assessment complies with the requirements set out in the Handbook of Academic Regulations, which details the regulatory infrastructure regarding assessment of coursework and for examinations. Brief descriptions of assessment tasks are linked to programme outcomes within the programme specification. Forms of assessment are identified in module specifications.

2.33   The review team tested the effectiveness of Medipathways' approach to assessment by searching MediMoodle; examining the programme specification, module proformas, student handbooks, Medipathways regulations; and by talking to key staff and students about their experiences of assessment and feedback.

2.34   Assessment is considered as part of programme approval and external examiners confirm that assessment processes enable learners to demonstrate achievement of the intended learning outcomes.

2.35   The students have a four-term teaching year and the assessment load in each module is rigorous as modules have between three and six assessment tasks, with virtually all of them including an unseen written examination. In addition to the examinations, there are various assessments with practice-based assessments, individual and group work, quizzes, reviews, projects, essays and reports. Annual programme monitoring has addressed issues of over assessment, reducing the overall assessment load and increasing the weighting given to examinations. The external examiner raises concerns about assessment load at level 5 and the volume of assessment was discussed at the Learning and Teaching Committee. However, the students feel that the volume of assessment is about right.

2.36   Students are given general advice on assessment as part of induction and MediMoodle has a number of guides on assessment, including how work is graded and how to make use of feedback. In course handbooks and on MediMoodle students are given clear guidance on what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it. Students have opportunities for formative assessment and these are valued by them. Course reps provide detailed feedback on formative and summative assessment at course rep meetings and this includes some dissatisfaction with the timeliness and volume of feedback.

2.37   Marking is underpinned by detailed mark schemes. Feedback is provided to students using a proforma, but feedback is not specifically related to the intended learning outcomes. The University's External Examiners Code of Practice provides guidance on marking and moderation. External examiner reports identify that moderation is taking place. Formal Examination Boards are conducted and membership includes Medipathways staff, the external examiner and representatives from the University; the external examiner states that marking is very thorough and that feedback given to the students was of a high standard.

2.38   Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation B6 is **met** as students have appropriate opportunities to show that they have achieved their intended learning outcomes.

Risk in this area is low as although there are concerns about over-assessment, these are actively being addressed by the course team.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External examining*

Findings

2.39   The processes for the appointment, by the University, of external examiners for collaborative courses are detailed in the Collaborations Handbook, as are their responsibilities. The University sets out the expectation of external examiners in a code of practice, and the personal and professional specification required for external examiners is contained in a detailed nomination form. External examiners are provided with information from the University and inducted into their role.

2.40   The review team considered the use made of external examiners by searching the Medipathways virtual learning environment; reading external examiner reports and records of annual monitoring processes; and by talking to students about their access to external examiner reports.

2.41   The external examiner at Medipathways provides thorough and detailed scrutiny of the programmes as evidenced by their attendance at examination boards and the provision of detailed reports. Through these reports the external examiner attests to their involvement in the setting of assessments and oversight of marking and moderation. Staff provide detailed responses to the external examiner and feedback from the external examiner is an integral part of module evaluation reports. Students are able to see the external examiner reports on MediMoodle and students reported that they had read these. The external examiner is able to meet with students. Staff reported active engagement with the external examiner when considering changes to modules. Currently, there is only one external examiner, but the review team were reassured that there are plans to appoint an additional examiner as students progress onto levels 5 and 6.

2.42   Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation B7 is **met**. Risk is low in this area as documentation supplied to the review team indicates that Medipathways has a robust external examining system and that the external examiner makes a contribution to the management of the assessment process and to annual monitoring processes.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B8): Higher education providers have effective procedures in place to routinely monitor and periodically review programmes.

Quality Code, *Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review*

Findings

2.43   Medipathways, as a delivery organisation, is required to adhere to University procedures for monitoring of quality and standards as set out in the Collaborations Handbook. The programme has been validated via the University's Learning and Teaching Committee**.** The programme and modules are monitored annually. Medipathways has recently established a Learning and Teaching Committee that has responsibility for the development of programme specifications and delegated responsibility for the conduct of annual reviews.

2.44   The review team tested this approach by examining documents setting out the way in which annual monitoring and periodic review should be conducted, consulting records of annual programme monitoring, and talking to staff during the review visit.

2.45   Programmes are reviewed annually and reports consider progression and retention data, feedback from students and external examiners. Detailed action plans are developed as part of these reports and good practice is highlighted. External examiners provide feedback as part of Examination Boards and staff reported that discussion at Examination Boards is an important review activity. Detailed external examiner reports and responses are then produced. Detailed module evaluations are produced which indirectly address student, staff and external examiner feedback, though the source of feedback is not directly reported.

2.46   The Terms of Reference of the Learning and Teaching Committee makes explicit a clear relationship with the University Collaborations Committee and updates on progress in annual review are provided to this committee. The newly formed Learning and Teaching Committee has recently been able to discuss the annual review reports but evidence of the outcomes of these discussions was not stated explicitly. To date there have been no periodic reviews. The review team has recommended Medipathways further develop its deliberative structures and terms of reference to ensure sufficient oversight and recording of key decisions relating to academic quality, and the quality of the student learning experience and its enhancement, and information (see Expectation A4).

2.47   Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation B8 is **met** since Medipathways has in place processes for the production of annual programme and module reports. It has very recently established the Learning and Teaching Committee to provide oversight of these processes. Risk is considered moderate in this area as the Learning and Teaching Committee has yet to establish its effectiveness.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

Expectation (B9): Higher education providers have fair, effective and timely procedures for handling students' complaints and academic appeals.

Quality Code, *Chapter B9: Complaints and appeals*

Findings

2.48   The Academic Affiliation Agreement between the University and Medipathways sets out the responsibilities of both organisations in respect of student complaints and appeals. The University expects Medipathways to have in place policies and regulations for academic appeals that are approved by the University. The Collaborations Handbook makes clear that students have a right of a request of a review of a complaint or appeal to the University and ultimately onto the Office of the Independent Adjudicator. The arrangements enable Medipathways to meet Expectation B9.

2.49   The review team evaluated the effectiveness of the arrangements for handling complaints and appeals by searching the virtual learning environment for information; reading a range of student handbooks, and talking to students and staff about their experiences in handling complaints and appeals.

2.50   Medipathways outlines a student complaints procedure in course handbooks and in the Handbook of Academic Regulations. This advises students to make any complaint or appeal to the registrar, but does not set out a formal process that includes the University. As part of the evidence for the review an alternative document was provided, but this is not provided to students nor contained within formal documentation. This document sets out a formal process to be used for complaints or appeals, but does not include the student's right to complain to the University, should a complaint not be upheld. The review team therefore **recommends** that by 1 October 2014 Medipathways fully describes the arrangements for complaints and appeals and ensure that these arrangements are communicated effectively to students.

2.51   Information in the Handbook of Academic Regulations is provided to students on how to submit a claim for mitigating circumstances. Students are informed that they have a right of appeal if a mitigating circumstances application is rejected.

2.52   Discussions with staff identified that many informal means exist for students to raise concerns and that to date the only formal complaints received had been about library borrowing rights and this had been addressed. Students were generally aware that guidance on complaints is provided in student handbooks. Staff confirmed that records of mitigating circumstances decisions are communicated to University via Examination Board discussions. Examination Board minutes record deferral decisions. Staff reported that no means of formally recording and learning from complaints or appeals is yet in place.

2.53   Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation B9 is **met** since Medipathways has a stated appeals and complaints procedure, should it need to be used. Risk is moderate in this area because this procedure does not explicitly include the right to complain to the University, nor has it been communicated to students via any means.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

2.54   Medipathways is a delivery organisation for programmes validated by the University. Medipathways has responsibility for the effective management of its arrangements with Birkbeck, University of London for the provision of general learning resources and with Abbey College for tutorial support for international students, and arrangements with both organisations are set out within legally binding agreements. In March 2014, Medipathways secured additional library access for their students from the Royal Society of Medicine.

2.55   The review team tested Medipathways' approach to the delivering of learning opportunities by external organisations by reviewing legal agreements, reviewing student feedback and talking to staff and students.

2.56   Medipathways is a small specialist education provider that uses the University of London teaching and laboratory facilities at Birkbeck. Although there is a service level agreement in place with Birkbeck, University of London, this agreement is confined to use of space, wireless access, computing and library facilities, it does not specify access to the specialised laboratories needed for degree-level study in biomedical science. The course team is currently exploring ways in which additional external laboratory placements might be made available to students undertaking level 6 projects who perform particularly well. Students are specifically asked to provide feedback on the general teaching, IT and laboratory facilities at Birkbeck and evaluations identify that they are currently happy with the quality of these.

2.57   Medipathways is responsible for meeting students' needs in respect of library resources The self-evaluation document identified an issue concerning library access, in that at the time of writing, students only had limited access to library resources at Birkbeck, University of London. Course handbooks provide students with information on library access but do not make it clear that borrowing rights and access to relevant electronic journals at Birkbeck are not included. Lack of sufficient access to these resources has been the cause of negative feedback from students. Medipathways has recently secured access to borrowing rights and relevant electronic journals through a contract with the Royal Society of Medicine. Students reported that these new arrangements are working well, though the team observed that the students are now studying at level 5 at Medipathways and have had limited access to books for loan and sufficient electronic journals.

2.58   Medipathways does not directly accept international students, but has an arrangement whereby international students are accepted at Abbey College. These arrangements are known to the University. Students enrolled at Abbey College attend lectures from the Medipathways programme which are made available to them as open lectures, in addition to tutorials provided at Abbey College. Staff at Medipathways described this arrangement, which is represented as an Abbey College programme, as being the equivalent to Medipathways own CertHE programme. Tutorials for both programmes are provided by a member of staff employed by both organisations and in this way a consistent student experience is facilitated. Students report that they are clear that they are Abbey College students and staff advised that student will receive their qualification from Abbey

College, not from Medipathways. The review team noted that a student from Abbey College attended the student meeting held as part of the Medipathways review and that the Abbey students may attend Kal's Corner meetings with the Director. The review team noted that a key responsibility of the Senior Management Committee is to review regularly the home and international student recruitment process, and to monitor international student activity and recruitment, yet Medipathways does not recruit international students. These arrangements are complex and potentially confusing to students.

2.59   The Senior Management Committee is responsible for overseeing Medipathways' strategic planning, monitoring and resource allocation processes but the review team observed that resources required to deliver the programme through other organisations were not secure and **recommends** that by 1 October 2014 Medipathways establish and monitor formal agreements with its support providers to safeguard the quality of learning opportunities. The team further **recommends** that by 1 October 2014 Medipathways establish a process within the development and monitoring of programmes to ensure that sufficient resources are secured to enable the provision of a high-quality learning environment (see also Expectations B1 and B3).

2.60   Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation B10 is **not met** as proactive and secure arrangements for access to learning resources provided by others are not in place. Risk is considered serious in this area because this lack of effective management has a potentially detrimental impact on the student experience.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Serious

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

2.61　　Medipathways does not offer research degrees.

Quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.62   In reaching its judgements about the quality of student learning opportunities the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. Of the 10 relevant Expectations in this area, four are not met; the risk is judged to be serious in one case and moderate in the other cases. In addition, three of the Expectations which have been met are judged, nevertheless, to be of moderate risk.

2.63   Overall, the eight recommendations in this area refer to the need for an explicitly strategic and proactive approach, for example in teaching, learning, assessment and professional development, equality and diversity policies, and Medipathways' relationships with other bodies responsible for programme delivery. There is also a recommendation located under Expectation C which relates to this area and refers to the need for transparent recruitment and admissions processes.

2.64   The risk to one of the Expectations which was not met is judged to be serious and this relates to the College's ability to manage its higher education with others. This, together with the nature of the concerns relating to the other Expectations which were also not met, leads the team to conclude that quality of student learning opportunities **does not meet** UK Expectations. As in other areas, the review team found the need to ensure that Medipathways' approach is underpinned by processes to secure appropriate oversight and recording of key decisions (as outlined in Expectation A4).

2.65   There are no features of good practice, but the review team noted the work of Medipathways in providing appropriate support for its students and, in particular, affirms the actions being taken to support students' professional development.

3 Judgement: Quality of the information produced about its provision

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 Medipathways provides a range of information for prospective applicants, staff, students and peer networks. Medipathways is increasingly using their website and other online sites to communicate information for applicants and students. Medipathways is responsible for the information it provides in all media, electronically and hardcopy, managing its responsibilities regarding its awarding body. The University states the arrangements that are expected to be followed to manage Medipathways' information in the Collaborations Handbook.

3.2 The review team tested Medipathways' approach to producing information for intended audiences by reviewing the documentation available, both electronic and hardcopy, and met with students and staff to confirm processes for approving and ensuring that information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

3.3 Medipathways' stated mission is to provide progression routes onto medicine or dentistry achieving this through an academic programme to meet the needs of medical or dental schools, providing additional support to coach students to achieve their aims. Medipathways provides articulations onto other Medipathways programmes, or through arrangements made with approved medical schools overseas indicating that offers of places are given at the start of the students' BSc course. The students' meeting with the team and the staff meetings confirmed that such offers had not been provided at the start of the course for any of the students in the group. Staff affirmed that this was not unusual. Medipathways does not keep progression data on these typical impact factors, including the numbers of students who ultimately achieve medical or dental practitioner status.

3.4 The Medipathways website is managed locally and provides information in an easy to navigate manner with an attractive presentation. It engages applicants and promotes the potential of a variety of routes into medicine or dentistry. Students reported that they had found the Medipathways website via an internet search. The level of transparency of information for international students particularly was questioned when conflicting information was presented. On one page, programme entry requirements were given, while on another no reference was made to international applicants being considered either by Medipathways or in partnership with another college. The review team **recommends** that by 1 October 2014 Medipathways ensures that all recruitment and admissions-related information and services are transparent to all applicants; home and international (see also Expectation B2).

3.5 Basic hardcopy materials are provided to students, who are given high-level but well presented induction and course handbooks. These provide certain relevant information but at a high level, with no module details, term study schedule, or assessment, and partly documented appeal processes. Little information is provided about how employability opportunities are designed into the programme and mapped for a typical student experience.

3.6 Guides for staff are provided including a staff induction policy, staff welcome pack, and course and module developers advice. These are made available through a staff

discussion forum on MediMoodle (called Insight) and staff discuss teaching and curriculum issues there. The Medipathways student experience officer produces publications which are communicated electronically called Medezines. These are brief and comprise a mix of social and academic information.

3.7   A lack of transparency was seen in statements made concerning library use. Readers of the induction and course handbooks are not informed that access to Birkbeck library would not include borrowing of texts or rights to access e-journals. These statements were raised by students with Medipathways staff at Course Committee meetings and Medipathways has now secured an alternative, beneficial library arrangement giving borrowing rights and access to relevant journals with the Royal Society of Medicine.

3.8   The team found that statements from the handbooks and the publicity poster provided by Medipathways did not give a clear presentation of staff roles. Key staff are seen representing different organisations, for example, the Founder and CEO of Medipathways being also the Director of M&D and welcoming the students on their first day at Medipathways. Medipathways confirmed that beyond the initial registration fee paid to M&D, for its role as a recruiting agent, these arrangements did not require any additional financial payments.

3.9   The team found that the students were generally content with the information provided to them, and had been able to visit Medipathways to discuss their applications which had been instrumental in their decision-making. Module outlines, assessment briefs and schedules are provided in the MediMoodle online system, and students have access to information such as external examiner reports placed in a student common room area.

3.10   Medipathways relies on internal, informal processes for the generation of documentation and does not have a clear management approach to exercise oversight of information, publicity and publishing practices. Though Medipathways' Director of Learning and Teaching provides personal oversight regarding student support and teaching materials held on the MediMoodle system. Course leaders provide the source for much of the Medipathways information, but the governance structures do not include any responsibility in this area. The checks and balances necessary to ensure Medipathways meets the Expectation are not in place. The review team has recommended that Medipathways further develop its deliberative structures and terms of reference to ensure sufficient oversight and recording of key decisions relating to academic quality, and the quality of the student learning experience, enhancement and information (see Expectation A4).

3.11   The team found some documentation was inconsistent with more recent materials; these were undated, unformatted, sometimes unchecked, documents with no management information provided and with poor presentation. The review team **recommends** that by 1 October 2014 Medipathways establish an overall policy for the production and monitoring of Medipathways' information about its higher education provision. This would include oversight and vigilance regarding materials placed on partners' sites which refer to themselves.

3.12   Overall the review team concludes that Expectation C is **not met**. Although staff are substantially committed to students, there is a lack of strategic, management oversight. No committee has responsibility for this area and no strategic oversight is exercised to ensure that information remains fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. This means that the risk is serious for this Expectation.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Serious

Quality of the information produced about its provision: Summary of findings

3.13   In reaching its judgement about the quality of information Medipathways produces about its provision the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

3.14   There were no features of good practice and no affirmations. The review team found lack of clarity in the information published, particularly in relation to recruitment and admissions, the services available and their location, as well as inconsistencies both in content and presentation. This gives rise to one recommendation in this area and a related recommendation under Expectation B2. The review team was unable to find evidence of an overall policy for the production and monitoring of Medipathways' information about its higher education provision, provided both by Medipathways and its partners.

3.15   While students appeared generally content with the information provided to them, the team was concerned at the extent to which Medipathways relies on internal, informal processes for the generation of documentation and does not have a clear management approach to exercise oversight of information, publicity and publishing practices. It is recommended under Expectation A4 that, as part of the further development of its deliberative structures and terms of reference to ensure sufficient oversight and recording of key decisions, particular attention is made to the provision and oversight of information. Specifically, it is recommended that Medipathways establish an overall policy for the production and monitoring of information about its higher education provision.

3.16   The team therefore concludes that the level of risk is serious and that the quality of the information produced about its provision **does not meet** UK expectations.

4   Judgement: 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   Responsibility for Enhancement is not explicitly contained within the terms of reference for the deliberative committees of Medipathways and Medipathways recognises that opportunities for the dissemination of good practice are currently limited.

4.2   The review team tested Medipathways approach to Enhancement by examining relevant committee minutes, reviewing module reports and the annual monitoring report, reviewing staff and student discussion boards on MediMoodle and by engaging in discussions with staff.

4.3   Medipathways is a small college that will see its student numbers increase over the next few years as the two-year BSc rolls out and potentially as a new three-year degree is introduced. Medipathways has a reflective and responsive culture responding to feedback from students and from the external examiner to improve and refine its current programmes. To date, enhancement activity has taken place through feedback; this is collected systematically from students via module questionnaires, whose findings feed through into module evaluations and the annual monitoring report, and from the external examiner at Examination Board meetings and in his reports. Feedback from student representatives is taken at the Course Committee and a responsive approach is evident. Students and staff spoke positively about the effectiveness of Kal's Corner as a place to discuss and resolve issues. Additionally, students are able to raise points for discussion on the MediMoodle discussion board and a staff forum 'Insights' provides a vehicle to enable staff reflection on relevant topics.

4.4   The Learning and Teaching Committee has been recently established and two meetings have been held; this provides a more formal opportunity for enhancements to be discussed. Staff also spoke about the usefulness of the Examination Board meetings to discuss improvements with the external examiner. Staff were also able to describe how staff development activities, such as a workshop on problem-based learning and the trialling of problem-based tutorials with students will lead to enhancements at levels 5 and 6. There is not a formal approach to staff development or peer support for teaching. To date a strategic approach to Enhancement has not been used and the team has recommended that Medipathways further develop its deliberative structures and terms of reference to ensure sufficient oversight and recording of key decisions relating to academic quality, and the quality of the student learning experience, enhancement and information (see Expectation A4).

4.5   Overall, the review team concludes that the expectation about Enhancement is **not met** as Medipathways has not yet developed a coherent and strategic approach. Risk is considered moderate in this area because, although mechanisms such as the Learning and Teaching Committee have been put in place, there is a need to embed and build on its work.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Moderate

Enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.6   In reaching its judgement about the enhancement of learning opportunities the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

4.7   There are no features of good practice in this area and no affirmations. While the review team saw evidence of a range of enhancement activities and initiatives and an enthusiastic approach by the staff, it concluded that Medipathways has not developed a strategic approach to enhancement. Responsibility for Enhancement is not currently specifically contained within the terms of reference of the deliberative committees, although the recently established Learning and Teaching Committee has the potential to include this role within its remit.

4.8   The review team concludes that there is a moderate level of risk in this area and that the Enhancement of student learning opportunities **requires improvement to meet** UK expectations. As in other areas, the review team found the need to ensure that Medipathways' approach is underpinned by processes to secure appropriate oversight and recording of key decisions, and this is addressed by the recommendation in Expectation A4.

5   Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1   Medipathways considers employability to be at the heart of their practice, working in partnership with students to provide support for them to understand and realise their potential. An Employability Strategy is under development but is not yet fully developed, disseminated or embedded in Medipathways practices. Medipathways aims to place core employability literacies at the heart of all programmes, embedding these within the curriculum and extracurricular activity. This is not yet mapped and planned.

5.2   The strategy draws from sector expertise including HEA pedagogy, for employability, recent CBI employability reports and includes relevant Jisc-funded work on digital literacy. Medipathways acknowledges that to deliver this strategy, all staff involved in delivering and supporting students will be required to undertake additional training. Other preparations (reviews of infrastructure and engagement with the student body) have not been formally concluded. Recent Learning and Teaching Committee minutes confirm the development of the strategy, and the informal level of embedding of employability aspects in Medipathways modules that the strategy has reached so far. Staff confirmed the early stages of adoption of this work, outlining possible future plans and development with enthusiasm.

5.3   Medipathways uses its relationship with MDX Events to secure opportunities for students to attend professional development activities at no additional cost. Evaluation of this practice has not yet been considered to confirm its value. Recent development of partnership with the Royal Society of Medicine is intended to extend the opportunities for professional development available to students.

5.4   Individual support for student development is provided through personal Medipathways-based mentors with roles defined in a personal mentoring policy. The role is intended to provide a range of services tailored to student needs, including support for writing personal statements, advice on testing processes and interviewing practices for medical school applications. This support was confirmed as effective and appreciated by two students who met the review team. Advice and referral on the appropriate professional and statutory regulatory bodies and their regulations is not yet developed for PSRB related to roles beyond medical and dental practitioners.

5.5   Medipathways is at an early stage of establishing external 'Medimentors' for all students and knowledge of this was confirmed by students. Similarly, Medipathways has recently engaged an external organisation to provide opportunities for student work placements. Details of these schemes and the approaches to be undertaken to evaluate their impact are not yet available.

5.6   These practices are at an early stage of development and not yet been presented as a coherent offer to students, though some students have completed a substantial proportion of the accelerated undergraduate programme. Plans to ensure that students engage actively and with personal awareness of their development needs have not been fully considered, and impact and evaluation of the approaches to develop Employability not yet planned. This area of activity at Medipathways is being addressed with enthusiasm but is not a fully functioning practice.

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 27-29 of the Higher Education Review (Plus) handbook.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

e-learning
See technology enhanced or enabled learning

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Public information
Information that is freely available to the public (sometimes referred to as being 'in the public domain').

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.

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.