



Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of Northern College of Acupuncture

October 2017

Contents

About this review	1
Key findings.....	2
Judgements	2
Good practice	2
Recommendations	2
About the provider	3
Explanation of findings.....	4
1 Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations.....	4
2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities.....	17
3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities	36
4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities.....	39
Glossary	41

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at the Northern College of Acupuncture. The review took place from 24 to 26 October 2017 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Ms Brenda Eade
- Mr Mark Langley
- Mr Laurence McNaughton (student reviewer).

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

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

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

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#)² and explains the method for [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).³ For an explanation of terms see the glossary at the end of this report.

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

² QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk.

³ Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers): www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education.

Key findings

Judgements

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

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

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice**.

- The College's detailed procedures for programme development which includes inclusive design of the curriculum, the evaluation of the development process and support for the academic community to be fully involved (Expectation B1).
- The integration of professional practice and research informed teaching (Expectation B3).
- The careful interaction of virtual and real resources and the highly responsive support mechanisms to underpin professional and student development and achievement (Expectation B4).
- The responsive systems to facilitate student engagement which includes the evaluation of the opportunities for students to provide feedback (Expectation B5).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to the Northern College of Acupuncture.

By September 2018:

- review the effectiveness of reporting arrangements to the Academic Board and the Board of Directors to ensure effective oversight across the provision (Expectation A2.1)
- ensure that the outcomes of all monitoring activities are effectively captured and used to inform improvements and enhancements across the whole provision (Expectation B8)
- provide clear written College-wide guidance for the production and checking of information (Expectation C)
- to formalise and systematise its approach to enhancement (Expectation Enhancement).

About the provider

The Northern College of Acupuncture (NCA) was founded in 1988. It aims to be a leading and pioneering establishment of educational excellence in the fields of traditional Chinese and Oriental medicine (acupuncture, herbal medicine and Tui na massage) and nutrition, with a reputation for significant research activity, and to:

- provide an inspirational learning environment of a very high quality, with a range of highly motivated and professionally qualified staff
- provide high quality teaching clinics serving the local community and providing treatment at preferential charges
- base its work on shared values.

NCA has a strong commitment to research. It has a research charity, the Foundation for Research into Traditional Chinese Medicine, founded in the second year of NCA's life and initiated the British Acupuncture Council's Acupuncture Research Resource Centre, which was based at NCA in its early years. This involvement in research, combined with the level of qualifications of its staff, were key reasons for its first degree courses to be validated as MScs.

It offers undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in acupuncture and postgraduate programmes in Chinese herbal medicine and nutrition. There are 200 students, making a full-time equivalent (FTE) of 136. There are 68 academic staff (eight FTEs) and 19 administrative staff (eight FTEs).

It has had a series of awarding bodies over the years, namely the University of Wales, the University of Central Lancashire and Middlesex University, and is currently establishing links with London South Bank University (LSBU). The severance of links with these bodies in no way reflects negatively on NCA. All the higher education partners have been positive about the provision at NCA. NCA's major challenge is to have its programmes approved by LSBU in 2018. At the time of the review, NCA was undergoing Taught Degree Awarding Powers approval process.

NCA underwent review for Specific Course Designation in February 2014 and a monitoring visit in February 2016, which concluded that NCA is continuing to maintain academic standards and enhance the quality of student learning opportunities and information about learning opportunities. It noted that the two aspects of good practice had been developed further and the seven desirable recommendations had been met.

Explanation of findings

This section explains the review findings in greater detail.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

1.1 NCA delivers one undergraduate and six master's programmes which are validated by Middlesex University.

1.2 The University processes and procedures for programme validation and approval ensure that the qualifications are positioned at the appropriate level, that the programme learning outcomes align with the relevant qualification descriptor and the naming of the qualifications is in accordance with the titling conventions specified in the FHEQ.

1.3 Overall responsibility for the award of the qualifications to mark the achievement of programme learning outcomes rests with the University.

1.4 Where appropriate, the College uses the relevant professional bodies for the accreditation of its programmes. It has its own internal committee structure and regulations for the maintenance of standards.

1.5 The processes in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.6 The team met with the Principal, senior members of staff, the professional bodies and the link tutor and examined documentation relating to the design and approval of programmes including programme specifications and validation documentation. The team also reviewed the College's regulations.

1.7 The team found that NCA has a history (22 years) of successful partnerships with three Universities which have acted as its awarding organisation. NCA relies on the validation procedures of its current partner, Middlesex University, to ensure that the requirements of the FHEQ are met.

1.8 There are no relevant Subject Benchmark Statements for the programmes delivered by NCA. However, the College maps its course in Chinese Herbal medicine against the European Herbal and Traditional Medicine Practitioners Association (EHTPA) and the course in Nutritional Science against the Nutritional Therapy Education Commission (NTEC).

1.9 The BSc and MSc Acupuncture are accredited by the British Acupuncture Accreditation Board, which sets detailed statements of Standards of education and Training in Acupuncture (SETA). The MSc Chinese Herbal Medicine is accredited by the European Herbal and Traditional Medicine Practitioners Association (EHTPA). The MSc Nutrition Science and Practice/Nutritional Therapy is accredited by the NTEC.

1.10 There are no relevant professional bodies for the three online MSc programmes but these have been mapped against the Quality Code and Master's Level Characteristics. The professional bodies regularly review the suitability of the programmes for continued accreditation.

1.11 In response to concerns raised in 2013 by the British Acupuncture Accreditation Board (BAAB) about the differentiation in levels for the BSc and MSc programmes, NCA undertook a critical review involving both staff and students and produced a statement defining the nature of the MSc. This is used as a benchmark to ensure that the assessment of the programmes reflects the requirements of level 7 of the FHEQ.

1.12 Detailed programme specifications for each programme are contained in the programme handbooks. These follow the University pro forma indicating the FHEQ level for the programme, the overall learning outcomes, the programme structure and credit values, the aims of the programme and the teaching, learning and assessment methods.

1.13 The oversight of the University in the design, validation and approval of programmes together with the College's own internal processes and regulations enable the Expectation to be met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.14 NCA relies on the academic frameworks and regulations of the University for the award of credit. It has established its own governance structures to manage both the academic and resources aspects of the provision. The responsibilities of the College and the validating partner University are set out in the partnership agreement and the Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) for each programme. Any changes to the original validation agreement are recorded in an addendum. These include programme design, governance, assessment and the award of credit.

1.15 The processes and procedures in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.16 The team examined documentation relating to the relationship between NCA and its validating partner, reviewed the governance structures of the College, including the organisational structure and the committee structure, and scrutinised the minutes of the College's constituent committees – Board of Directors, Academic Board, Boards of Study, Module Assessment Boards and the Progression and Finalists Board. The minutes of the management team meetings were also reviewed. The team met members of the senior management team at NCA and the link tutor from Middlesex University.

1.17 NCA is responsible for the governance of the programme at the operational level through its committee and management structures and has devised a set of academic regulations which were scrutinised and approved by the University as part of the validation process.

1.18 The organisational structure of NCA provides for academic and administrative systems. The Principal is responsible for both areas. The role of each Course Director is defined by a set of key tasks. For the acupuncture programmes, stream leaders manage discrete areas of the curriculum. In the other programme areas, module leaders take responsibility for individual modules. For the acupuncture programmes there are also year leaders to support student cohorts.

1.19 The College's committee structure is set out in the College Handbook. The deliberative committees meet regularly, and minutes of meetings are recorded and actions identified and tracked.

1.20 The Board of Directors which meets six times a year is responsible for determining the strategic direction of the College and makes the final decision in relation to staffing, finance, risk and resources. It draws its membership from external organisations.

1.21 The Academic Board is chaired by the Principal and comprises the senior management team, representatives from the teaching staff and students, and one external academic. The Board makes the final decision on all matters of educational policy, including changes to regulations, the structure and organisation of courses, and teaching clinic policies.

1.22 Each programme has a Board of Study which draws its terms of reference from the University's regulations. Boards of Study meet twice per year and are responsible for the management of the programme and monitoring the student experience. There is a standard agenda for each meeting. Student representatives, academic and support staff and the University link tutor are members of the Boards of Study.

1.23 Management Team meetings are held every six weeks. The outcomes of these meetings inform the meetings of the Board of Directors and the Academic Board; however, there is no direct line of reporting from the Management Team meetings to either the Academic Board or the Board of Directors.

1.24 Minutes of Management Team meetings, Boards of Study, Academic Board and Board of Directors are detailed, and action trackers are produced for each meeting. All actions are recorded on a unified action tracker, which is used by the Quality Officer to remind staff about the actions for which they are responsible.

1.25 The College has a resources committee and a marketing strategy group which are sub groups of the Board of Directors. Brief notes are made for the resources meetings, but the marketing group does not record decisions made. NCA also holds enhancement meetings but these are not currently minuted. However, NCA is aware of the need to produce short notes of key decisions for enhancement meetings.

1.26 The team found that although the individual action trackers recorded actions as closed, the unified action tracker was not considered by either the Academic Board or the Board of Directors and consequently actions tended to be focused in particular programme areas reflecting a silo effect in the management and committee structure. Action taken could therefore not be evaluated and shared across the governance structure.

1.27 The team **recommends** that NCA reviews the effectiveness of reporting arrangements to the Academic Board and the Board of Directors to ensure effective oversight across the provision. This should ensure that the governance structure provides transparent reporting lines for all committees across the provision and enables the College to take a strategic overview of the actions required following meetings of the deliberative committees.

1.28 However, as overall responsibility for securing academic standards and awarding academic credit rests with the University, the team considers the Expectation to be met and the level of risk low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.29 NCA produces programme handbooks which contain the programme specifications and module specifications. These are approved through the University's validation process which is set out in the University's Learning and Quality Enhancement Handbook. Programme specifications provide a definitive record of each programme and qualification. Module specifications record the module learning outcomes, subject content and assessment metrics.

1.30 Changes to modules are recorded via a module change form, which goes through the University approval processes. Changes to programme specifications are made by presenting the case to the University using their Programme Change pro forma. The College has an internal process for discussing proposed changes to programmes and modules.

1.31 The University is responsible for providing records of study to students and alumni through diploma supplements, which are produced by the College and formally ratified by the University.

1.32 The processes in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.33 The team scrutinised programme handbooks, read the reports from validation events and documentation relating to changes to programmes and module specifications. They examined the records of study provided by the University to students and alumni, and met the senior management team and the link tutor.

1.34 From the evidence provided and through meetings with staff and students, the team found that detailed programme handbooks are available for all programmes. These contain the programme specifications, which provide information for students and other stakeholders on the intended learning outcomes of the programme and its constituent modules.

1.35 The structure of the programme is set out in the programme specification together with the learning and teaching strategy, and the methods and timing of assessments. Module specifications include intended learning outcomes which align with the overall programme learning outcomes. They contain the indicative subject content, learning resources and the methods and requirements of the assessment process, which test the achievement of the learning outcomes. They are compiled by the College at the time of programme design and approved by the University during the validation process. Programme specifications are also available on the College website and the virtual learning environment (VLE).

1.36 The procedure for making changes to programmes and modules follows University processes. Minor changes to modules can be made by NCA, but the Deputy Dean of School at the University decides whether the change is minor. Changes to module specifications have been made for Nutritional Research and Traditional Medicine to provide more support for research skills and encourage students to undertake the dissertation. The timescale for making and implementing changes is included in the proposal form. Changes to programme

specifications require a special case to be made to the University in the form of a critical review. Recent changes to programme specifications include shortening the length of the MSc in Nutritional Therapy and the MSc in Chinese Herbal Medicine to three years.

1.37 Records of study are provided to students in the form of a Diploma supplement. These are issued once achievement of the relevant programme learning outcomes has been confirmed by the Progression and Finalists Board which meets twice a year and is chaired by the Principal. An example of the certificate issued by the University to students who have successfully completed their programme is included in the MoC. It indicates the title, classification and date of the award. Students confirmed that they had received their certificates and Diploma supplements.

1.38 The team concludes that definitive records of study for each programme and qualification are rigorously maintained by both NCA and the University and that they are effectively used for monitoring and review. Records of study, in the form of a certificate and Diploma supplement are provided for students and alumni. The Expectation is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.39 Programme approval is completed through the University's validation processes which include external scrutiny. NCA designs the programmes and constituent modules through its own internal processes for programme design. These are discussed in detail in Section B1.

1.40 The processes and procedures in place for the approval of taught programmes would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.41 The review team examined materials relating to the design and approval of the three most recently validated online MSc programmes. The team scrutinised the programme specifications and module specifications for all programmes and read the outcome report from the recent validation event. The team studied the reports from external examiners.

1.42 Since the partnership with Middlesex began in 2010, NCA has successfully validated seven programmes. These are the BSc and MSc in Acupuncture, the MSc in Nutritional Therapy in 2010, the MSc in Herbal Medicine in 2012, two online master's courses in 2014, and a third online master's programme - MSc Advanced Nutrition (Research and Practice) in 2016.

1.43 As part of the validation process for each programme, the University ensures that that academic standards are set at a level which meets the UK threshold standard for the qualification and that the proposed programme is in accordance with its own academic frameworks and regulations.

1.44 Changes to programmes are subject to further approval by the University. In 2016, the length of the MSc courses was shortened to three years to make them eligible for student funding. Through their approval processes, the University and professional bodies confirmed that they were satisfied that the academic standard of the programmes had been maintained.

1.45 External examiners are part of the validation panel for all approval events and provide external confirmation that the standards set are at the appropriate level and comparable with other UK institutions. They also review programme specifications as part of their role in monitoring standards of assessment. Their reports confirm that the standards set and credit awarded align with other UK providers of higher education programmes.

1.46 All programme approvals involve scrutiny by the professional bodies in relation to the content of the curriculum and the professional standards of the programme before they are accredited. This enables students to obtain membership of the appropriate professional body upon completion of their course.

1.47 The team concludes that the approval processes of the University are consistently implemented and ensure that academic standards are set at the appropriate level within its

own academic frameworks and regulations and are aligned to the FHEQ. The Expectation is therefore met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.48 As the degree-awarding body, Middlesex University is responsible for ensuring that assessment demonstrates that the credits and qualifications reflect the achievement of relevant learning outcomes. The University maintains consistent oversight of the College's engagement with assessment and the attainment of threshold standards by approving assessment criteria as part of its validation process. This ensures that criteria align with the programme learning outcomes and the appropriate level of the FHEQ at inception. The College rigorously observes these requirements throughout its assessment processes.

1.49 The processes and procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.50 The team read programme documentation and external examiner reports, spoke with the Principal, as chair of the progression and finalist boards, and senior staff.

1.51 Staff mark assessments in line with the pre-agreed criteria, confirmed by external examiner reports. College-operated Module Assessment Boards and the Progression and Finalists Boards award credit or qualifications respectively. The University has approved the remits and procedures of these boards which the link tutor and University-appointed external examiners attend. The University delegates responsibility for chairing these boards to the College Principal.

1.52 The team concludes that the Expectation is met. The oversight of the University and the involvement of the external examiner ensure that the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.53 NCA complies with the annual monitoring and periodic review process of its University partner. It is also subject to regular monitoring and review by the accrediting professional bodies. These procedures explicitly address whether the UK threshold academic standards are achieved and whether the standards required for accreditation by the professional bodies are being maintained.

1.54 The processes and procedures implemented by the College and monitored by the University and the professional bodies would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.55 The team met senior managers at the College, the University link tutor and representatives from the professional bodies and discussed the effectiveness and outcomes of the monitoring processes. The team scrutinised the University annual monitoring reports (AMRs) for all programmes for the last two years, read the College's annual reports for the last three years and examined the documentation relating to the six-year periodic review by Middlesex University. The team also read the reviews undertaken by the professional bodies, and noted the recommendations of the external examiners.

1.56 The team found that NCA is subject to extensive and rigorous monitoring processes by the University and the accrediting professional bodies. The University requires AMRs to be produced for each programme. The outcomes of these reports are considered by the University and action required is fed back to NCA by the link tutor.

1.57 Periodic review by the University is carried out every six years. As part of the periodic review in 2016, the University validated the new online MSc Advanced Nutrition (Research and Practice). The outcomes of the review were favourable.

1.58 The accrediting professional bodies - The European Herbal and Traditional Medicine Practitioners Association (EHTPA), the Nutritional Therapy Education Commission (NTEC) and the BAAB make regular visits to the College and their reports indicate that the standards required by the professions are being achieved and maintained. In an attempt to harmonise the professional and academic requirements of the programmes, NCA has introduced the concept of professional gateway competencies that sit alongside the learning outcomes and are specific to the academic level.

1.59 Actions required as a result of the reviews undertaken by the University and professional bodies are recorded but they do not necessarily inform the Quality Improvement Plan (see B1 for more detail).

1.60 External examiner reports provide a further point of external monitoring of standards for the College. They confirm that 'programme design meets expectations in terms of standards and content'. Recommendations made by the externals relating to standards, for example requiring a minimum pass mark for two components of assessment (Western medicine and Chinese medicine) rather than allowing students to pass with an overall average grade, have been implemented.

1.61 The team concludes that the rigorous monitoring processes of the University and the professional bodies ensure that the Expectation is met. As the processes for monitoring are external to the College, the risk is considered low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.62 As the degree-awarding body, the University uses external and independent expertise to help it set and maintain academic standards. As a partner of the University, the College must observe the University's requirements in this respect.

1.63 The processes and procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.64 The team reviewed programme development documentation and external examiner reports. It also spoke with senior staff and alumni about how the College engages with external expertise.

1.65 University validation processes involve external advisers at both validation and revalidation events. The University also appoints external examiners for each programme, who attend Module Assessment Boards and the Progression and Finalists Board along with the University link tutor for each programme. External examiners complete an annual report that confirms that the College has met the appropriate academic standards.

1.66 The team concludes that the Expectation is met. The oversight of the University ensures that the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards: Summary of findings

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

1.68 With the University, NCA has systems in place for maintaining definitive programme records, making use of external reference points, approving and monitoring the provision and making use of external and independent expertise.

1.69 All 10 expectations are met with low levels of risk. There is one recommendation.

1.70 The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1 NCA uses the established processes of the University and the professional bodies for the validation of all new programmes. The University's processes for programme approval are clearly set out in their Learning and Quality Enhancement Handbook (LQEH). Within the College, responsibility for the oversight of programme design, development and approval lies with the Academic Board and Board of Directors. NCA is currently applying to LSBU as its validating body.

2.2 The processes in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.3 The team met with the Principal, senior members of staff, representatives from the professional bodies, the University link tutor, teaching staff and students. They scrutinised documentation relating to the partnership with the University including the Partnership Agreement, MoCs, validation reports, periodic review report, professional body reports, minutes of the Board of Directors and minutes of Academic Board.

2.4 NCA has a set of internal procedures for programme design and development that involves academic staff and students and draws on advice from external networks. Core team meetings are held to discuss new programme areas and a development plan is created. An initial analysis of the market is undertaken. The business case for the new programme is considered by the Board of Directors and forms part of the overview documentation for the University.

2.5 Careful consideration is given to the overall aims of the programme, and programme learning outcomes are developed to align with the appropriate FHEQ level. The programmes are also mapped to the requirements of the accrediting professional body.

2.6 NCA uses the concepts of inclusive design as a key part of the development process. This enables the College to effectively respond to the different needs of its diverse student population and make provision for individual support for teaching, learning and assessment. Feedback on proposals for new programmes is obtained from staff, alumni and students. NCA was commended for its 'cohesive programme teaching approach' and its 'evidence based approach to practice' by the University's Major Review and Validation team in 2016.

2.7 Staff involvement in programme design is supported by staff development events. Online training materials relating to programme design and development are being created to encourage more staff to be involved in the development of new programmes.

2.8 The relevant Board of Study evaluates the design of a new programme during its first two years.

2.9 The team considers that the College's detailed procedures for programme development, which include inclusive design of the curriculum, the evaluation of the development process and support for staff to be fully involved, is **good practice**.

2.10 The requirements for the University's validation and approval process include the completion of a standard pro forma which confirms that adequate resources are in place, indicates the proposed market and provides an overview of the course and its structure. A draft handbook, which contains the programme specification, module specifications and course structure together with the learning and teaching strategy as well as an overview document form the main part of the submission to the University. The appropriate school in the University scrutinises the documentation and makes recommendations for improvement. The final submission is considered by the University's appointed Validation Panel, which includes external advisers. The University also makes a visit to the College.

2.11 The MSc in Advanced Nutrition (Research and Practice) was approved as part of the programme review by the University in 2016. The report following the review and validation is detailed. It sets several conditions which have been responded to by NCA. A Memorandum of Cooperation relating to the programme was signed in August 2016.

2.12 The team concludes that NCA's detailed and inclusive approach to programme design and development, together with the rigorous validation procedures of the University, enable the Expectation to be met and the associated risk low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.13 NCA has a clear admissions policy. The admissions requirements for each programme are set out in the programme specifications and are available via the prospectus and website. Validating University responsible for ensuring admissions are appropriate for each programme and accrediting professional bodies, ETHPA, BAAB and NTEC, scrutinise the criteria and policies at the time of accreditation to ensure they are informed by standards suitable to them. Ultimately, the Registrar is responsible for the admissions process.

2.14 The policies and procedures which NCA has put in place and the oversight of the University and the accrediting professional bodies allow the Expectation to be met as they are fair, transparent, valid and inclusive and are underpinned by appropriate organisational structures. That said, more could be done to help staff see a more strategic direction in terms of future recruitment. The marketing strategy does not look forward and the marketing plan is also not as helpful as it could be. NCA should capitalise on its numerous strands of feedback to ensure future student interest and application.

2.15 The team met various members of staff who have roles and responsibilities relating to the admissions process. This included staff who had administrative responsibilities and academic responsibilities enabling detailed discussion regarding admissions, interviews and the induction process in detail. They also met students who discussed their experience of application, admission and induction to the College. The team reviewed all available documents relating to admissions which included, but was not limited to, the prospectus, admissions process maps, website, programme handbooks, the admissions policy, admissions appeals policy and induction information.

2.16 The processes in place at NCA are fit for purpose. The students met by the team were, without exception, very happy with their experience of the admissions process. Course information is available online and in the prospectus. This includes clear admissions guidance for each programme. Applications are made direct to NCA via the website and is then followed by an interview. Students with learning difficulties are well supported throughout the process and may also be identified at this juncture. The documents pertaining to admissions are in line with University requirements and staff that the team met were clear about their responsibilities regarding admissions. The Admissions process was evaluated in terms of student retention and progression through AMRs and Boards of Study. Recognition of prior learning forms part of NCA's admissions process and staff responsible for this were clear about their responsibilities. There is a detailed and rigorous induction process as well as a second induction phase introduced for acupuncture programmes.

2.17 From the evidence the team viewed in advance of the review meetings, a clear management of process regarding admissions was identified. This was well understood by all staff met by the team and there was a variety of documentation that demonstrated not only NCA's rigorous internal processes but also its adherence with the stipulations of the awarding body. Students spoke positively about the application process and thought the induction week was a very useful experience for them to get acquainted with the College.

2.18 While overarching documents and lines of administration are not always clear, the Expectation was met and the level of risk to the quality of learning opportunities was low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.19 The NCA Handbook outlines a strategic approach to learning and teaching, which is referred to in the Learning, Teaching and Assessment sections in programme handbooks. The practice-focused nature of the provision requires students to reflect on how they develop their skills and understanding. NCA aims to make all learning and teaching inclusive, by ensuring that all assessment tasks are accessible to students with differing needs. Curriculum design enables students to acquire and develop learning skills. External examiners are positive about this approach. Programme aims and learning outcomes include transferable academic and digital skills.

2.20 This strategic approach, based on inclusivity and reflective practice, would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.21 The team considered College and programme handbooks and considered these alongside student feedback and discussion with teaching staff, students and senior managers.

2.22 Central to the College's ethos is its focus on practitioner training. Each programme therefore carefully mirrors the appropriate professional body's requirements. College regulations specify how to work with patients and fellow students, and teaching in each year integrates clinical practice with essential self-employed business skills. Given its professional focus, College tutors are all professional practitioners, ensuring the currency of staff knowledge of both the subject material and business models.

2.23 The College's staffing strategy details the expected levels of practitioner knowledge and disciplinary scholarship, where possible this includes experience as clinical practitioners and of postgraduate qualifications. The strategy also reflects the UK Professional Standards Framework. The College encourages teaching staff to undertake postgraduate teaching qualifications and provides some funding for this.

2.24 The College also provides funding for staff to undertake master's or doctoral awards, research and scholarship. The College's Research Committee and the Research Director lead on research activities and report on the research strategy and activities in the College's annual report. The College appoints MSc dissertation research supervisors based on their personal experience of research.

2.25 The College employs a range of approaches to teaching. Its voluntary peer observation process encourages staff to identify differing approaches and share these informally, but also at staff training days and the annual staff conference. The College's annual report summarises all scholarly activities, such as the Staff Conference and Development Days that provide a forum to share good practice and update on sector-wide issues. Key staff attend annual partner away days at Middlesex University and all staff reflect on their practice as required by their professional body, ensuring that their professional

experience links directly back to their teaching. External bodies commend the College's commitment to staff development. The integration of professional practice and research-informed teaching is **good practice**.

2.26 The relevant Course Director oversees the induction and mentoring of new staff, which runs alongside a voluntary peer observation process with which staff engage enthusiastically. The College is developing an online induction process for new staff to underpin the process of personal mentoring. The annual performance review process encourages all staff to reflect on their teaching practice, value their skills and achievements, identify and discuss their development needs. Part of this process, along with the staff questionnaires, enables the College to evaluate its approach to staff development.

2.27 Student induction facilitates transition into higher education through online processes and meetings with personal tutors. For online students, a two-week induction considers e-learning and the demands of working online in detail. Low withdrawal rates indicate that induction engages students positively.

2.28 Each subject addresses the need for personal tutors differently. While this is responsive to local need, students might in time question the parity of this. However, students speak highly of the pastoral care and support they receive at the College.

2.29 During induction and at key points in the year, staff explain the nature of sound academic practice and explore plagiarism and assessment by introducing students to the plagiarism-detection software. The College Handbook supports this and outlines processes for reporting harassment or discriminatory behaviour, complaints and appeals.

2.30 The College gathers student feedback through a range of online and hard copy questionnaires. These rate teaching and learning activities, teaching materials and guidance on further self-directed study. The College has worked hard to ensure parity of experience for online students. Tutors use a range of online resources, such as a 'Put Your Hand Up' option in the online forum to simulate asking questions in class. Students and alumni praise the teaching.

2.31 The team concludes that the Expectation is met. The careful and considered approach to developing staff and ensuring student inclusivity ensure that the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement

Findings

2.32 The College articulates a strategic and operational approach to enabling student development and achievement through a range of handbooks published online. These are readily accessible to staff and students. The clearly stated aim is to enable student development and achievement, which staff and student induction explains in detail, reinforced by subsequent teaching and feedback sessions. The College publishes its Access and Participation statement on the website, while its Quality Assurance and Curriculum Development Policy aims to link quality assurance processes with student development and achievement. Student Progress Committees monitor the effectiveness of the provision, taking account of the need of students with protected characteristics.

2.33 The processes and procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.34 The team tested this by considering a range of programme documents, policies and feedback sheets and through discussion with representatives of professional bodies, support staff, managers, teaching staff, students and graduates.

2.35 The College takes a considered approach to supporting student development and achievement. Prior to enrolment the College sends information to prospective students about the provision of library and online resources, the teaching clinics and support. Applicants complete a Fitness to Study and Practise form, identifying their study needs and the Registrar then clarifies any detailed support needs. This establishes an ongoing dialogue with students and a recently developed initial Specific Learning Difficulties screening process helps identify any students who may require further assessment.

2.36 The website provides full details of teaching dates and information on scheduling of clinic days and any other attendance requirements. There is also information on home study expectations. The College offers one-to-one support for mature students who are returning to study. This is a complete and thorough approach.

2.37 Programme specifications outline each programme's aims to develop broad academic skills, such as critical reasoning, research, academic writing and referencing. Assessment activities aim to integrate these skills in a single assessment. Assessment activities also build from formative tasks to summative ones, to enable students to build the skills they require. The College focuses on developing reflective practitioners and the 2016 NTEC reaccreditation cited the Personal Development Planning as good practice. Twice yearly, Student Progress Committees review the progress of each student on each programme.

2.38 The College's size means that online library resources are costly, but it significantly expanded its subscriptions to online full text journal resources in 2014. The College has worked hard to establish parity of support for online students. The College's VLE draws together various proprietary brands into a single access point, this ensures fluid access to dynamic teaching content and ensures that students receive programme information in advance of starting their studies and throughout the academic year.

2.39 The greater part of online access is from students' homes, so the VLE is a crucial resource. Consequently, the College informs students of a minimum IT specification, but does provide some computing and printing facilities on site. The IT administrator works

closely with the management team, meeting regularly with the Principal and Course Directors. Student questionnaires consider the VLE, library and online resources as very good.

2.40 The College library is well stocked with course texts. The librarian communicates regularly with the Course Directors and produces an annual report and development plan for Academic Board. Again, the 2016 NTEC reaccreditation regarded the library as good practice. Students rate the quality of learning materials as very good across all programmes.

2.41 Learning spaces are suitable and appropriately equipped. Facilities are of a high standard and are available for student use outside formal teaching sessions, graduates can hire consultation rooms for private practice out of study hours. The annual report records the planned building maintenance and refurbishment cycle.

2.42 The College aims for parity in the quality of learning opportunities for all students and makes reasonable adjustments for students with protected characteristics. The College is fully accessible for people with disabilities and students can access additional learning support on a personal basis. Staff have redesigned the e-learning materials to enable greater inclusivity, drawing on recommendations of the British Dyslexia Association and the College has developed a Specific Learning Difficulties screening tool. Dyslexia training is available to all staff some of whom provide feedback or teaching sessions through audio recordings.

2.43 The College has developed dissertation training for staff. Training activities, one-to-one support, shadowing and team working enable new staff to engage with inclusive learning. Teaching clinics underpin all practitioner training courses. Each clinic has a Clinic Handbook that complies with the Code of Practice of the relevant professional body. Students experience clinical working as a planned part of their curriculum. The clinics consistently receive the best feedback of any aspect of the College's provision. Student feedback and professional body reports praise the provision of student support. The careful interaction of virtual and real resources and highly responsive support mechanisms to underpin professional and student development is **good practice**.

2.44 The Expectation is therefore met. The completeness of the College's approach ensures that risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student Engagement

Findings

2.45 Student engagement is facilitated through a range of processes and procedures. This includes a Student Charter 'Privileges and Responsibilities of Students', which is included in the College Handbook; end-of-year questionnaires, Board of Study, informal discussions, representation on committees and learning agreements. The various formal and informal systems in place would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.46 The team reviewed all documentation relating to student engagement. This included details of how a student might become a student representative; the committee structure; end-of-module and programme feedback opportunities; and the Student Charter within which details of the expectations in terms of what the students can expect from NCA and what NCA can expect from the students can be found. The team met both staff and students of the College to see how these policies and procedures work in practice. Meetings with the Principal and the support staff also gave the team a clear sense of how student engagement is realised up and down the College.

2.47 The team reviewed the relevant sections of the College Handbook examined the results of the end-of-year feedback questionnaires, met student representatives and students from across the programme areas, as well as academic and support staff.

2.48 The VLE is used for 'you said, we did' postings following issues raised by students. The usefulness of this was confirmed by students met by the team. The College also provides opportunities for feedback at the end of lectures and practical sessions. There are also various points around the College where students can use feedback forms to feedback anonymously if they need to. The various methods for feedback provide the opportunity for continuous dialogue between course directors, student reps and students.

2.49 Student representatives are either volunteers or, in the situation where more than one student wants to be a representative, they are elected. They are made aware of this opportunity at induction. A guide for student representatives is published outlining their role. The College Handbook and programme handbooks also outline the responsibilities and role of student reps. Due to the nature of the kind of student who undertakes study at NCA, it is difficult to recruit student representatives and to achieve substantial student representation on committees. However, the team felt that NCA's solution to this, giving students a multitude of feedback platforms, was very satisfactory in order to ensure that the student voice is heard and, ultimately, engaged with. Students are represented on the College's deliberative committees, that is Boards of Study and the Academic Board, where the outcomes of student feedback are discussed, and where they have an opportunity to raise other issues relating to the quality of their learning experience. There are also programme and course meetings which feature student representatives. The students met by the team detailed the various ways in which they gathered student feedback which included using the VLE. They also attend programme approval and periodic review events, professional accreditation events and have an input into programme design.

2.50 The effectiveness of the processes for student engagement is evaluated through the Academic Board where it is a standard agenda item. A Quality Improvement Plan devolves from this meeting of which student feedback forms part. However, it was not clear to the team how this is then monitored. At the same time, the 'you said, we did' was

something that students were very much aware of. Changes made because of student feedback include, for example, the rebalancing of the assessment schedule. Face-to-face sessions between the Principal, course director and student cohorts have been reinstated during 2015-16. NCA participated in the National Student Survey which showed a very positive response to the work done at the College in this area among others. The analysis of the end-of-year evaluation of each programme is included in the AMR and is also scrutinised by Boards of Study.

2.51 Due to the nature of the NCA, it is not always possible to have full representation on all necessary committees at all times. However, the responsive systems to facilitate student engagement, which includes the evaluation of the opportunities for students to provide feedback, is **good practice**. This was supported and confirmed by the meetings that the team had with both staff and students. Consequently, the team deems Expectation B5 to be met presenting a low risk to the quality of learning opportunities.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.52 NCA's assessment policies, processes and regulations are clearly set out in the College Handbook. The document includes arrangements for extensions, penalties for late work, inclusive assessment and marking procedures. Assessment criteria are also provided in this handbook. Programme and module specifications specify the intended learning outcomes. Programme specifications clearly detail what is expected from each student in terms of assessment. The professional bodies maintain oversight of assessment through their accreditation processes.

2.53 The regulations, policies and procedures relating to assessment, which are overseen by the University and professional bodies, allow the Expectation to be met.

2.54 The team met students and staff to discuss the effectiveness of the assessment process, scrutinised the assessment regulations, examined the programme specifications, and the minutes of the module assessment boards and analysed the external examiner reports.

2.55 Assessment regulations include details of reassessment opportunities, but these are not published until later in the year. Staff that the team met confirmed the process for this. Knowledge of the process was confirmed by the students that the team met. Plagiarism had been recognised as a recurring problem on BSc in Acupuncture but the College was happy with the way it had dealt with this problem by offering further guidance and information for students on the matter including the use of, for example, plagiarism-detection software. An assessment calendar is provided for all courses. The students that the team met were happy with the schedule of assessment, how feedback from assessments was administered and were very keen to highlight the amount of support they had through assessments should any help be required.

2.56 The various course handbooks make explicit reference to the Expectation. Policies and procedures ensure that assessment processes are equitable, valid and reliable and enable every student to achieve and demonstrate that they have achieved the learning outcomes. Arrangements for feedback are clearly stated in the handbook, where it is stated that feedback on all assessed work will normally be provided within 20 working days after the final submission deadline. Assessment of students has been included and discussed as part of staff development events and conferences.

2.57 Staff whom the team met confirmed that these activities were useful for their own development and that it enabled them to better assess their students. The outcomes of assessment are considered at module assessment boards which is chaired by the Principal. The Progression and Finalists Board consider the overall profile of students and makes recommendations for the award of a qualification. This Board is also chaired by the principal. Policies and procedures for Recognition of Prior Learning and the application form are clear. Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning is also referred to in the admissions policy and procedures. The policy is also found in the handbook. NCA recognised the different educational backgrounds that prospective students may come from. The policy reflects this

and staff were clear on how this is implemented if necessary.

2.58 The team found that the College had appropriate processes and procedures in place to enable students to achieve their awards. The College had effective mechanisms in place to carry out the process of Recognition of Prior Learning and Accreditation of Prior Learning. Staff were clear in their responsibilities throughout the assessment process and students were satisfied where to find information relating to the assessment of their programmes and understood what was expected of them in order to meet the learning outcomes. Therefore, the team concludes that Expectation B6 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining

Findings

2.59 The College Handbook defines the role of external examiners, The College nominates candidates in line with University criteria, but the University appoints an external examiner for each programme and inducts them into their role. External examiners attend the Module Assessment Boards for their subject area, and one external examiner also attends the Progression and Finalists Board, where they sign conferment lists.

2.60 External examiners receive a copy of the latest programme handbook at the beginning of each academic year. This contains all assessment documentation, the assessment calendar and the clinic handbook. For assessments that change yearly, a moderator, course director and external examiner sign off an Assessment Approval Form. Programme handbooks identify the external examiner and their current position.

2.61 The processes and procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.62 The team considered University and College documentation concerning the appointment and practice of external examiners. It also reviewed examiner reports and board minutes to consider if the practice meets the University's requirements. The team also spoke with senior managers and teaching staff about their engagement with external examiners.

2.63 External examiners oversee all assessments for the programme by receiving examination papers and draft assignments. They scrutinise samples of all summative assessments with the internal examiners' marks and comments. They scrutinise all dissertations. Assessment boards receive statistics for further consideration and examiners consistently note the detailed running of assessment boards and processes. External examiners can visit teaching clinics, but the introduction of consultation records in the nutrition clinic enables the external examiner to check these consultations.

2.64 Following the board, external examiners complete an annual report for the University, in which they make recommendations and identify examples of good practice. The College includes these reports in the AMR for the University, along with the College's response. Boards of Study scrutinise the resulting action plan, student feedback and staff evaluations. Student representatives attend the Boards of Study and the College publishes all reports on the VLE.

2.65 The team concludes that the Expectation is met. The oversight of the University ensures that the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review

Findings

2.66 NCA undertakes monitoring and review of its programmes in a variety of forms. This includes AMRs and periodic review for the University, annual reports for BAAB, EHTPA and a desktop review for NTEC. The College produces an annual report.

2.67 The processes and procedures for monitoring and review, which are overseen by the University and the professional bodies, would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.68 The team scrutinised the AMRs and Critical Reviews relating to the periodic review by the University. They studied the monitoring reports for the professional bodies, together with NCA's annual reports. The team also considered the recommendations in the external examiner reports, and the documentation relating to the QAA Review for Specific Course Designation in 2014 and subsequent monitoring report in 2016. Meetings were held with staff and students, the link tutor and representatives from the professional bodies to discuss their input into the monitoring processes.

2.69 The team found that at the programme level, NCA produces detailed monitoring reports which identify action required.

2.70 Recommendations made by external examiners in their annual reports are addressed in the programme monitoring reports and responses made. For example, on the advice of an external examiner for Nutritional Therapy, NCA has reviewed the link between formative and summative assessment for that programme, to ensure it supports students in the assessment process. NCA has also modified the assessment for two modules on the Acupuncture programme to require students to pass both elements of the assessment rather than a pass being based on an average mark for the two assessments.

2.71 All AMRs contain an analysis of end-of-year student evaluation, which is generally positive. Comparisons are also made between student achievement and progression for different cohorts within each programme.

2.72 The high withdrawal rates for the MSc Nutritional Therapy/Nutrition Science and Practice programme have raised concerns and NCA has responded by enhancing the Access course and creating a better structured VLE to support students.

2.73 NCA was the subject of QAA review and follow-up monitoring between 2014 and 2016. It responded to all the recommendations made and was found to have made 'commendable' progress with implementing its action plan in 2016, and in 2017 no further visit was required.

2.74 The annual reports describe the activities of the College during the year and include financial data. They do not directly relate to the outcomes of monitoring activities.

2.75 Although the monitoring activities of NCA are extensive, the team found that NCA does not fully use the outcomes of its monitoring processes to inform a strategic approach across the College for improvement and enhancement of the learning experience. The AMRs for the four programme areas validated by the University have action plans. These are scrutinised by the Boards of Study for each programme. Similarly, the monitoring

reports for the professional bodies identify action required, which is then monitored by the relevant Board of Study.

2.76 NCA created a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) at the time of the 2014 QAA review. The actions included in this plan had target dates of 2014-15 and the minutes of the Management Team meeting in January 2015 indicate that they have been completed. (Actions are now recorded as completed on the QIP.) A second QIP with target dates of 2017-18 was created this year, following the creation of the self-evaluation documentation. The team was presented with an updated version of the QIP at the review. Although detailed actions are recorded in both QIPs, there is no direct reference to the monitoring undertaken for the University and professional bodies to enable NCA to take a strategic overview of the outcomes of its monitoring activities. Furthermore, NCA does not produce 'annual overview reports'.

2.77 The team **recommends** that NCA ensures that the outcomes of all monitoring activities are effectively used to inform improvements and enhancements across the whole provision.

2.78 The team concludes that although the College's procedures for monitoring and review result in the production of detailed reports and action plans for each programme area, the link between the QIP and the individual action plans for each report is not clearly articulated and the QIP is not continually updated - one QIP was completed in 2015 and the second was not created until 2017. Furthermore, as each report is considered and monitored within its programme area, the monitoring process does not fully support the sharing of good practice and identification of areas for improvement across the provision. Consequently, the outcomes of the monitoring process do not enable a strategic overview to be taken for future enhancement of the learning experience and this is reflected in the recommendation made by the team.

2.79 However, as the monitoring activities of the College are extensive and are overseen by the University and the professional bodies, the Expectation is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.80 NCA presented the team with detailed documentation relating to its complaints and appeals processes. There is a Policy and Procedure for Academic Appeals and Complaints with responsibilities clearly outlined. Equivalent documentation and information is available for complaints.

2.81 In the first instance, the College will endeavour to offer the student support and guidance, as outlined in the policy. If a formal complaint or appeal is still waiting to be pursued then the College follows its own processes to help the student. If students remain dissatisfied they are made aware of their right to contact the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA). Students are made aware of these policies and procedures at induction. They are also available on the VLE and in the course and College handbooks. An annual report about complaints and appeals is considered by Academic Board, and includes findings from the annual letter from the OIA.

2.82 The documentation for complaints and appeals is very clear and is fit for purpose. The policies are regularly reviewed with an annual report being received by the Academic Board and areas for improvement identified.

2.83 The team reviewed NCA's documentation relating to academic appeals and complaints. This included, but was not limited to, looking at the memorandum of understanding between the College and the University, information available to students, and processes in place to ensure that NCA staff are kept up to date should changes be made. The team also met NCA staff to see how effectively the process is managed further to any stipulations given in documentation. In addition to this, the team met students to confirm that they were aware of the respective processes and how they might go about finding out.

2.84 The students confirmed that the guidance for academic appeals and complaints is discussed at induction. Furthermore, the students were all clear on where they would find the relevant information. This understanding of process was also confirmed by staff in meetings.

2.85 NCA has an established complaints and appeals process and meetings with staff and students confirmed that the information reviewed was accurate and current. Therefore, the team concludes that Expectation B9 is met and the associated level of risk low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.86 NCA delivers programmes on behalf of the University in accordance with the various formal agreements that have been put in place following the validation and approval processes. The University therefore takes ultimate responsibility for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities at NCA.

2.87 During their programme of study students observe practitioners, outside the College, on at least two occasions. The team learned that although NCA assists students in finding suitable practitioners to observe, the practitioners are not involved in the delivery of the curriculum or the assessment of students. This Expectation is therefore not applicable to this review.

Expectation: Not applicable

Level of risk: Not applicable

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

2.88 NCA does not offer research degrees, therefore this Expectation is not applicable.

Expectation: Not applicable

Level of risk: Not applicable

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

2.90 There are four areas of good practice relating to programme development, the integration of practice and research in teaching, the integration of virtual and real learning resources and student engagement. There is one recommendation concerning monitoring.

2.91 NCA has effective systems in place to ensure that students are able to achieve the learning outcomes of modules and programmes.

2.92 The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Findings

3.1 NCA provides extensive information to its potential and current students and other stakeholders through its website. Copies of key documents are also available in paper format. The Principal has overall responsibility for the provision of information. The University has oversight of the information provided and approves all public information following sign-off by the Principal.

3.2 The systems in place for the provision and management of information both online and in paper format would allow the Expectation to be met.

3.3 The team examined the information contained on the website and the hard copies of the documents relating to programme information, regulations and professional body requirements. Meetings were held with staff responsible for the provision of information, with students and with other stakeholders, including the link tutor and representatives from the professional bodies.

3.4 The College website provides access to the College's objectives and policies, procedures and programme specifications, through drop-down menus.

3.5 The marketing strategy does not look forward and the marketing plan is also not as helpful as it could be. NCA should capitalise on its numerous strands of feedback in order to ensure future student interest and application.

3.6 The prospectuses can be downloaded from the website (or a paper copy requested) and include details of the programmes and the application process. The VLE provides access to handbooks, assessment calendars and professional body information. Electronic copies (not paper copies) of the College Handbook, programme handbooks, assessment calendars, dissertation and clinic handbooks are provided. The NCA publishes an annual report that provides detailed information about the College's activities to its stakeholders, including plans, student recruitment and achievement. However, these are broad strokes. More detailed information about looking forward was found within the QIP but this only relates to the current academic year. Information for students studying at NCA is available through the VLE. Student surveys, feedback at Boards of Study and the student submission indicate some problems with the VLE in 2016-17, but at the visit in October 2017 students at meetings drew attention to and praised the VLE. The team found the VLE was highly supportive of student learning. There appears to be several members of staff who have input to the VLE. Overall responsibility for College-wide content of the VLE rests with the College Manager with support from the ICT team, while programme specific content is signed off by the Course Directors. Overall responsibility for the College's public website (www.chinese-medicine.co.uk) lies with the Marketing Manager with support from the ICT team, but programme-specific information is signed off by the Course Directors, and College-wide and legal/compliance information is signed off by the Principal. NCA has recognised that the processes for ensuring that the information students require for study is well organised and provided in a timely manner, require improvement and is attempting to address this.

3.7 Students were satisfied with the information available as prospective students; they confirmed that the information was complete and fit for purpose. As current students of the College, they acknowledged satisfaction with the information available for their courses. Contrary to some misgivings in the student submission, the students drew particular attention to and praised the College's VLE which, in addition to its function as a repository for information, serves as an effective support for their studies.

3.8 There is a process for checking the accuracy and currency of information although the team could not find evidence of this as a formally understood policy, only in meetings was this confirmed as verbally understood. However, it should be noted that the collating of information for public distribution forms part of the marketing plan, despite not readily forming part of committees' terms of reference. The Registrar is responsible for records of student achievement and Finalists Board. The College prepares the Diploma supplements, which are issued by the University.

3.9 The information available to prospective students is clear and concise. However, the team felt that the lack of strategic oversight suggests that there could be problems in the future. This deficiency is possibly best demonstrated by the informality that the Marketing Group currently meets and fits into NCA's committee structure. The team **recommends** that NCA provides clear written College-wide guidance for the production and checking of information. To this end, the team felt that the Expectation is met and the risk to learning opportunities is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

3.11 NCA provides extensive information to potential and current students. There is a process for checking the accuracy and currency of information, although this is informal. NCA works well with the University in the provision of information.

3.12 The information about learning opportunities is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The team made one recommendation to provide clear written College-wide guidance for the production and checking of information.

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

4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1 NCA cites many examples of enhancement that arise from decisions made by the Board of Directors with the intent of improving the quality of the provision. These are embodied in the action plan for the forthcoming year. For example, over the last six years, the Board has set a series of actions to enact its decision to move towards blended learning, each year's actions building on the previous year. This has resulted in considerable development to the excellent VLE and College-wide approaches to teaching and assessment. Many of these actions arise from considered and well-researched responses to live issues within NCA.

4.2 Undoubtedly, such actions arise from a deeply embedded awareness throughout the institution of the College's ethos to be 'a leading and pioneering establishment of educational excellence'. This corresponds to the demands of NCA's professional bodies that programmes should demonstrate continuous improvement. Similarly, as a partner of Middlesex University, NCA must align with University guidance about quality assurance and enhancement activity. Currently, the College regards its sense of enhancement as organic.

4.3 While there are clear examples of enhancement activity in all aspects of the provision, these are invariably reactive responses to immediate strategic issues, rather than proactive measures that underpin an institutional determination to enhance the provision over time. For instance, a revitalised approach to dissertations was a measure to reverse retention issues, that it made a strong contribution to the research agenda was a bonus.

4.4 NCA's focus on excellence and its professional bodies' emphasis on improvement have yet to reconcile themselves under an enhancement banner. For instance, NCA has no enhancement strategy. Its strategic responses are usually set only a year in advance, rather than being the result of a three or five-year risk-assessed plan that aims to further the quality of learning opportunities for students.

4.5 Reconciling its sense of excellence with continuous improvement and enhancement would develop a broader sense of enhancement as a longer term and proactive force. Such an approach would allow for fully risk-assessed actions and tie into a wider strategic plan for the development of the College. The team **recommends** that NCA formalises and systematises its approach to enhancement.

4.6 The Expectation is met because there is clear evidence of enhancement taking place and arising from NCA's determination to make continuous improvement. However, the fact that such enhancement is reactive and not part of a longer term strategic plan means there is a moderate risk that enhancement activities will not fully achieve their potential.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

4.8 NCA demonstrates a commitment to enhancement and the team found several examples of this. However, there is no formalised and systematic approach and the team therefore made a recommendation.

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

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 21-24 of the [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\) handbook](#).

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

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

Academic standards

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

Award

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

Awarding organisation

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

Blended learning

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

Credit(s)

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

Degree-awarding body

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

Distance learning

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

Dual award or double award

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

e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

Enhancement

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

Expectations

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

Flexible and distributed learning

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

Framework

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

Framework for higher education qualifications

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

Good practice

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

Learning opportunities

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

Learning outcomes

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

Multiple awards

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

Operational definition

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

Programme (of study)

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

Programme specifications

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

Quality Code

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

Reference points

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

Self-evaluation document

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

Subject Benchmark Statement

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

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)

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

Threshold academic standard

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

Virtual learning environment (VLE)

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

Widening participation

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

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