



# Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of Oxford Centre for Mission Studies

October 2016

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## About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Oxford Centre for Mission Studies. The review took place from 5 to 7 October 2016 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Tim Woods
- Ms Deborah Trayhurn
- Ms Seraphina Simmons-Bah (student reviewer).

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

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

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

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

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 3. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 5.

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

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

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

<sup>3</sup> Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers): [www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Educational-Oversight.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Educational-Oversight.aspx).

## Amended judgement - September 2017

In October 2016, the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies underwent a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) that resulted in a judgement of 'requires improvement to meet UK expectations' for the enhancement of student learning opportunities.

As a consequence, it was agreed with the Home Office to consider the progress made by the Centre to address the 'requires improvement' judgement through a monitoring visit.

The review team evaluated the actions that had been undertaken by the Centre against its action plan since the original review, and considered the strategic approach to enhancement, along with the supporting evidence.

The review team was satisfied that the original recommendation had been acted upon in a serious and effective way and that the Centre was meeting UK expectations for the judgement area that had been unsatisfactory at the original review.

### Amended judgement

As a result of this extended monitoring visit, the School's judgements are now as follows:

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

The review can therefore be signed off as complete.

A report from the extended annual monitoring visit is published on the QAA website at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/provider?UKPRN=10004932](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/provider?UKPRN=10004932).

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about Oxford Centre for Mission Studies

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Oxford Centre for Mission Studies.

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

### Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following feature of **good practice** at Oxford Centre for Mission Studies:

- the supportive guidance of the Dean's Review and the Pre-submission Subcommittee in helping students to achieve successful examination outcomes (Expectation B4).

### Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Oxford Centre for Mission Studies.

By January 2017:

- clarify, formalise and implement document management procedures to ensure the accuracy of information (Expectations C and A2.2).

By April 2017:

- review and clarify governance structures to ensure robust maintenance of quality and standards (Expectation A1)
- undertake staff development to ensure that processes for programme design, approval, development, delivery, monitoring and review are fully understood and more effectively operated (Expectation B3)
- clarify and formalise the procedures to support students with disabilities in completing their programmes (Expectation B4)
- strengthen the processes for the appointment and training of student representatives (Expectation B5)
- establish effective processes for programme design, approval, development, monitoring and review (Expectations B8 and B1)
- establish procedures for formal appeals and complaints made at the OCMS stage and include reference to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (Expectation B9)
- take a strategic approach to enhancing the quality of student learning opportunities (Enhancement).

## Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms** the following action that Oxford Centre for Mission Studies is already taking to make academic standards secure and improve the educational provision offered to its students:

- the actions taken by the Executive Director to introduce externality in the Research Induction School (Expectation A3.4).

## Financial sustainability, management and governance

Oxford Centre for Mission Studies has satisfactorily completed the financial sustainability, management and governance check.

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

## About Oxford Centre for Mission Studies

Founded in 1983, the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies (OCMS) is an international and ecumenical Christian research centre. It exists to produce theologically informed scholars who use acquired research skills to effect change in the areas where they practise; to facilitate research and encourage excellence in mission scholarship, professional practice and theological education; and to challenge and expand students' abilities to meet the demands of new challenges in their field. OCMS is unique in its focus on the nature and practice of Christian mission, with particular attention to the needs of the majority world. Students recognise this, and report positively upon the 'open and welcoming' approach of OCMS in providing 'opportunities for students to interact internationally and to learn from peers and professionals who come from very different worlds'.

OCMS has 123 students studying on the Research Degrees Programme, with MPhil and PhD degrees validated by Middlesex University (the awarding body). Six students are full-time and 117 are part-time and non-resident. Consistent with its mission, 60 per cent are from the developing world. Students are supported at OCMS by eight faculty and six professional support staff (11 FTE) and by supervisory teams drawn from a network of around 150 leading academics based in the UK and overseas. The single campus, in a Grade I listed church, houses a specialist library of over 13,000 volumes on theology and mission history.

The most significant change since the 2012 QAA Review for Educational Oversight was the change in validating institutions in October 2012, from the University of Wales to Middlesex University; this has enabled students and faculty to access awarding body resources, such as lectures and the library, on campus and online. In addition, over the last four years the OCMS committee structure has been adapted to facilitate alignment with awarding body regulations. The other major change is a current transition in the role of Executive Director, and in the Chair of the Council of Trustees. These changes will be accompanied by an organisational review, assessing the mission and strategic direction of OCMS.

The 2012 review outlined five areas of good practice and four areas of desirable action. OCMS has an action plan for addressing these areas, and has itemised actions, success indicators and evaluation against each area. The self-evaluation document outlines the actions taken against each area, and OCMS has sought to address the points made and to build upon areas of good practice.

## **Explanation of the findings about Oxford Centre for Mission Studies**

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Findings**

1.1 The Oxford Centre for Mission Studies (OCMS) provides research degrees (MPhil and PhD) that are validated by Middlesex University (the awarding body). The awarding body ensures that OCMS has the appropriate resources and facilities in place to support all candidates, and the overall responsibility for the programmes resides with the awarding body. The Memorandum of Cooperation between the awarding body and OCMS provides the definitive record of the agreement between both parties, and the main duties and responsibilities of each institution are set out in the Responsibilities Checklist and in the Programme Handbook.

1.2 Students at OCMS progress through several stages and there is guidance for students on progression through the stages of their research programme. The first (OCMS) stage lasts approximately 17 to 18 months, during which students attend a five-week full-time Research Induction School, followed by five weeks of developing their research proposals with a mentor. This OCMS Stage Plan prepares a student for registration as an MPhil candidate with the awarding body. Thereafter, students receive supervision under the management of OCMS and complete an MPhil Stage Plan, and then, subject to a progression assessment, progress for PhD registration with the awarding body.

1.3 The awarding body sets out the academic framework for the degrees in its Learning and Quality Enhancement Handbook, and OCMS has responsibility for maintaining these standards and the Awarding Body Research Degree regulations through its own Programme Handbook. The programmes are benchmarked against the Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*. Throughout the Programme Handbook, there are references to the Quality Code and how it has been used as a reference point in designing the programme.

1.4 OCMS is overseen by a Council of Trustees, and membership and terms of reference are laid out. The Council's governance protocols and minutes demonstrate that it oversees the vision and strategy as set out in the Memorandum and Articles of Association and meets its legal and regulatory responsibilities.

1.5 The research degrees meet academic standards through alignment with the FHEQ and the QAA-designed characteristics of doctoral degrees, through the awarding body validation, approval and enhancement processes. A system of external examiners is in place to confirm that the standards of awards are consistent with comparable institutions and with external reference points, and the Research Induction School is mapped against the Vitae Researcher Development Framework. The arrangements in place for the maintenance of threshold academic standards of awards thereby allow the Expectation to be met.

1.6 The review team examined documentary evidence relating to OCMS's collaborative agreement with the awarding body, its Memorandum of Cooperation, its governance arrangements and procedures for programme approval, training for students and examination protocols. The team also met senior managers and academic and professional staff from OCMS as well as the awarding body link tutor who acts as the representative of the awarding body on OCMS committees.

1.7 While there is a contingency plan with the awarding body to meet unexpected exigencies within the degree provision, the Council of Trustees does not oversee an institutional risk register. While there are a range of committees within OCMS to manage its provision, the review team found that the reporting mechanisms of the committee structure and memberships lack clarity. The Executive Director acknowledged that there were different committees for different stages, and senior staff were not always sure which business was undertaken or overseen in which forum. Although mentioned in staff meetings, the team found that the Calendar and Quality Committee did not appear on the OCMS organisation chart, nor was it mentioned in the self-evaluation document. OCMS explained that this Committee met once a month and that it was regarded as the main body to oversee the mapping of delivery against external reference points and QAA frameworks. Terms of reference were provided, but only one set of minutes (January 2016) was available. The governance structure for monitoring standards lacks clarity, and is not well understood by all staff. The review team **recommends** that OCMS review and clarify governance structures to ensure robust maintenance of quality and standards.

1.8 The awarding body has ultimate responsibility for ensuring that the research degrees meet relevant external reference points. While the awarding body's policies and procedures are applied within OCMS to maintain threshold academic standards and to ensure that the programmes are aligned appropriately, the review team identified a need to strengthen and clarify the workings of its governance and committee structures to further support the maintenance of threshold academic standards. Accordingly, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met, albeit that weaknesses in the operation of part of OCMS's governance structure reflect a moderate level of risk.

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

**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**

1.9 OCMS provides research degrees (MPhil and PhD) that are validated by the awarding body. The overall responsibility for the programmes resides with the awarding body's Research and Transfer Committee, the Deputy Dean (Research) of the School of Law, the Centre for Academic Partnerships, and the Research and Knowledge Transfer Office. The Memorandum of Cooperation between the institutions outlines their collaboration for delivery of the programme. The main duties and responsibilities of each institution are clearly set out in the Responsibilities Checklist.

1.10 The awarding body's Learning and Quality Enhancement Handbook sets out the academic framework for the programme, and OCMS applies this framework to maintain the academic standards of the provision.

1.11 Throughout the Programme Handbook, there are references to the Quality Code and how it is used as a reference point in designing the programme. The awarding body makes its criteria for the award of research available online, and the academic standards are aligned through its validation, approval and enhancement processes, the FHEQ, and the QAA Characteristics Statement for doctoral degrees.

1.12 In implementing and adhering to the awarding body regulations and quality assurance procedures, OCMS is overseen by the Senior Management Team, and a supporting committee structure including principally the Calendar and Quality Committee, the OCMS Assessment Board (OAB) and the Board of Studies (BoS). The latter two of these have representatives from both the awarding body and OCMS in their membership. The arrangements in place for the maintenance of academic standards of awards would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.13 The review team examined documentary evidence relating to OCMS's collaborative agreement with the awarding body, its Memorandum of Cooperation, its governance arrangements and procedures for programme approval, training for students and examination protocols. The team also met senior managers and academic and professional staff from OCMS as well as the awarding body link tutor who acts as the representative of the awarding body on OCMS committees. In evaluating OCMS's approach to this Expectation, the review team also examined the programme handbooks and the committees' terms of reference, academic regulations, organisational and committee structures, and committee minutes and reports of examinations.

1.14 The review team found that the Senior Management Team meets weekly, and sets the strategic direction for OCMS. Minutes from these meetings have been recorded in full since July 2016. The Calendar and Quality Committee is responsible for mapping QAA requirements onto the delivery of schemes at OCMS; the OAB oversees the operational management of the programme, and issues of student progression and monitoring; while the BoS oversees the management of the programme with particular emphasis on enhancement and student representation. Further subcommittees oversee pre-registration, ethics, examinations, admissions, the website and the student voice. The membership and terms of reference of all these committees are clearly laid out.

1.15 Key points in the students' progression are effectively overseen by OCMS review committees. The Pre-Registration Review Committee reviews a student's performance after completion of the Research Induction School. The OAB has established processes to oversee progression of students from the OCMS Stage to MPhil, and from MPhil to PhD. An Assessment Panel report recommends progression to the awarding body for each candidate. The Dean's Review and Pre-Submission Subcommittee provides an in-depth report on each candidate's readiness for final submission and offers effective support for students to achieve successful examination outcomes.

1.16 Further reference to the effectiveness of the Committees has been made within Expectation A1 above, relating to reporting mechanisms and staff uncertainty about the scope of different committees. However, the awarding body's academic regulations, OCMS's Programme Handbook, the established link tutor system and systems to monitor student progression collectively work to support students in achieving the awarding body's academic standards. The review team thus concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.17 The Programme Handbook and a Research Student Handbook provide definitive information on intended learning outcomes and how the programmes will be delivered and assessed. There are records of all approved programmes and qualifications, which include details of any changes that have been made to these programmes. These records demonstrate alignment of the programmes with the FHEQ, and there are Stage Plans which provide guidance on how students can progress through the stages of their research programmes.

1.18 Programmes are monitored annually with a report provided to the awarding body. The annual monitoring report is considered by the OCMS BoS and its deliberations are fed back into the action plan, and it is also presented to and approved by the OCMS OAB. Programmes are reviewed in accordance with the awarding body's validation and review procedures at the end of the Memorandum of Cooperation's approval period. The arrangements in place with the awarding body for the maintenance of a definitive record of awards allow the Expectation to be met.

1.19 When evaluating OCMS's approach to meeting the Expectation, the team considered evidence including completed QAA return forms, the Programme Handbook and Research Student Handbook, MPhil and PhD Stage Plans, the Annual Monitoring Report and OAB minutes. The team met senior members of staff, support staff and students and received a virtual learning environment (VLE) demonstration while testing the Expectation.

1.20 The Programme Handbook and Research Student Handbook provide clear details on the structure and delivery of the programme. The Stage Plans clearly define how students can progress through the MPhil and PhD stages, and students confirmed that they are aware of these documents and understand how to progress through their programme.

1.21 There are no formal processes in place for making and recording changes to the programmes currently in place. A recommendation covering these arrangements is reflected in Section C below. However, OCMS only offers the research degree programme and has not validated a new programme for over a decade, and has a process outlined for any new provision which may be validated in the future.

1.22 Although there are no formal procedures for recording any changes made to the programme, the team recognises that OCMS only offers a research programme which only includes taught input in the pre-registration stage at the Research Induction School and there is otherwise clear documentation outlining the structure of the programme. The team concludes that the Expectation is met with a low level of risk.

**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**

1.23 OCMS shares responsibility for the development of programmes with its awarding body, which is managed through a Memorandum of Cooperation between the two institutions. OCMS uses the awarding body's programme development processes and quality procedures to approve programmes, and these integrate consideration of the programme against the Quality Code. OCMS relies upon the awarding body's criteria for the design of programmes and to ensure that these designs meet standards appropriate for MPhil and PhD awards.

1.24 OCMS has produced a Programme Handbook and aligned its Research Degree Programmes' management and administrative systems, policies and procedures with the awarding body's regulations and procedures within its Learning and Quality Enhancement Handbook. The awarding body's institutional visit in June 2012 confirmed OCMS's mapping of its processes to secure threshold academic standards. OCMS is responsible for delivering a Research Induction School which acts as preparation for the awards, and the training modules operated at this stage are cross-referenced with the Vitae Researcher Development Framework.

1.25 The awarding body confirmed its MPhil/PhD institutional approval proceedings in 2012. The principle of close working with the awarding body partner to establish and manage the Joint Collaborative Research Programmes enables this Expectation to be met.

1.26 The team evaluated OCMS's approach to this Expectation by reviewing the Memorandum of Cooperation and checklist of responsibilities, with reports of institutional approval, handbooks used by OCMS and the awarding body, the external Vitae Researcher Development Framework and other documents covering OCMS's approach to programme development and awards. The team met with the Dean, senior staff members, the link tutors from both the awarding body and OCMS, and academic staff managing the programme, to consider the ways that OCMS approaches the work in practice.

1.27 OCMS has not undertaken programme design and approval activity since gaining institutional approval with the awarding body in 2012. OCMS staff confirmed confidence in partnership practices, and meet regularly with the awarding body link tutor, engaging with the Academic Partnerships office in undertaking review practices to meet awarding body arrangements. The awarding body shares responsibility for development of the joint collaborative research programme.

1.28 OCMS has successfully negotiated changes to awarding body partners for the MPhil/PhD programme, though reliance on the awarding body's processes and procedures for approval of programmes is considerable. The constructive support provided by the awarding body in its work with OCMS enables the Expectation to be met and the risk to be 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**

1.29 OCMS operates the Research Induction School which prepares candidates for registration with the awarding body for MPhil and PhD study. All stages of student study from induction to PhD completion are managed by OCMS. The OAB is responsible for the operational management of the programme, and reports are sent annually to the awarding body on the programme's standards and quality. The OAB exercises essential functions in assuring and enhancing the quality and standards of the programme.

1.30 The OAB approves student applications onto the Research Induction School and proposals for progression of registrations to MPhil or MPhil transfer to PhD. Decisions to approve registration are passed to the awarding body for review and confirmation by the Research and Knowledge Transfer Committee. These approaches are aligned with the awarding body criteria for the award of its PhDs using the awarding body's regulations which themselves meet QAA criteria.

1.31 The awarding body is responsible for the overall provision of OCMS's MPhil and PhD awards. In this respect, arrangements in place allow the Expectation to be met.

1.32 The review team considered documents showing OCMS's approach to this Expectation including review evaluation, documents showing the responsibilities of each party, and those relating to programme management. During the review, the team met the Dean, senior staff members, both link tutors, and academic and professional support staff to establish practices in place.

1.33 Standards and programme quality assurance practices are monitored directly through the effective embedding of link tutor roles from both institutions on the OAB and BoS. The link tutors' interaction, together with reports on progress and procedures for the appointment and activity of the viva panels which examine students for their research awards, provide the cornerstone of practice to ensure credit and qualifications are awarded in line with the awarding body academic framework.

1.34 Tracking and monitoring of students at all stages is effective. The OAB manages and reports progress to the awarding body. The arrangements made for the MPhil and PhD awards are supported by both OCMS and the awarding body's processes, and the roles of each are understood and actively engaged with. The awarding body link tutor works appropriately to provide close support to the programme, giving a degree of externality, and represents the awarding body at OCMS OAB and BoS as well as at awarding body committees, which confirm the OCMS practices in managing this programme.

1.35 These arrangements are robust and the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the risk is low.

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

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

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

## **Findings**

1.36 The monitoring and review process to support academic standards for the joint collaborative research programme is a shared responsibility of OCMS and the awarding body. Both institutions have appointed link tutors to maintain standards, the quality of delivery of the programme, and effective programme operation and communication. They jointly ensure that the programme is delivered in accordance with the Memorandum of Cooperation.

1.37 The OCMS Programme Handbook uses the awarding body's processes to ensure that monitoring and review practices meet the latter's requirements. OCMS provides an annual monitoring report to the awarding body, which takes inputs from external examiner reports, OCMS committees, student feedback and validation and review reports. An action plan is produced to address any operational weaknesses and systemic problems. The BoS tracks the action plans and confirms progress and developments. The awarding body confirms feedback from the annual monitoring process, and this along with the design of the above processes allow OCMS to meet this Expectation.

1.38 The team reviewed documents including those describing responsibilities and approaches to managing the programme and sample annual monitoring reports and the awarding body responses to these. The team also met staff engaged in this process including the Dean, the awarding body link tutor, academic staff and those managing the quality assurance processes at OCMS.

1.39 The review team found that OCMS applies its standards through its OAB. The programme managed by OCMS relies heavily on awarding body-directed monitoring and review processes in terms of structure, rather than internal systems. Inputs are arranged from externally appointed supervisors, who operate as the main supervisors in many instances, report on student progress and interact with House Tutors to provide materials for monitoring and review. External examiners review standards and report on these in examination forums, and in this way the external examiner system provides external verification of procedures and standards. These views and observations are fed into the OAB and BoS and are included in the annual monitoring process.

1.40 The team concludes from discussions and review of documentation that by applying the awarding body's processes for monitoring and review, OCMS meets the Expectation, and the associated risk is low.

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

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.41 The awarding body's academic frameworks require the engagement of external and independent expertise to ensure that threshold academic standards and its own academic standards for the programmes offered within OCMS are maintained. Beyond this interaction with the awarding body's processes and committees, OCMS aligns its programmes with QAA standards and the Vitae Researcher Development Framework, embedded in the delivery of the Research Induction School.

1.42 The design of the relevant elements of the PhD training and supervisory scheme is undertaken by the OAB and BoS, both of which include awarding body representation, and OCMS also provides an annual monitoring report to the awarding body. The BoS first considers this report, then feeds its deliberations into the OAB, which has ultimate responsibility at OCMS for quality and standards.

1.43 OCMS relies upon the role of the contracted external supervisor in the supervision arrangements of the candidates, and the role of the external examiner at the final viva voce examination, to ensure academic standards. The awarding body frameworks and the processes within OCMS allow the Expectation to be met.

1.44 The review team tested the Expectation during meetings with OCMS staff and by reviewing documentary evidence provided. The review team also met external supervisors and the awarding body link tutor.

1.45 The OAB makes recommendations on the appointment of external supervisors to the awarding body, which gives formal approval. OCMS explains the scope and terms of reference for external supervisors in the letter of appointment and provides a Supervisor Handbook. Supervisors contribute regular reports on students' progress which are monitored by the Stage Leaders. The role of the supervisor is kept under review and this process has recently led OCMS to identify and implement improvements to the supervisory role.

1.46 External examiners appointed to examine candidates are required to confirm that in the delivery and assessment of research degrees, OCMS adheres to its published standards, and that these are comparable with standards elsewhere in the higher education sector and with threshold standards in the UK. External examiners are appointed to engage in the examination of students and provide advice and recommendations on the examination process and the overall delivery of the programme. External examiner feedback is considered by the OAB and BoS, which in turn feeds into the annual monitoring report and action plan sent to the awarding body.

1.47 The link tutors take responsibility for ensuring that appropriate structures are in place to maintain academic standards. They ensure that the programme is delivered in accordance with the Memorandum of Cooperation, and that there is effective liaison between the two parties.

1.48 The awarding body and OCMS have an appropriate system of using external supervisors and examiners as independent expertise. The evidence provided demonstrated that OCMS adheres to the processes laid down in the Programme Handbook. There is no system within OCMS for routinely requiring independent external input, although external examiners provide thorough scrutiny. The review team **affirms** the actions taken by the Executive Director to introduce externality in the Research Induction School.

1.49 The processes for using external and independent expertise when setting and maintaining academic standards are defined, and awarding body and OCMS committee oversight is appropriate and robust. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met with an associated low level of risk.

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

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

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

1.51 All seven Expectations in the judgement area are met, and six of these have a low level of risk. The review team identified a moderate risk in relation to Expectation A1, and recommends that OCMS reviews and clarifies governance structures to ensure robust maintenance of quality and standards. The review team also made a cross-reference at Expectation A2.2 to a substantive recommendation in Expectation C, which is concerned with the clarification, formalisation, implementation and documentation of management processes to ensure the accuracy of information.

1.52 There are no features of good practice. The review team affirmed the actions taken by the Executive Director to introduce externality in the Research Induction School.

1.53 The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of the degree-awarding body at OCMS **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 OCMS shares responsibilities for the design and approval of modules, programmes and qualifications with the awarding body. The OAB and BoS are responsible for the development of the programme using feedback, monitoring and external examiner reports which suggest areas for development or enhancement. The incoming Executive Director intends to implement an organisational review of OCMS which is intended to strengthen the safeguarding of academic standards and enhance the academic programme. OCMS does not yet have full systems and processes in place to support the development of new provision and so does not currently fully meet this Expectation.

2.2 The team considered existing materials including contractual agreements and handbooks used to manage the programme, together with statements of development practices for the provision.

2.3 Discussions were held with OCMS staff including the Dean, staff responsible for quality assurance processes and both link tutors to establish an understanding of the arrangements for setting and maintaining academic standards, and for curriculum design, development and approval processes.

2.4 Meetings with staff identified some inconsistent embedding of sector development practices. Staff did not appreciate the regulatory limits applying to OCMS's responsibilities in respect of the Research Induction School, specifically that it could not treat this stage as a separate FHEQ award without validating this with their awarding body. The programme design is available in the Programme Handbook, but the structure and approaches of the Research Induction School are described as modules, although it is not a formal programme stage with specific learning outcomes and assessment. Discussion also confirmed that committee structures and reporting systems used to take programme development plans forward and develop practices are unclear.

2.5 OCMS has not developed new programmes for some time. Approaches to develop provision and ensure alignment with awarding body regulations and currency of practice are not currently identified within OCMS processes. OCMS recognises this and has recently identified arrangements at a high level for the design, development and approval of new provision.

2.6 To reflect the need for operationalising this, a linked recommendation to establish effective processes for programme design, approval and development has been embedded within Section B8.

2.7 OCMS has acknowledged the need for development to meet this Expectation. Procedures are outlined at a high level and do not provide sufficient detail on the design, approval and development of provision with clear programme and/or module learning outcomes. Accordingly, the Expectation is currently not met. The risk is considered moderate because OCMS works collaboratively with its awarding body, and while its procedures are

broadly adequate, they have some shortcomings in terms of the rigour with which they are applied.

**Expectation: Not met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

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

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

**Findings**

2.8 Information on OCMS's recruitment, selection and admissions procedures is included in their programme handbook. OCMS sets out its strategic priorities in recruitment, selection and admissions in this handbook and has procedures in place to assess candidates' prior achievements and potential to ensure that prospective students are a match with its strategic priorities.

2.9 OCMS have reviewed and updated their admissions process to become more stringent, with two interviewers present, one of whom is an expert in the proposed research area, to aid potential students in coming to an informed decision about whether they can commit to their chosen programme of study.

2.10 Admissions requirements for potential students, including tests for English language proficiency for international applicants, and the stages of the application process are detailed on the OCMS website, through the application form or through direct communication with the Registrar or Admissions Tutor.

2.11 An Admissions Committee meets to assess a candidate's potential to complete their programme of study based on their prior achievements and qualifications and suitability in accordance with the OCMS mission. This Committee also has responsibility for ensuring that policy and procedures are followed and that policy is monitored, evaluated and developed as necessary. The operation of these admissions and enrolment processes allows the Expectation to be met.

2.12 The team tested the Expectation by considering a range of evidence, including Admissions Committee minutes, an interview form and by visiting the OCMS website. The team met staff and students to further evaluate OCMS's approach to meeting the Expectation.

2.13 Students confirmed that the interview process has become more stringent, commenting positively on the level of challenge it now offers. Students confirmed that they were in regular contact with OCMS throughout the application process, commenting explicitly on how quick, helpful and supportive staff responses were. Students also commented positively on how the Research Induction School supported them in coming to a decision about completing their programme.

2.14 OCMS has a clear strategy in place for recruitment, selection and admissions; its admissions requirements are clearly communicated to applicants, and appropriate support is offered to applicants throughout the application process.

2.15 There are clearly defined procedures in place for the recruitment, selection and admission of students; current students comment positively on the effectiveness of the process. The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.16 As OCMS only offers a research degree programme, traditional teaching occurs during the five-week Research Induction School. This School is a suite of training themes in research skills and research methodologies delivered to prepare students for registration as awarding body MPhil candidates. The School is reviewed annually by the OAB and student feedback is collated and analysed for improvements by the Pre-Registration Review Committee.

2.17 Students are assigned a mentor at the start of the Research Induction School to help shape their thesis proposal for registration. Thereafter, students' main support derives from the supervisory arrangements and independent study. Supervisors are either internal or external, and oversee students' progression through to the submission of the thesis. A supervisory team consists of three people - the Main Supervisor, the Second Supervisor and the House Tutor. The resources and supervisory arrangements put in place by OCMS allow the Expectation to be met.

2.18 The review team tested the Expectation in discussions with OCMS staff and students, external supervisors and the awarding body link tutor, and by reviewing relevant documentary evidence.

2.19 The review team found that the House Tutor acts as the Main Supervisor's principal contact with OCMS, and as a mentor to newly appointed supervisors. The House Tutor and Stage Leader ensure that academic procedures are met by both students and supervisors. Detailed procedures for supervision are laid down and all arrangements are outlined in the Programme Handbook. Students submit six-monthly progress reports, and also make a regular evaluation of their skills development through completion of a Research Training Review form. Monitoring of the effectiveness of OCMS's procedures and processes and the learning and teaching environment occurs through student feedback questionnaires, such as the Research Induction School evaluation, the student forum, the BoS, and through individual supervisory meetings that are fed into the half-yearly and annual reports.

2.20 Students are able to attend weekly open lectures but texts of lectures are also available on the VLE and some are published in the OCMS publication 'Transformation'. Students deliver seminars on Wednesdays and all students are expected to attend and present during their annual residence. Opportunities to adapt the seminar process are offered through student forums, which are held during seminar slots. Between the provision of the OCMS library, the Oxford Bodleian library, Oxford online and the awarding body library provision, students find the research resources to be excellent and praise the learning opportunities and resources available to them.

2.21 The review team found that the focus of staff development was predominantly research-led, with less emphasis on the development of pedagogical skills. Further, the use of external frameworks such as the Vitae Researcher Development Framework was not well understood by staff and not expressly used by staff or students. The review team **recommends** that OCMS undertake staff development to ensure that processes for

programme design, approval, development, delivery, monitoring and review are fully understood and more effectively operated. This recommendation also addresses aspects of findings within Expectations B1, B8 and Enhancement.

2.22 Teaching mainly occurs through the supervisory arrangements for each candidate, and the appointment and supervision process is laid out in detail. There is a rigorous system for appointing a supervisory team, through early investigations into the student's capabilities, the suitability of the supervisor, and consideration and approval at the Pre-Registration Review Committee. A decision is made by the OAB before being submitted for final awarding body approval. The team found in discussions with the Faculty that the supervision system is comprehensive, but can be complex and requires careful consideration of processes to mitigate the possibility of supervisors becoming isolated.

2.23 Overall the team found that the systems for engaging staff, students and stakeholders support student learning and meet the Expectation. The level of risk is low.

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

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

**Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement**

**Findings**

2.24 The Programme Handbook describes the research environment, resources and personal development and training aspects of the research programmes offered at OCMS. Student development begins with the five-week Research Induction School to develop research skills, which culminates in the presentation of a research topic to faculty members. During the Research Induction School, the students are introduced to the OCMS library and the Oxford library system. Students have an opportunity to attend lectures and research seminars held at the awarding body and at OCMS, and to participate in awarding body conferences.

2.25 In addition to the OCMS library resources, students have access to resources of the Bodleian Group and upon registration with the awarding body can access and engage with its library resources, lectures and annual research conference events. Arrangements are also in place for students to attend open lectures at the University of Oxford.

2.26 There are four key evaluative transitional points for students. These are the continuation of enrolment after the Research Induction School; registration for OCMS procedures; transfer from MPhil to PhD; and the Dean's Review. After the Research Induction School, all candidates are assessed for their readiness for MPhil registration. The Pre-Registration Review Committee makes its proposals to the OAB on which the awarding body link tutor sits. A transfer of a candidate from MPhil to PhD is undertaken after an assessment by portfolio and a transfer panel examination. The panel's transfer report and recommendation is reviewed by the OAB and then forwarded to the awarding body.

2.27 OCMS has a Research Training and Review process which is aligned to the Vitae Researcher Development Framework which is introduced to students in the Research Induction School and uses review forms to support students to identify research skills necessary to complete their thesis. A system of OCMS Mentors and House Tutors support and monitor annual progress through half-yearly reports. The design of the above resources and processes to support the research environment allows the Expectation to be met.

2.28 The review team examined student reports and plans, the Programme Handbook, examples of the Research Induction School timetable and minutes of appropriate committees. In addition, meetings were held with staff and students to corroborate the documentary evidence.

2.29 The team found that the appropriate resources are in place to establish a research environment for the research programmes and students commented positively on these resources. The Research Training and Review process is appropriately supported by OCMS Mentors and House Tutors who monitor annual progress through half-yearly reports at the different stages of study. These reports are then submitted to the OAB which oversees the process.

2.30 OCMS has also recently established Research Interest Groups to provide a venue for staff and students to discuss common research topics and facilitate scholarly reviews of each other's work. These Groups are facilitated by the faculty and offer training in discipline or subject-specific skills. The research environment is also supported by the OCMS

publication 'Transformation', a quarterly peer-reviewed journal, which provides students with the opportunity to publish alongside international scholars.

2.31 A further developmental support for students on the cusp of examination is provided by the Pre-Submission Subcommittee, which provides students with a mock viva experience in which independent faculty and supervisors produce a report for students that includes recommendations to inform revisions to their submission. There is evidence in the external examiner reports that the advice received in the Pre-Submission Subcommittee has helped students to improve their submissions. This Subcommittee and the Dean's Review act as a checkpoint to assess whether the student is on track for the final submission. This supports students in making timely and successful submissions and is widely praised by them. The supportive guidance of the Dean's Review and the Pre-Submission Subcommittee in helping students to achieve successful examination outcomes is **good practice**.

2.32 In addressing student requests for more explicit recognition of the necessary skills for progression, OCMS has recently sought to make changes to the Research Induction School by introducing experienced students to the programme to explain the trajectory of the development of a thesis. This has been widely appreciated by the students.

2.33 While the review team found that the process to support students was generally effective, the meeting with staff highlighted that support for students with additional needs is informal and less structured. The review team **recommends** that OCMS clarify and formalise the procedures to support students with disabilities in completing their programmes.

2.34 Overall, the review team considers that the processes for supporting students work effectively because monitoring is regular and thorough, resources are appropriate and support provides effective opportunities for students to develop academically, personally and professionally. The review team concludes that the systems and processes are effective in meeting the Expectation, and the associated 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**

2.35 OCMS is committed to creating an environment which promotes a sense of community and encourages students to engage with each other and staff both formally, through committee meetings, and informally through community time and informal meetings with staff, which are allowed through the consistent open-door policy. OCMS acknowledges that student engagement does not include the traditional presence of a Students' Union which would offer frequent student activities. However, students feel that OCMS encourages student engagement, particularly when students are in residence, without putting too much pressure on the individuals, many of whom are in full-time employment, to commit to events on campus.

2.36 Students are included in the processes of quality assurance and enhancement at an early stage as they are invited to provide written feedback on the Research Induction School, and there is evidence that responses are collated and actioned by staff. Student feedback received at the BoS, other committee meetings and student forums is fed back into the higher committee structure and Senior Management Team. All students are invited to attend the biannual student forums which are held in place of a student seminar. A student representative will email all students beforehand to ensure that as much feedback is received as possible before the forum itself. Students are provided with information on any progress made on issues arising from previous student feedback as part of the student forum. Student representatives are invited to the BoS and there is evidence that both student representatives and other students are present at these meetings where they are able to give oral reports on behalf of the student body. Expectations about student behaviour and conduct are detailed in the Programme Handbook. Taken collectively, these student engagement processes allow the Expectation to be met.

2.37 In evaluating the approach to meeting the Expectation the team considered a range of evidence, including student forum and Board of Studies minutes, and met with staff and students, including in the latter case both students present on campus and others contacted via video call.

2.38 OCMS is committed to engaging students in improving the provision offered. Both the formal and informal processes for gathering student feedback work effectively, with students commenting positively on how their feedback has informed improvements and led to changes made to the Research Induction School and seminar process.

2.39 There are effective processes in place for ensuring that all students are made aware of any changes made to the programme, through student forums, the minutes of which are shared with students; announcements made during Wednesday community time; information shared on the VLE; and through direct emails for students who are not in residence.

2.40 Student representatives and other students are effectively engaged in the development of provision through their roles in the student forums and the Board of Studies. However, there are no formal processes in place for the appointment of student representatives and no training is offered for their role in quality assurance. The review team **recommends** that OCMS strengthen the processes for the appointment and training of student representatives.

2.41 Overall, the current systems for student representation and engagement operate effectively, and there are formal and informal processes in place for gathering student feedback, which informs decisions taken at committee and senior management level relating to programme development and quality assurance. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met with a low level of risk.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.42 OCMS is responsible for preparing and assessing the applicants' readiness for the MPhil/PhD programme and at each stage provides opportunities for students to demonstrate work against requirements for study or final award. An admissions process determines the readiness of candidates for the programme, establishing language proficiency and assessing prior learning for non-standard entry.

2.43 Assessment points are provided and structured to meet the requirements of a research degree. Arrangements for formal assessment begin with the mandatory Research Induction School where candidates' work is effectively gauged to meet individual needs. A House Tutor assists each student to develop their research proposal from admission. The programme has a range of assessment activity for student progression, and students maintain a personal training record.

2.44 Ethical student practices are guided in the Research Induction School sessions and operated against the British Education Research Association (BERA) guidelines, 2004. An Ethics Committee operates to ensure research is operated in such a way as to protect students and maintain ethical research standards in cases of work with vulnerable groups. The OAB manages assessment consideration at key progression points and determines and records recommendations for each student, through the preparatory Research Induction School, and formal registration, transfer and awards stages. The awarding body link tutor attends the OAB and BoS meetings, engaging the awarding body at key assessment decision points. Decisions and arrangements are approved by the awarding body Research Knowledge Transfer Committee. The arrangements identified enable the Expectation to be met.

2.45 The team tested the Expectation by examining a range of documents including the Memorandum of Cooperation and Checklist of Responsibilities, guidelines for ethical practices, records of student activities, and records from OAB, BoS, Ethics and other assessment monitoring meetings. Meetings were conducted with students, the Dean, Stage Leaders, the awarding body link tutor, academic supervisors, external and internal academics and support staff to establish how these mechanisms work in practice.

2.46 No formal assessment policy supports the recognition of prior learning and assessment of student learning at OCMS. In meetings, OCMS staff were clear about academic standards to be met at MPhil and PhD stages but a limited range of assessment models and practices were in evidence. Students themselves are expected to link their activities to their personal development against the Vitae Researcher Development Framework. Staff were generally unaware of use of this framework on the programme.

2.47 Feedback to students is generally very effective, and students particularly cite as an example the independent Dean's Review held at the latter stage of their work. This sharpened focus for the final PhD writing up and presentation stages. The impact of this has not yet been formally reviewed. Recently, formal Research Induction School assessment points have been extended and made more rigorous. Students confirmed that

these additional monitoring and assessment practices supported their personal development. Staff indicated that the student-completed six-monthly reports are frequently responded to by exception, and some students considered this a missed opportunity for Stage Leaders.

2.48 Management of the assessment activity has been developing and is effective in providing staff information. Stage Leaders formally report to management meetings on student progress on a six-monthly basis. Some decision-making processes needed clarification to ensure full understanding of the scope and extent of decision-making available to OCMS at the Research Induction School stage. Discussion highlighted that the potential outcomes at the conclusion of the OCMS Research Induction Stage are restricted to recommendation to proceed to register, recommend further work necessary, de-enrol with unaccredited certificate of attendance or de-enrol.

2.49 Formal examination committees are held to consider student progress, and these enable OCMS to propose formal and considered responses to the upcoming OAB which is attended by the awarding body link tutor. At such meetings student progress is considered following discussions with supervisory teams and the House Tutor and Stage Leader concerned. Student assessment on this programme is individual, especially once registration with the awarding body is complete. OAB meetings consider students individually, while analysis of aggregate data on student progress and cohort review is discussed, but not in the same depth.

2.50 The approaches outlined meet the requirements of a research programme and consideration of assessment is robust. Feedback provided to students is positively received, and the team considers the Expectation to be met, and the risk low.

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

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

### **Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining**

#### **Findings**

2.51 The appointment of an external examiner is made according to the Awarding Body Regulation A10.6, to ensure that the examiner is independent of both institutions. All decisions concerning the appointment of examiners are the responsibility of the Awarding Body Research and Knowledge Transfer Committee. The OCMS Programme Handbook also describes the process for the viva voce examination.

2.52 Processes in place require the appointment of external examiners, consideration of external examiner reports and response to actions, and these frameworks and processes allow the Expectation to be met.

2.53 The review team examined documentary evidence including the Programme Handbook, the process to appoint external examiners, pre-examination reports, and minutes from relevant committees. The team also interviewed staff and students about the procedure.

2.54 The team found that the external examiner is recommended to the OCMS Examinations Committee after discussion with the supervisory team, Dean and Stage Leader at the Dean's Review. Appropriate checking of the external examiner's qualifications occurs, and if the appointment is confirmed internally, this is then forwarded to the OAB and then the Awarding Body Research Degrees Board for approval.

2.55 Each external examiner reads the thesis, prepares a preliminary report and reaches a decision in a final report jointly prepared with the internal examiner. The OCMS Stage Leader also sends copies of the external examiner's report to the Awarding Body Research and Business Office.

2.56 The OAB reviews the external examiners' reports regarding the examination process, and considers any recommendations regarding changes to the scheme or any quality issues or weaknesses in systems. Although the BoS does not receive a copy of the external examiner's report, the committee does discuss issues raised about the examination process and the management of the programme and considers the OAB's proposed measures.

2.57 The process for the appointment of external examiners and examining boards follows the published arrangements. The awarding body has appropriate oversight and authority in the process, and the process meets UK standards. While not always seen as a routine process, the team found that some external examiners did get feedback from the awarding body, and that OCMS used their reports to make improvements to the programme. The team confirmed that external examiner reports and comments and any proposals made through the OAB and BoS are considered in the annual monitoring report and action plan.

2.58 The College applies the awarding body systems and processes for appointing and working with external examiners, and on this basis the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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**

2.59 OCMS's processes for monitoring and reviewing academic standards, quality and enhancement focus on providing an annual monitoring report for consideration by the awarding body. The awarding body's template is used for this review and is accompanied by a proposal for an OCMS action plan to address any operational weaknesses and systemic problems. There is no internal periodic review process currently in place within OCMS.

2.60 OCMS OAB and BoS consider issues associated with the student experience, student performance, monitoring and progression, the monitoring of supervisors, and the oversight of standards. These committees are supported by subcommittees that oversee preregistration, research ethics, examinations and the website, as well as occasional working parties. Institutional action plans are developed and monitored by the Senior Management Team. OCMS uses the monitoring points for student progression to review the efficacy of the programme. Students review the Research Induction School each time it is operated and contribute to review activity in discussion in student forum and BoS meetings.

2.61 The formal arrangements in place are focused on the annual monitoring review process, and there is no process for periodic review. These allow the OCMS to meet the Expectation in part only.

2.62 The team considered OCMS's approach to programme monitoring and review through documents outlining responsibilities, reviewing examples of annual monitoring review reports and Research Induction School evaluative comments and meeting with staff to discuss practices. The team met staff responsible for arranging monitoring and review practices, the academic managers, students, and the institutional and awarding body link tutors.

2.63 In practice, approaches taken for review are reactive and do not give rise to strategic action plan approaches. The responsibility for oversight of activities overall is diffuse. The annual monitoring review is stated to be approved by the OCMS OAB for onward submission to the Faculty and thence the awarding body, but minutes do not evidence such discussion and review. While the annual monitoring review development is stated to be tracked internally through the Board of Studies against an action plan, the documents produced in evidence and reviewed lack these action plans and the OCMS agreed that there was no internal action plan currently in place. In discussion, OCMS highlighted use of an operational Calendar and Quality Committee which had been introduced but was not shown on the committee structure. This operational group provides the opportunity to consider matters concerning calendar operation and quality with responsibility for external quality matters including with the awarding body and through the Board of Studies Action Plan. The role of action planning at programme and institutional levels is not clear, with little deliberative committee or Senior Management Team discussion discerned indicating how OCMS operates oversight and development. The operation of oversight of quality and programme monitoring and review practices is not currently effective.

2.64 While there has been some evolution of the provision through the Research Induction School programme, OCMS has recognised the need for clear reporting systems

and development of procedures for programme development. Annual monitoring review reports are descriptive with little analysis of trends, particularly in reviewing student cohorts. Recent changes in practice made to the programme signalled in these reviews, such as 'more rigorous Research Induction School, followed by an evaluative (staff) meeting, which ensures that students are assessed earlier and designed to increase registration rates', have been introduced but have not yet been formally evaluated. Review processes do not have clear requirements for consideration of threshold standards and the annual monitoring reports' documentary materials do not require regular consideration of external quality reports. A number of activities need to be addressed to increase the effectiveness of OCMS's annual monitoring process and introduce systematic periodic review arrangements. The review team **recommends** that OCMS establish effective processes for programme design, approval, development, monitoring and review. This recommendation incorporates observations made within the context of programme design, approval and development highlighted in Section B1.

2.65 The incoming Executive Director intends to implement an organisational review of OCMS to strengthen the safeguarding of academic standards and enhance the academic programme. No external membership is evident on the OCMS OAB and BoS deliberative committees besides membership from the awarding body with allocation of an awarding body link tutor. Increased externality to the Research Induction School has been recognised in an evaluation requested as part of the institutional review underway.

2.66 The Expectation anticipates clear, effective, regular and systematic processes for the monitoring and review of programmes. OCMS has indicated that it is seeking to develop this aspect, but the team considers that it does not meet the Expectation at present. The risk is deemed to be moderate in view of the level of development still needed in the operation of this part of OCMS's academic governance structure.

**Expectation: Not met**  
**Level of risk: Moderate**

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

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

**Findings**

2.67 Procedures for complaints and appeals are detailed in the Programme Handbook and all formal complaints are ultimately managed by the awarding body. These procedures are further detailed in the OCMS Student Grievance and Complaint Procedure document. Within the Programme Handbook, behaviour which constitutes bullying or harassment is detailed and this is expanded upon in the Bullying and Harassment Policy.

2.68 All appeals are handled by the awarding body in accordance with their Research Degree Regulations. When going through an appeal, students will first go to the third-party monitor and can receive advice from link tutors from OCMS and the awarding body and administrative support from the Registrar. Informal complaints about the quality of learning can be raised through the BoS and student forum. Actions are assigned to any student complaints raised at the BoS. Information about grievances and appeals can be found on the VLE under the Research Programme Section. These complaints and appeals procedures allow the Expectation to be met.

2.69 In testing the Expectation, the team considered the OCMS self-evaluation document, the Programme and Student Handbooks, policy documents and BoS minutes. The team met staff and students to further evaluate the OCMS approach to meeting the Expectation.

2.70 Staff and students confirmed the processes in place for both informal and formal complaints. The processes in place for addressing informal complaints raised through the Student Forum and the BoS work effectively, with clear actions being assigned to concerns raised. Students confirm that they are satisfied with the way in which informal complaints are managed by OCMS.

2.71 Although none of the students have been involved in any formal appeals or complaints, they were all aware of the policy for formal complaints and appeals and were clear on who the third-party monitor is and their role.

2.72 While procedures are in place for complaints and appeals post OCMS stage, there are no equivalent processes in place for the OCMS stage. The review team **recommends** that OCMS establish procedures for formal appeals and complaints made at the OCMS stage and include reference to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.

2.73 The team concludes that while the overall Expectation is met there remains a moderate level of risk arising from the absence of these procedures at the OCMS stage.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.74 OCMS offers the MPhil and PhD programmes validated by the awarding body, under a Memorandum of Cooperation between the two institutions. OCMS contracts with external supervisors to support the delivery of the supervision processes within the research programmes. It also provides its students with the opportunity to attend and engage widely with the awarding body's research lectures, seminars and conferences.

2.75 Additionally, OCMS provides students with the opportunity to attend open lectures at the University of Oxford. Specific arrangements also exist for students to attend relevant lectures and seminars at the Institute of Gender Studies, Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies, and the Centre for Muslim and Christian Studies. An arrangement with the Samvada Centre for Research Resources, an offshoot of Touch India Trust, which is an Institute in India run by an OCMS alumnus, provides research training and offers OCMS faculty members the opportunity to gain experience of teaching abroad. The arrangements in place allow OCMS to meet this Expectation.

2.76 The team tested the Expectation by considering evidence provided by OCMS, including the Memorandum of Cooperation with the awarding body, and in meetings with staff and students. During meetings with staff and students, the team was able to confirm that these arrangements were effective.

2.77 OCMS have a number of arrangements in place for delivering opportunities with others, and the team concludes that these arrangements are effective in meeting the Expectation, with a low level of risk.

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

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

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

### **Findings**

2.78 The research environment at OCMS is driven by a Research Strategy. This strategy addresses the distinctiveness of the student body and ways to cement and improve the research facilities and experience of that body. The strategy aims to expand and diversify the research faculty, the physical/virtual campus and faculty/staff resource.

2.79 OCMS has also recently established Research Interest Groups to provide a venue for OCMS staff and students to discuss common research topics and to provide scholarly reviews of each other's work. The Research Interest Groups are facilitated by the faculty and offer training in discipline or subject-specific skills, and are supported by resources placed within the VLE. The design of the research environment and the activities associated with it allows the Expectation to be met.

2.80 The review team examined documentary evidence relating to the research activities of OCMS, interviewed staff and students, and sampled the physical library resources. In addition, the review team was shown a presentation on the VLE and investigated the electronic resources available to students.

2.81 OCMS seeks to develop these priorities through a range of activities. The review team found that the Executive Director intends to explore the value and appropriateness of extending the range and reach of OCMS's activities. Furthermore, goals include developing research proposals among candidates that investigate diverse perspectives on the chosen topic; using the VLE to widen access to diverse opinions in academia; inviting, as a matter of policy, academics representing various disciplines and religious/non-religious perspectives to present the Montague Barker open lectures; and encouraging students to attend conferences and seminars to present papers for feedback from academics with varied perspectives through the use of supportive OCMS funds.

2.82 The research environment is also supported by the OCMS's Edinburgh 2010 Regnum Series of 35 volumes on mission, which has made it a significant publisher of studies in mission and the global church. These works engaged globally leading scholars, particularly from the 'Two-Thirds World', to produce this significant series. Further, its house journal 'Transformation', a peer-reviewed publication published by Sage, is now an internationally recognised source for mission scholarship, and offers opportunities for research students to publish alongside international scholars.

2.83 Students and staff are entitled to use the OCMS library, and this in turn is supported by access to the resources of the Bodleian library and the Oxford online resources. OCMS manages a 'multiple copy' fund to bolster copies of key research texts, and some funds to support students' attendance at conferences and their use of archival resources outside Oxford. Students are also encouraged to deliver presentations at the annual awarding body student conference each June. Further arrangements for the use of research resources with a number of institutions in Oxford and beyond are also in place.

2.84 As the Research Degree Programme is the only degree programme offered by OCMS, all information provided in relation to the preceding Expectations applies to this Expectation in Chapter B11, which cross-refers to all of those judgements.

2.85 The research environment works well in practice. The Research Interest Group process and resources are in their infancy, but students clearly see this as a positive development. Students are also very appreciative of the general research environment at OCMS, Oxford itself and the research resources available through the awarding body, particularly the online resources for students who live for the majority of the time outside Oxford and the UK.

2.86 The arrangements for the supervision of students are generally rigorously managed and students speak highly of these supervisory relationships and the research development opportunities that derive from the collaborative engagement with the awarding body. The team concludes that this Expectation is met and carries a low level of risk.

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

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

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

2.88 There are 11 Expectations in this judgement area, and nine of these are met, eight with low risk and one (Expectation B9) within a moderate risk. In two areas, Expectations are not met, and each has an associated moderate risk. In relation to Expectations B1 (programme design, development and approval) and B8 (programme monitoring and review), the review team identified weaknesses in the operation of this part of the provider's academic governance structure and a lack of clarity about responsibilities such that in each case the Expectation is not met.

2.89 A total of five recommendations are made in this area. The first arises from the need for OCMS to undertake staff development to ensure that processes for programme design, approval, development, delivery, monitoring and review are fully understood and more effectively operated (Expectation B3). The second recommendation relates to Expectation B4, and the need to clarify and formalise the procedures to support students with disabilities in completing their programme. In relation to Expectation B5, OCMS is recommended to strengthen the processes for the appointment and training of student representatives, while in relation to Expectation B8 (with a link to B1) the need is identified to establish effective processes for programme design, approval, development, monitoring and review. Finally, and in relation to Expectation B9, OCMS is recommended to establish procedures for formal appeals and complaints made at the OCMS stage, and include reference to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.

2.90 The review team has identified a specific feature of good practice in relation to Expectation B4, involving the supportive guidance of the Dean's Review and the Pre-Submission Subcommittee in helping students to achieve successful examination outcomes.

2.91 The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at OCMS **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 Information is provided on the OCMS website for current and prospective students, staff and alumni. Current students are able to access information about the programme through the Programme Handbook and the Student Handbook.

3.2 OCMS maintains regular communication with students from when they arrive at the Research Induction School until they graduate, using online communications including email, video call and the VLE, and through face-to-face means including Wednesday community time and ad hoc student-staff meetings.

3.3 The Website Committee has responsibility for any information published on the website. The Website Committee meets to discuss requests for changes to the website and decides on allocation of responsibility for amendments, additions and deletions to be made. The design of the processes allows the Expectation to be met.

3.4 The team tested the Expectation by reviewing the OCMS website and considering evidence provided. The team further evaluated the OCMS's approach to meeting the Expectation by discussing this with students and staff, including seeing a demonstration of the website and VLE.

3.5 OCMS uses a range of effective methods to communicate with students, making use of online and face-to-face communication. The review team found that all relevant information is included on the OCMS website and that the Website Committee has oversight of its maintenance.

3.6 While students have access to resources and receive information via the VLE, there are no clear formal systems and processes in place for updating and maintaining records and information, both generally and specifically in relation to the VLE. However, OCMS recognises that this is an area for development. The review team **recommends** that OCMS clarify, formalise and implement document management procedures to ensure the accuracy of information (see also Expectation A2.2).

3.7 Although there are effective processes for sharing information with students and all relevant public information is available on the OCMS website, there are no clear formal procedures in place for the maintenance and management of information. The team therefore concludes that while the Expectation is met, there remains a moderate level of risk.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

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

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

3.9 The one Expectation in this judgement area is met, with a moderate level of risk. There is one recommendation relating to the clarification, formalisation and implementation of a document management procedure to ensure the continued accuracy of information.

3.10 The review team concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at OCMS **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 OCMS has a Board and Committee structure that manages academic standards and defines quality assurance in terms of quality enhancement and states that it seeks to continuously improve the students' learning experience, provide a wide range of learning opportunities and resources for research, and enable these to be accessed by a widely distributed student body. It has no enhancement strategy, written or otherwise.

4.2 The key committee for considering enhancements to the student experience is the BoS. This committee has oversight of operational enhancement changes to various processes such as the Research Induction School, supervisor processes and other areas that affect the student learning experience such as a recently introduced Faculty Staff Appraisal policy.

4.3 The Board's responsibilities and processes for seeking continuous improvement have the potential for a concerted proactive approach to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities to meet the Expectation.

4.4 To test the effectiveness of its processes, the team reviewed the student submission, committee structure and minutes, staff appraisal and development practices, and annual monitoring review and action planning approaches. The team met students, SMT and academic and professional support staff to discuss work in practice.

4.5 Despite formal activities stated to be reported through the OCMS Board of Studies at twice-yearly meetings, enhancement is not clearly signalled in the agenda or materials discussed in meeting records seen. OCMS does not manage systems and processes for enhancing learning opportunities in a concerted way. Staff engagement with enhancement and awareness was reactive, rather than informed and systematic, and arose as a response to student comments. Examples of enhancements proffered in meetings are not described in a strategic plan of action. Action plans are not readily used to guide practice and it is not clear where Senior Management have concerted oversight of developments. This complements observations the team made within Expectation B8 in relation to OCMS's operation of an ineffective annual monitoring process, and the lack of systematic periodic review arrangements, and the allied recommendations.

4.6 While opportunities to gather feedback from students are being extended, OCMS is not yet evaluating, developing and sharing good practice examples in the delivery of its provision. Staff are appraised and a summative report for the individual staff members which notes examples of good practice is produced. Further approaches to share these and strategically develop OCMS's critical learning pedagogy are not in place. These omissions contribute to an ineffective enhancement process currently at OCMS. The review team **recommends** that OCMS take a strategic approach to enhancing the quality of student learning opportunities.

4.7 The team's findings and recommendation to address the ineffective monitoring and review processes in Expectation B8 complement observations within this Expectation. In staff discussions on enhancement, OCMS described recent processes for seeking continuous improvement, which have the potential to underpin a concerted proactive approach to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities. However, the team found

that these processes placed reliance on informal discussion and staff engagement, and tended to be reactive rather than proactive in nature. The shortcomings in terms of the rigour with which these systems are applied mean that the Expectation is not met. The weaknesses in the operation of this part of the provider's academic governance structure give a moderate level of risk as OCMS does not have a concerted approach to systematically improve students' learning opportunities.

**Expectation: Not met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

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

4.8 In reaching its judgement about the enhancement of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The team did not identify any good practice or affirmations in relation to this Expectation.

4.9 OCMS do not currently have a clear or shared approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities, and current governance arrangements do not allow for the integration of enhancement initiatives into the academic governance structure in a systematic and planned manner.

4.10 There is one recommendation, namely that OCMS takes a strategic approach to enhancement of the quality of student learning opportunities. This is a moderate risk because it demonstrates weaknesses in the operation of this part of the provider's academic governance structure.

4.11 The review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at OCMS **requires improvement to meet** 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 to 24 of the [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\) handbook](#).

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

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

### Academic standards

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

### Award

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

### Awarding organisation

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

### Blended learning

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

### Credit(s)

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

### Degree-awarding body

A UK higher education provider (typically an Awarding Body) 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 Awarding Body 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 (The 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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