



# Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of the St Nicholas' Training Centre for the Montessori Method of Education

November 2017

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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 the St Nicholas' Training Centre for the Montessori Method of Education Ltd. The review took place from 21 to 23 November 2017 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Ana-Maria Pascal
- Ms Leigh Spanner (student reviewer)
- Mr Martin Stimson.

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provision and to make judgements as to whether or not academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. These expectations are the statements in the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) (the Quality Code)<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.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#)<sup>2</sup> and 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](http://www.qaa.ac.uk).

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

## Key findings

### Judgements

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

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of the degree-awarding body and other awarding organisation **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 is **commended**.

### Good practice

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

- The extensive support offered to potential applicants, which ensures the effectiveness of the application and admissions process for students and the Centre (Expectation B2).
- The integration of Montessori principles in the approach to teaching and learning, which significantly enhances the student learning experience (Expectation B3).
- The wide-ranging and highly effective support mechanisms, which allow students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential (Expectation B4).
- The engagement of students as partners in processes for taking forward identified enhancement initiatives (Expectation B5).
- The comprehensive and detailed support for placements, which enables students to put their learning into practice effectively in their professional environment (Expectation B10).
- The translation of the strategic commitment to enhancement at operational level, which ensures its consistent implementation (Enhancement).
- The development and enhancement of the VLE, which has significantly enhanced learning, teaching and support for students and provides a valuable resource for the Centre's academic community (Enhancement).

### Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations**.

By July 2018:

- review the approach to student representation on deliberative committees, to maximise the continuity and effectiveness of student participation (Expectation B5)
- develop formal policies and processes for ensuring that information for students remains fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy (Expectation C).

### Affirmation of action being taken

The review team did not identify any affirmations.

## About the provider

The St Nicholas' Training Centre for the Montessori Method of Education Ltd (the Centre) seeks to promote and provide exemplary Montessori education by means of training educators, providing information, advice and support to schools, managing its own schools and undertaking charitable projects to inform and sustain the Montessori community in the UK.

The Centre incorporates the training centre Montessori Centre International (MCI), the Montessori Schools Association (MSA), the Montessori Evaluation and Accreditation Board (MEAB) and the MSN Education Centres. The higher education programmes are delivered through MCI.

Governance of the Centre falls under the remit of the Board of Trustees, whose powers and responsibilities are defined under the Articles of Association. The Board meets four times a year to oversee the work of the charity and related operations.

The organisational mission of the Centre is to:

- provide and sustain national quality assured and accredited Montessori teacher training in the UK and abroad
- support charitable projects that help extend awareness of the benefits of Montessori education
- support schools and teachers in membership of the MSA through training and operational advice
- promote and extend the national accreditation system to Montessori schools across the UK
- Conduct research into the effectiveness of Montessori education and evaluate all MSN services to ensure the highest levels of delivery
- encourage unity within a broad Montessori church, a unity that accepts difference but promotes similarities.

The Centre's previous QAA review was a Review for Specific Course Designation, which took place in 2013. The outcome of this review was that there could be confidence in the management of stated responsibilities for standards and in the quality and enhancement of the learning opportunities, and that reliance could be placed on the information produced about learning opportunities.

At the most recent QAA annual monitoring visit in 2016 the review team concluded that the Centre was making satisfactory progress in addressing the recommendations of the 2013 review, that all recommendations had been progressed and that identified good practice had been further built on.

The Centre offers higher education programmes with two partners. The Foundation Degree (FdA) in Montessori Early Childhood Practice is validated by London Metropolitan University (the University). A Certificate in Higher Education forms part of the FdA programme and is offered as a stand-alone qualification or as an exit award from the full FdA.

The Diploma Early Years Educator (level 3/4) is awarded by Crossfields Institute. Level 4 of the diploma has been recognised by the University as equivalent to 120 credits at level 4 and, through an articulation arrangement, students who successfully complete the diploma are eligible for admission to the FdA at level 5. Following successful completion of the FdA, students are able to progress to an honours degree at the University.

The Centre is located in premises in central London but new premises in St John's Wood have been acquired. The new premises is in the process of refurbishment and is scheduled to be ready for occupation in 2018.

There are 28 students enrolled on the FdA programme (26 full-time and two part-time). There are 49 part-time and 104 distance learning students on the diploma, and a further 267 diploma students are on work placement.

## Explanation of findings

This section explains the review findings in greater detail.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### **Findings**

1.1 The Foundation Degree (FdA) Montessori Early Childhood Practice is positioned at level 5 on the FHEQ, written in line with the Foundation Degree Qualification Characteristic Statement and Subject Benchmark Statement for Early Childhood Studies. The level 4 Certificate in Higher Education (CertHE) in Montessori Early Childhood Practice is offered as a one-year stand-alone qualification but it can also be an exit point after a year of study on the full FdA. London Metropolitan University, as the awarding body, is responsible for ensuring that this provision meets the relevant national reference points including the standards set out in the FHEQ.

1.2 The Centre also offers the Diploma in Montessori Pedagogy (Early Years Educator) (EYE), which is at levels 3 and level 4 in the FHEQ, awarded by the National Advisory Council for Further Education (NCFE) and the Council for Awards in Care Health and Education (CACHE), which is delivered in collaboration with Crossfields Institute. The learning outcomes for these awards are detailed in the programme specifications and the Centre adopts NCFE processes to monitor quality and standards. The Diploma (EYE) is

listed on the Ofqual register of qualifications as a level 4 vocationally related qualification, and on the European Qualification Framework at level 5 (which is equivalent to level 4 FHEQ). It has been mapped against level 4 of the BA (Hons) Early Childhood Degree by the University and the University recognises it as being equivalent to 120 credits at level 4.

1.3 The alignment with this Expectation is ultimately the responsibility of the University as the awarding partner for the FdA and CertHE, and NCFE/Crossfields in respect of the diploma. The University is responsible for ensuring alignment of the FdA and CertHE with National Credit Frameworks, the Qualifications and Credit Framework, the FHEQ, relevant Qualification Descriptors, Subject Benchmark Statements and Characteristics Statements.

1.4 In the case of the diploma NCFE fulfils this responsibility, ensuring the programme meets the standards required for the Ofqual Register of Regulated Qualifications, and vocationally related qualification (VRQ).

1.5 The contribution of the Centre to ensuring alignment with these frameworks and compliance with regulations and responsibilities as shown in the responsibilities checklists and the Institutional Memorandum of Understanding (IMOU) in place with the University would enable this Expectation to be met.

1.6 To test the operation of these arrangements the team scrutinised a range of documentation (including programme specifications, course diagrams and mapping documentation, and the Centre's agreement with the University). The review team also held a number of meetings with staff (including representatives of the awarding partners) and with students and employers.

1.7 In the case of the FdA the academic level is assured through the University's programme design and approval processes outlined in the Quality Manual, and confirmed in external examiner reports and periodic review reports. The Centre is subject to regular quality review from the University in the form of periodic review and to external reviews from QAA. The level is also assured through an annual review process, standardisation meetings (where learning outcomes, assessment criteria and student work are discussed), sampling of student work remotely in the online External Quality Assurance area on the virtual learning environment (VLE), and (in the case of the diploma programme) annual 'Touchstone' (quality assurance and standardisation) meetings with the awarding organisation.

1.8 Scrutiny of the documentation and conversations with staff confirmed that the Centre secures academic standards by working in collaboration with relevant awarding partners, mapping learning outcomes to nationally agreed standards, and using appropriate frameworks such as guidance on Qualification Characteristics, QAA Subject Benchmark Statements and feedback from external examiners.

1.9 The review team confirmed the relevance and accuracy of documentation relating to the partnership agreement with the University. Crossfields has an agreement with the Centre which is the end product of a process of due diligence and centre approval. This includes provision of programme specifications, module handbooks and module (termed units on the diploma) specifications. Staff at the Centre work to the Crossfields Centre Handbook and the Internal Quality Assessor (IQA) Handbook, which set out the operational and management arrangements for the partnership in line with the responsibilities checklist.

1.10 The programmes offered by the Centre align with the FHEQ and the diploma appears on the Ofqual Register of Regulated Qualifications. The Diploma also meets the professional standards in the Early Years Educator (EYE) criteria of the National Centre for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL). Programme specifications for the University programmes

refer to the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements. The specification for the diploma does not, although the mapping process undertaken by the University demonstrates that the qualification aligns with the FHEQ.

1.11 Programme specifications, programme handbooks and documentation relating to awarding partnerships demonstrate alignment with the FHEQ and other reference points for establishing and maintaining academic standards. Awarding partners hold ultimate responsibility for academic standards, with the Centre discharging its responsibility for the oversight and maintenance of academic standards effectively with regard to delivery of the programmes. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**



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

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

**Findings**

1.12 Responsibility for setting and maintaining academic standards and establishing transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations ultimately rests with the University for the FdA, and Crossfields Institute for the diploma.

1.13 The Montessori Education Board delegates responsibility for the Governance of the educational mission to the Montessori Education Committee (MEC). MEC, which is chaired by the Chief Education Officer, manages the programmes through the Head of Academic Programmes.

1.14 The responsibilities of the Centre, the University and Crossfields were identified in the responsibilities checklists provided to the review team. In the case of the University this emanates from an institutional Memorandum of Understanding and the Course Level Agreement (CLA). Crossfields annually confirms that the Centre is an approved centre for the delivery of the diploma using its internal quality assurance processes. The Centre is responsible for programme delivery and makes use of the internal governance frameworks and the academic processes from the awarding partners.

1.15 The application of these governance frameworks and established academic processes by the Centre, in line with the requirements from the awarding partners, would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.16 The review team tested the operation of the arrangements in place through scrutiny of a range of documentation, including minutes of academic meetings and reports from the external examiners for the University programme and the equivalent external quality assessor (EQA) reports for the Crossfield programme. The review team also held meetings with staff (including representatives of the awarding partners), students and employers.

1.17 Academic standards for the FdA and CertHE are managed through the implementation of the University' Quality Manual and the Partnerships Operational Manual. The use of these reference points during annual monitoring and periodic review procedures ensures comparability of standards. Senior staff confirmed that they make reference to the Partnership Operational Manual, the Business Schedule and the Quality Manual. The alignment with these documents is monitored by the Academic Committee.

1.18 The minutes of Education Committee, Academic Committee and Student Committee indicate that the awarding partners' frameworks and internal processes are adhered to, and the terms of reference are kept under review. Student representatives are included in the terms of reference for both committees, although it is not always the same student who attends. The issue of student participation in deliberative committees is furthered discussed in Expectation B5.

1.19 Discussions with staff confirmed the value of standardisation meetings and Touchstone meetings in effectively managing academic programmes in line with awarding partners' regulatory documentation. External examiner reports indicate that standards and

quality remain high and Academic Team meetings appear to be effective at dissemination of information and policy.

1.20 Academic regulations, including assessment regulations for the award of credit, are adopted from the University. Crossfields provides an assessors' toolkit and staff are supported with an IQA Handbook. The University's Operations Manual identifies four key areas to ensure comparability of standards. These are national reference points; admissions; assessment; and student progression and achievement. The Centre demonstrates compliance with these frameworks through adherence to the University's annual monitoring and periodic review procedures, and the use of external examiners who confirm compliance.

1.21 The quality framework includes the annual Quality Management Group meetings organised by the Quality Enhancement Unit of the University. Agenda items include assessment and achievement.

1.22 Meetings with staff confirmed that the diploma is awarded in line with Crossfields' quality assurance policy and procedure detailed in the Centre Handbook and IQA Handbook. Crossfields carries out an annual Centre review, receives minutes of standardisation meetings, samples student work remotely in the online EQA area on the VLE and organises annual Touchstone meetings.

1.23 A review of documentary evidence confirms that external examiner reports and EQA reports identify good practice in assessment, which is shared through in-house training, at the International Professional Development Conference and on the tutor forum. Meetings with staff confirmed operational activity at the Centre is in line with the responsibilities checklists including the completion of annual monitoring course logs. Meetings with staff confirmed that the accreditation of prior learning (APL) process was rarely used as there was a formal articulation in place for students to progress from the diploma to level 5 of the FdA. Applications seeking APL for other qualifications would be discussed with the University.

1.24 The Centre maintains oversight through a reporting framework of committees including Education Committee and the Academic Committee, chaired by the Chief Education Officer, with appropriate terms of reference. Minutes of these meetings confirm systematic consideration of structured business. Staff confirmed that information was disseminated through course team meetings and they shared a clear understanding surrounding the responsibilities of academic committees and their role in monitoring a suite of planning documents.

1.25 Student assessment results and the award of credit on the FdA are considered annually by Performance Evaluation Monitoring and Subject Standards Board and awards board, which is chaired by a representative of the University. These offer opportunities to reflect and discuss results at module level and consider individual student performance.

1.26 The team saw examples of transcripts and certificates of completion. The annual monitoring processes make full use of external examiners to ensure that threshold standards are maintained and that the academic standards of the awarding partners are maintained.

1.27 The partnership with Crossfields operates effectively, and there are documented guidelines on procedures and policies. As noted in paragraph 1.9, the due diligence and centre approval document is the formal agreement for this partnership. The Centre may, however, wish to consider working with Crossfields to develop a partnership agreement that sets out the terms of the relationship and the respective responsibilities.

1.28 The responsibility for this Expectation rests ultimately with the awarding partners. The Centre's role in securing academic standards is through adherence to the awarding

partners' academic frameworks and regulations, and the processes for the award of credit, and it does so effectively. 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**

1.29 To ensure that the programmes and quality management processes align with awarding partner requirements, the Centre applies the relevant specifications in the delivery of programmes, the assessment of students, programme monitoring and review and the provision of records of study.

1.30 The awarding partners have responsibility for approving specifications for new programmes and any changes to existing ones. The Centre maintains a record of new and amended programme specifications as a central reference point for the delivery and management of programmes.

1.31 These arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met. To test their operation the team scrutinised a range of documentation (including programme and module documentation and documents relating to the development and approval of programmes, annual monitoring and assessment). The team also held meetings with staff (including representatives of the awarding partners) and with students and employers.

1.32 The Centre makes programme specifications available on the VLE and student handbooks contain detailed information on learning outcomes, assessment and programme structures that align with the relevant programme specification.

1.33 The Centre provides students with a transcript of the modules studied and the results obtained on completion of their studies, which align with programme specifications. The Centre keeps a record of student transcripts.

1.34 Academic staff confirmed that they use learning outcomes in the design and delivery of learning activities, and example assessments demonstrated their use for the assessment of students.

1.35 The Centre applies the programme specifications throughout the quality monitoring cycle. They are referred to during the annual monitoring review process, including external examiner and EQA's monitoring of programmes.

1.36 The review team concludes that the arrangements the Centre has in place, and its adherence to the requirements of its awarding partners, ensure that there are appropriate processes for the production, approval and use of definitive documentation. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.37 The overall responsibility for the approval of programmes at the Centre lies with the awarding partners. The Centre follows their procedures in order to ensure that academic programmes are set and maintained at the appropriate level.

1.38 For the FdA programme, the respective responsibilities of both the Centre and the University are enshrined in the Institutional Memorandum of Agreement. In addition, the University has comprehensive procedures in place for programme approval, modification to programmes and modules, and periodic revalidation; these are clearly set out in the University's Quality Manual, which also includes a summary of key quality management processes and their timeline.

1.39 For the diploma, Crossfields' and the Centre's respective responsibilities are indicated in the Centre Handbook, with further details about procedures listed in the qualification specifications. The Centre Handbook also stipulates that any suggested changes would be considered through the annual review process.

1.40 These arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met. The review team tested their operation by scrutinising a range of documentation (including the Agreement with the University, the University's Quality Manual, and the Centre's self-evaluation document for the revalidation of the FdA, the Crossfields' Centre Handbook, and the diploma qualification specifications). The team also held meetings with staff (including representatives of the awarding partners) and with students and employers.

1.41 The documentation provided to the team illustrates that the Centre follows the requirements of the University in respect of programme approval and review. The Centre applied the University's procedures at its last periodic review, for the revalidation of the FdA, which took place in 2013; the accompanying self-evaluation report is a good illustration of how the Centre follows the University's procedures. Course leaders are required to prepare a self-evaluation document and refreshed course and module specifications. The Centre provided a summary of proposed changes to the FdA modules (mainly concerned with an increase in the number of credits for each module from 15 to 30). The 2013 review also included an external consultation with relevant employers. Updated course and module specifications and the re-approval report by the University were made available to the team.

1.42 The Centre fulfils its responsibilities with respect to assessments by adhering to its awarding partners' procedures for assessment design and marking, moderation, and external verification (further discussed in Expectation B6). The Centre applies the review procedures set out by its partners; in addition, it has its own monitoring and review process, to ensure that academic standards for its programmes are maintained (further discussed in Expectation A3.3). Staff are informed of relevant policies and procedures at induction and through committee meetings and the VLE system; staff demonstrated in-depth understanding of the various stages of the required procedures.

1.43 The Centre is fulfilling its responsibilities for this Expectation by implementing the awarding partners' procedures. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.44 The Centre itself has no awarding powers, so ultimate responsibility for setting and maintaining academic standards for the programmes it offers lies with its awarding partners. The partners ensure that the requirements of the FHEQ are met, and that relevant Subject Benchmark Statements are considered as part of the validation process. They also ensure, through external scrutiny (including the use of external examiners) that the achievement of relevant learning outcomes has been demonstrated through assessment.

1.45 The Centre is responsible for delivering its approved programmes and assessing students in line with the approved programme specifications and module/unit guides. The respective responsibilities of the Centre and its partners for maintaining academic standards are set out in the relevant partnership documentation.

1.46 The University clearly sets out its procedures for all academic and administrative matters, and how it expects its partners to implement these, in its Partnerships Operational Manual, which includes a section on assessments. Learning outcomes and threshold standards are identified in programme specifications. Programme content is mapped against the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements during the validation process. The Centre implements University procedures regarding the evaluation of learning outcomes achievement using a detailed mapping matrix, which is included in each programme specification. This shows where each module learning outcome is practised and assessed.

1.47 The University's assessment procedures include details of the role of external examiners and Subject Standards Boards, as well as double-marking requirements. The Centre rigorously applies these, as evidenced by external examiner reports and details of the moderation procedure applied to the FdA during the summer of 2017. Representatives of the University and Centre staff confirmed this.

1.48 The arrangements in place would enable the Expectation to be met. The review team tested their operation by scrutinising a range of documentation (including documentation relating to the partnership arrangements, programme specifications, Academic regulations, and moderation procedures). The team also held meetings with staff (including representatives of the awarding partners) and with students and employers.

1.49 External examiners confirm that the general standard and consistency of marking is appropriate, and that the standards for the awards are appropriate for qualifications at the respective level and subject. In relation to marking, they confirm that 'marking is thorough, and this is well supported by the monitoring carried out by the University. By being monitored three times plus being externally checked, students can be assured as to the thoroughness and fairness that their work is subjected to'. Internal marking and verification is also considered to be 'rigorous' and 'of a consistently high standard'.

1.50 Assessment requirements in line with the University's regulations are included in each programme and module specification. Students confirm that they are clear about requirements and the feedback they receive reflects their performance against requirements.

1.51 On the basis of the documentation provided, and meetings with staff and awarding partner representatives, the team concludes that the assessment processes ensure that credit and qualifications are awarded appropriately. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**



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

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

**Findings**

1.52 The Centre works under the regulations of its awarding partners, who are ultimately responsible for the monitoring and review of the programmes. They undertake this through the activities of external examiners (for the University) and EQAs for Crossfields, and periodic review procedures, with the Centre using its own annual monitoring process as well.

1.53 The University's processes for monitoring and evaluation are detailed in its Partnership Operations Manual; they consist of an annual process, which involves external examiner reports, review of course and module logs, and a Collaborative Annual Monitoring Statement, which informs a Partnership Annual Monitoring Statement.

1.54 For the diploma (levels 3 and 4), an annual review is undertaken by the EQA appointed by Crossfields Institute, who has both subject expertise and experience of quality assurance processes. The EQA reviews the Centre's internal quality reports and student assessments and confirms awards.

1.55 In addition, the two awarding partners also periodically review the programme and partnership arrangements. The most recent review of the FdA was in 2013. Student representatives and external advisers were involved in this, in addition to University and Centre staff. The next periodic review is due to take place during 2017-18 academic year.

1.56 These arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met. The team tested their operation by scrutinising a range of documentation (including documentation for programme monitoring and review, documentation on the partnership arrangements, programme and module logs, annual review reports, external examiners' and EQA reports). The team also held meetings with staff (including representatives of the awarding partners) and with students and employers.

1.57 The Centre complies with its partners' requirements by submitting annual monitoring course logs prepared in collaboration with the University's Academic Liaison Tutor, as evidenced for the last three academic years. These include both descriptive and analytical material about, for example, student performance and feedback, and are informed by comments from external examiners. They also include an action plan (with details of responsible individuals and expected timeframe), as well as confirmations of completion of previous actions. A similar process is in place for the Crossfields provision, where IQA and EQA reports inform the annual report.

1.58 The Centre makes effective use of course and module (or unit) logs. These include action plans with details of actions arising from the various stages of the review. The action plan for the last course log includes changes to induction and feedback, which have been implemented (further discussed in Expectation B8). Both staff and students confirm that actions arising from feedback through different channels are effectively put into practice.

1.59 The review team concludes that there are effective processes for monitoring and review of programmes, which address whether the academic standards of partners are being met. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.60 The awarding partners have ultimate responsibility for ensuring that external expertise is used during programme design and review, and assessment and award processes, to ensure that academic standards are established and maintained. The Centre is responsible for nominating external examiners or advisers to the University and giving appropriate consideration to the comments of externals.

1.61 The University is responsible for the appointment of external and independent advice to enable standards to be established and maintained on the FdA and CertHE. External advisers participate in periodic review and are consulted about programme changes. They make recommendations regarding the academic standard of examinations, review student assessments, attend course Performance Enhancement meetings and report in writing to the University's Head of Quality Enhancement Unit and the Academic Liaison Tutor.

1.62 The diploma was developed using the external expertise of Crossfields Institute. The Crossfields Institute Quality Team reviews centres for approval. Centres are allocated an EQA, with subject expertise as well as experience of quality assurance processes. The EQA reviews internal quality reports and reviews assessments and confirms awards.

1.63 These arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met. The review team tested their operation through scrutiny of a range of documentation (including documentation on programme design, external examiner reports, EQA reports and minutes of deliberative meetings). The team also held meetings with staff (including representatives of the awarding partners) and with students and employers.

1.64 External examiner reports and EQA reports offer impartial advice and comment on the review of student work. External examiners attend course Performance Enhancement meetings, and report annually to the Subject Standards Board. They confirm that UK threshold academic standards are set, delivered and achieved and that the academic standards of the University are appropriately set and maintained. The EQA carries out an annual review visit to monitor the quality of the diploma programme, sample assessed student work and produce an annual report.

1.65 External examiner and EQA reports are an important part of the annual monitoring processes of the Centre and the awarding partners. The Centre was able to provide examples of action taken following external examiner and EQA comments. The Centre's use of external examiner reports is further discussed in Expectation B7.

1.66 The responsibility for this Expectation rests with the awarding partners. The Centre makes full use of external and independent expertise at key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards. External advice is also obtained on whether UK threshold academic standards are set, delivered and achieved and whether academic

standards established by the awarding partners are appropriately set and maintained.  
The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

1.67 In reaching its judgement about academic standards, the review team considered its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The team also took into consideration that the awarding partners have ultimate responsibility for the setting of academic standards.

1.68 All Expectations in this judgement area are met and the associated level of risk is low in all cases. There are no affirmations and no recommendations. There are no identified areas of good practice.

1.69 The Centre's principal responsibilities for maintaining academic standards are for adhering to the requirements, policies and procedures of its awarding partners. The positive judgement in this area reflects the review team's view that the Centre does so effectively.

1.70 The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations **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 The Centre has no degree awarding powers, and therefore responsibility for setting academic standards lies with its awarding partners. However, the Centre also designs and develops its own proposed programmes, which are then approved by the respective partner. In doing so, the Centre effectively applies the University's procedures for programme design and approval, which are detailed in its Quality Manual. A good example is the approval process for the Centre's FdA in 2009. As required by the University's regulations, the Centre submitted a business case, explaining the rationale for it and the proposed structure of the programme.

2.2 Another example is the restructuring of FdA modules to facilitate recruitment for the level 4 Certificate in Higher Education in 2014. This was part of a wider strategy focused on a 'blended learning approach' (incorporating distance learning) and discussed at Board level in Feb 2014. The Centre submitted the required documentation to the University, including approval from the external examiner and revised programme specifications and it received approval for the proposed changes. The Centre provided other similar examples of programme development/modification, where University regulations were effectively applied.

2.3 The Centre inducts and regularly updates its staff with respect to University procedures and regulations. New staff confirm that they are thoroughly inducted on both Centre and partners' procedures. Any changes to the latter are communicated to staff at academic meetings, via email and through the VLE.

2.4 The Centre has its own quality assurance processes and an effective quality cycle document, which specifies how quality assurance principles are to be embedded in academic activities and monitored mainly by the Academic Committee and Education Committee, Chief Education Officer, and course leaders. Decisions about embarking onto any new partnerships or programmes would be decided at Board of Trustee level. Developments and modifications of existing courses would be delegated to the Academic Committee; minutes of the Academic Committee meetings are circulated with members of the Education Committee.

2.5 These arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met. To test their operation the review team scrutinised a range of documentation relating to programme design, approval and validation processes. The review team also held meetings with staff (including representatives of the awarding partners) and meetings with students and employers.

2.6 The Centre seeks student engagement through recruitment of student representatives and regular Student Committee meetings. 'Course developments' is one of the regular items on Student Committee meetings. At the Diploma Montessori Pedagogy Student Committee meeting, for instance, students were informed of the Centre's plans to work on extending a blended learning option for the level 5 FdA and were invited to

contribute suggestions. The Centre built a level 5 module and invited students to test it and offer feedback. They also contributed views on extra audio and visuals for students with additional learning needs. Students are invited to attend meetings with the Centre and the University's Academic Team, and both they and the academic staff confirm that improvements to teaching, learning and assessments have been made following student feedback.

2.7 External experts and examiners are involved in the process of designing or making changes to programmes at the Centre. This is evidenced by external examiner letters for the University provision. External experts also contributed to the consultation and design process of Crossfields EYE diploma, as evidenced by the timeline of Crossfields diploma development.

2.8 Based on the Centre's procedures and their application, the review team considers that there are effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.9 The Centre has clear policies and procedures for the recruitment, selection and admission of students. These state that the Head of Academic Programmes has overall responsibility for admissions, with support from the Admissions Officer and designated academic staff.

2.10 There are explicit entrance requirements that are agreed with the relevant awarding partner during the programme approval process. Prospective students complete an application form and attend an interview to determine their suitability for their chosen programme. Interviews are undertaken by a staff member with designated responsibility for admissions, who then decides about the suitability of the candidate based on the agreed criteria. The Centre clearly articulates these processes on its website.

2.11 The Centre has procedures in place for students to appeal admissions decisions or make a complaint about the recruitment, selection and admissions process.

2.12 The Centre's policies and procedures for the recruitment, selection and admission of students would enable the Expectation to be met. To test the operation of these arrangements the team scrutinised a range of documentation relating to recruitment, selection and admission. The review team also held meetings with staff (including representatives of the awarding partners) and with students and employers.

2.13 The review team found the Centre's admissions policies and procedures to be underpinned by appropriate organisational structures and processes. Staff with responsibility for admissions liaise closely with the awarding partners to ensure that the Centre's policies and process align with awarding partner regulations. Those that conduct interviews and make admissions decisions undergo training, access external guidance and use an interview record form to ensure rigour and parity.

2.14 The Centre systematically reviews and enhances its procedures for recruitment, selection and admissions in registration meetings. It collects admissions data and student feedback to inform this review. Entry requirements are reviewed as part of the annual monitoring process to ensure that they enable the selection of students who are able to complete their programmes.

2.15 As part of its strategic commitment to widening participation, the Centre is committed to a fair and inclusive admissions process. The Centre allows direct entry to level 5 for applicants who hold the diploma and takes into account professional experience of students who hold a relevant Early Years qualification, offering them a course of training alongside their studies. At interview, applicants with disabilities and additional learning needs have the opportunity to discuss reasonable adjustments to remove barriers to participation.

2.16 The Centre demonstrates its commitment to a transparent and accessible admissions process by providing comprehensive support for prospective students to assist them in making informed decisions about higher education and completing their application.



Students can access this support in a diversity of ways, both online and in person. For example, prospective students are invited to observe classes, visit a Montessori setting, access an application support blog and try out a guest course on the VLE. The Centre involves current students in creating videos and talking to prospective students at open events. Students said that the targeted support they received before applying to the Centre helped them to make effective decisions and staff confirmed that these processes enable them to select students who are able to complete their programme. The extensive support offered to potential applicants, which ensures the effectiveness of the application and admissions process for students and the Centre, is **good practice**.

2.17 The Centre operates transparent, fair and inclusive recruitment and admissions procedures that enable the selection of students with the potential to complete their chosen programme. The review team therefore 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**

2.18 The Centre offers a unique pedagogy 'that combines an educational philosophy, a curriculum approach and specific learning materials that have been passed down relatively unchanged since their initial introduction over a hundred years ago'. The development of the Montessori diploma provided an enhancement opportunity, enabling a shared understanding of the Montessori philosophy and the unique ethos of teaching, learning and assessment to be embedded in the programmes. This significant 'paradigm shift' enabled a 'community of practice' to be developed.

2.19 The significant strategic development of the VLE enabled this to be facilitated further, following extensive and continued discussion with students and staff.

2.20 The combination of aligned strategy documents supporting the Centre's mission, philosophy and ethos, together with recruitment and development of qualified and experienced staff, and a supportive framework for work placement enables the Expectation to be met.

2.21 To test the operation of these arrangements, the review team scrutinised a range of documentary evidence including documentation relating to the Centre's strategy and the development of the VLE in the context of the Centre's mission and ethos, as well as documents relating to the recruitment of staff and student support. The review team also held meetings with staff (including representatives of the awarding partners) and with students and employers. The team had access to the VLE and saw a demonstration of its content and capabilities given by a member of staff and a student.

2.22 The strategic development of the VLE was a major change project for the Centre, with significant inherent risks. Documentation supporting the strategy includes a Pedagogy Strategy, a Blended Learning, Teaching and Learning Strategy, a VLE Strategy and a Social Media Policy. A review of the documents relating to the development of the VLE in the context of the Centre's mission and strategy concluded they were comprehensive and well aligned. The extensive documentation was supported by wide-ranging enthusiastic discussion with students and staff.

2.23 The Centre delivers programmes through a blended and distance learning approach. This is supported with documentation, which encourages 'active learning', supports professional competence and workplace skills, encourage discussion and develops learner independence. The Centre has developed a VLE Project Roles guide and has recruited an eLearning Support Officer and an eLearning Development Lead. There are clear lines of communication between the eLearning Team and teaching staff enabling the project to be successfully implemented. Staff were introduced to blended learning at the International Professional Development Conference, where they attended practical workshops on using the VLE to enhance pedagogy.

2.24 Human resources policies ensure that appropriately qualified and experienced staff are recruited. Staff are qualified to at least one level above delivery, hold Montessori

qualifications and have professional experience in Montessori practice. The review team confirmed that staff are trained and mentored, and observed and appraised annually, which leads to continuing professional development (CPD) activity having a positive impact on the student experience.

2.25 Staff confirmed that they are mentored when new to role and undergo annual peer observation linked to appraisal. Staff have attended CPD modules at master's level in Applying Learning Technologies and Web Based Teaching and Learning through the Centre for Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT) at the University to support the blended learning strategy. This has led to initiatives such as 'flipped classroom' and the use of online collaborative bulletin boards.

2.26 Staff (including part-time and freelance) are supported through shadowing and workshops as well as formal staff development emerging from appraisal and peer observation. Sharing of good practice occurs through the Montessori Trainers Course and the International Professional Development Conference (IPDC).

2.27 Some staff are in the early stages of developing research initiatives and publish in early years publications and attend conferences. The Strategic Plan to develop research is on hold and a proposal to develop research has been considered by the education committee.

2.28 The student submission was supportive of staff, as were the students who met the team. Discussion at tutor forum, Academic Team meetings and dissemination of good practice and student feedback occurs at the IPDC. Teaching is monitored through end-of-module surveys.

2.29 The physical environment replicates a Montessori early years setting, enabling students to gain hands-on experience of the philosophy and principles. Online students attend a compulsory apparatus workshop, monitored through IQA reports, annual monitoring reports and student feedback. Tutors who deliver workshops at external centres attend the annual IPDC for professional updating.

2.30 Students confirmed they complete learning agreements at induction and a student confidentiality agreement. They also complete a learning agreement before undertaking placement. Students were positive about both physical resources and online resources. The VLE includes course materials, text and video resources, extra reading, additional links and is the hub for assignment submission and review, peer feedback and forums to communicate both academically and socially with their peers. Forum discussion and wiki tools help to promote a collaborative environment between students and staff.

2.31 The Centre is now offering blended learning for the FdA level 5 direct entry. It has created a blended learning policy and strategy to align with the Centre's strategic plan. Developments of the VLE have been received enthusiastically by both staff and students who are continuously engaged in its development. A confidentiality agreement and Social Media Policy have been created to ensure appropriate use of online tools.

2.32 The Centre promotes a variety of teaching and learning activities, including workshops, lectures, seminars, guided reading, individual tutorials, independent study and opportunities for reflection on practice. Debate, discussion and group work is encouraged through forums, online chats, webinars, Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) and online study groups. Students praised forums that allowed distance learning and attending students to communicate and learn from one another. Feedback from students and external examiners identifies the high-quality teaching at the Centre.

2.33 Reflective practice is a key feature of the philosophy and pedagogy of Montessori practice enacted through the maintenance by students of an online portfolio, and the use of module checklists. Peer feedback is a key learning tool on the diploma. Support for students includes information on the website, learner information guides, course and module handbooks. The introduction of formative feedback has impacted positively on attainment and the Centre is committed to sustaining current levels of formative feedback on the FdA because of the benefits to students. Students 'critically self-reflect' on their practice and critically observe professional placement practitioners to encourage academic debate (further discussed in Expectation B10).

2.34 The Centre has evidenced the positive impact of formative feedback through attainment, student feedback and external examiner feedback. The Centre is developing more sustainable ways of delivering formative feedback. Discussion continues at Student Committee and Academic Team meetings. Student peer monitoring was introduced in September 2016. After encountering operational difficulties, it was modified to embrace the concept of 'critical friends'. Staff and students spoke positively about the impact peer feedback had on learning

2.35 All students are required to undertake a minimum of 400 hours of professional practice in an approved Montessori early years setting. Students are supported by a Professional Placement Coordinator, an Academic Placement Tutor who observes students twice, and a Placement Mentor. Students have access to an interactive world map of approved placement opportunities professional, placement guide and a Professional Placement Student Handbook. Online students attend compulsory apparatus workshops at the Centre or at an approved centre.

2.36 Information is provided to students through resources provided on the VLE, including Meeting Point, learner information guides, course handbooks and additional module handbooks for FdA students. There are also supplementary handbooks for work placements for students, placement tutors and placement mentors and an online site for students and staff with video and downloadable guides on a range of topics.

The detailed and systematic approach to the development of the VLE, as a vehicle for teaching and learning and support for learning, enables staff, students and other stakeholders to articulate and systematically review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices at the Centre. Through the Centre's learning and teaching practice, all students are enabled to develop as independent learners, and to enhance their capacity for analytical and creative thinking. The team considers the integration of Montessori principles in the approach to teaching and learning, which significantly enhances the student learning experience to be **good practice**.

2.37 The review team concludes that the Centre has arrangements to articulate and systematically review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices so that every student is able to develop as an independent learner. The Expectation is met and the associated 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**

2.38 The Centre's Strategy and Operational Plan confirm a commitment to providing suitable support for the development of students and staff, with oversight through the Academic Committee. The Centre has a strategic aim to offer a transformative learning experience and provides a wide range of support mechanisms for student development and achievement. These mechanisms are regularly monitored and evaluated through student and employer feedback, and the use of internal and external quality reports in the annual monitoring process.

2.39 There are dedicated staff roles to support academic, professional and personal development, including support for work placement and online via the VLE. Support for students is provided throughout the students' journey from initial application through the complete period of study. Staff are appropriately selected and developed to support students, and human and physical resources are monitored throughout the year.

2.40 These arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met. To test their operation the team scrutinised a range of documentation relating to support for students, including information on the VLE. The review team also held meetings with staff, including representatives of the awarding partners, and with students and employers.

2.41 The review team considered the extensive range of support available to students during recruitment and transition (as highlighted in Expectation B2). This includes information on the website, a student experience talking heads film, a support blog, flow charts, opportunities to observe classroom sessions, samples of student work, a guest course on the VLE, contact with current and former students at open events, shared information from students, course handbooks and student information.

2.42 A study tools induction module enables students to familiarise themselves with the VLE, with support from the e-Learning Support Officer. Since the introduction of the induction course, levels of requests for support have fallen and students have expressed less anxiety about the technical aspects of studying online. Students are consulted about their induction experience at Academic Committee and feedback is positive. Student feedback indicates the Centre achieves its strategic aim.

2.43 The review team confirmed that a variety of arrangements embedded in the curriculum support students in their academic, professional and personal development. This includes a Study Skills module at the start of the course that is valued by staff and students; a study hub for level 5 Students; employability and work placement opportunities; personal and online tutors; an online community space; and in the case of the diploma a toolkit for student progress. Students are required to create weekly study plans so that group tutors can support time management skills.

2.44 The Centre's ethos encourages high levels of pastoral and academic support across the community. Group and personal tutors are easily contacted through email and an open-door policy. Online tutors provide personal support for students on the diploma programme. The Centre supports tutors via the tutor forum, IQA reports, which promote good practice in student feedback, mentoring of new tutors, and through the IPDC.

2.45 The Centre focuses on the well-being of students, for example by discussing this topic at the IPDC, and is working to develop a policy and procedure for student well-being and supporting those with mental health issues.

2.46 A designated tutor has responsibility for coordinating support and, after enrolment, contacts all students who have identified additional learning needs to discuss strategies for effective learning and any reasonable adjustments that may be required. The Centre has been commended in previous QAA reports for its provision of support for students with additional learning needs. Staff have telephone access to a support counsellor when dealing with complex student welfare needs, the availability of which is promoted on the tutor forum, and plans exist to have an external counsellor or additional needs tutor run workshops and bookable counselling sessions.

2.47 A range of physical resources support academic and professional development including a library, the VLE, external apparatus workshop venues, computers, and a common room and breast-feeding room, which are outlined in handbooks and during induction. The Centre is shortly to move to new premises, which will include a Montessori Nursery.

2.48 The Centre provides training for support and administrative staff, including in-house training provided by HESA, Copyright Licensing Agency Training webinar, student loans company training, visits from the Office of the Independent Adjudicator, Prevent training and a series of workshops on supporting quality assurance and enhancement attended by a range of staff including administrative and support staff.

2.49 Support arrangements are monitored through the Centre re-approval visits, student feedback, employer feedback surveys, Destination of Leavers from Higher Education survey, MSA survey, module reviews and the annual monitoring log processes in line with the requirements of the validating partners, a quality monitoring group, plus support from the University. Minutes of Student Committee evidence positive feedback and the IQA report confirms positive feedback and support for new tutors.

2.50 The review team considered EQA and external examiner reports that monitor and evaluate student development and achievement on behalf of Crossfields, the University's Academic Quality Monitoring Group and Annual Quality Management Group (AQMG). The external examiner's report is complimentary about the high levels of expectation and detailed quality assurance work. Students consistently give good feedback around the levels of student support available, especially the pastoral support offered by staff. Curriculum area leaders coordinate student feedback from modules and statistics across all cohorts in the module logs, which feed into the annual course monitoring log. Action is taken in response, for example the production of a pregnancy and maternity policy, which was considered by Academic Committee after student consultation then disseminated at IPDC.

2.51 For FdA students the Centre adopts the University's regulations for plagiarism and academic offences. There is a cause for concern process, a misconduct procedure, academic malpractice and exceptional circumstances process and a graphic toolkit for use by students needing extra time.

2.52 Staff spoke enthusiastically about the transformative nature of the VLE on the entire centre. The Centre refers to the VLE as having increased completion rates and reduced withdrawal. The Centre has procedures that enable diploma students who are failing to make progress to successfully complete the programme. The course extension procedure, for example, has allowed 14 students to complete the programme who may otherwise have been unable to complete.

2.53 A Professional Placement Coordinator supports students on placement, from registering for placement, through to completion. Students are allocated an Academic Placement Tutor and a Placement Mentor to support them on placement through regular meetings including virtual tutorials via the VLE.

2.54 Students access placement information through the Professional Placement Handbook, an interactive map and placement guide on the website, and discuss a professional placement learning agreement with their mentors during induction. All students, tutors and mentors have handbooks on the VLE and the Centre is developing further online resources for professional placement. Support for placements is further discussed in Expectation B10.

2.55 A core strategic objective is a partnership with the Montessori Schools Association (MSA) to enhance graduate employment prospects. Employability is embedded in curriculum design and assessment, and the Centre has links with many employers. For example, the Centre surveys employers at a number of conferences to evaluate how employers view their graduates and whether their learning objectives meet employer expectations.

2.56 The VLE provides some support for developing employability skills, such as a section on CV writing. Students feel that more could be done to advise them about potential careers. In response the Centre is developing a careers section on the VLE, with input from students. They will direct students to the careers section towards the end of their programme. The Centre collects DHLE data for FdA students and intends to collect this for diploma students in future.

2.57 Students receive information about progression to further study via the website, in course handbooks, via webinar sessions, forum discussions, visits from the link tutor, former students and when they receive their qualification certificates.

2.58 Students are inducted into the library, which is updated annually, and staff are available for technical issues relating to computers. FdA students access eBooks and e-journals through the University's Learning Resource Centre. The Centre is responding to the current inconsistencies in accessibility of these resources and developing ways in which all cohorts can benefit from online library resources.

2.59 The Centre monitors and evaluates its approach to student development and achievement through the annual monitoring process, external review by external examiners (FdA) and EQAs (diploma), and the annual review of the Centre's quality assurance procedures conducted by the University. This includes student feedback. Students who met the team spoke positively about the resources, both physical and on the VLE.

2.60 The Centre has procedures to collect student progression, achievement and satisfaction data for each module (or unit on the diploma) level. This feeds into course level annual monitoring. Through this process the Centre identified that one of the primary reasons for deferral was pregnancy, and subsequently worked with students to develop a Pregnancy and Maternity Policy.

2.61 The Centre also identified that the development of the VLE has contributed to improvements in continuation rates for distance-learning students and flexible study options on the FdA facilitate course completion. The Centre plans to extend flexible study options for the level 4 FdA/CertHE.

2.62 The achievement and completion rates at the Centre are high relative to the University. The entrance requirements on the FdA remain low. The high levels of success

are in part attributable to the extensive support mechanisms in place. The team considers as **good practice** the wide-ranging and highly effective support mechanisms, which allow students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.

2.63 The Centre offers an extensive and comprehensive range of support services, enabling students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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



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

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

**Findings**

2.64 The Centre has a system of student representation in place whereby at least one student per cohort is selected by their peers to voice suggestions raised by the student body and represent them on various deliberative committees. The Centre runs Student Committee meetings once per semester, where student representatives and staff discuss student feedback. The Centre also collects student feedback through surveys and module evaluations and consults students on a number of issues through a dedicated forum on the VLE.

2.65 Through student representatives, Student Committee meetings and feedback surveys, the Centre has taken deliberate steps to engage students as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their academic experience. These arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met. To test their operation the review team scrutinised a range of documentation relating to student engagement. The review team also held meetings with staff (including representatives of the awarding partners) and with students and employers.

2.66 The Centre has established an effective partnership with students that informs the quality of their programmes through a range of formal and informal mechanisms. The Centre facilitates an open environment in which students and staff can discuss their educational experience through the personal tutor system and forums on the VLE. Students said they felt able to raise concerns with staff informally, as well as through feedback surveys and their student representatives.

2.67 The review team confirmed that each cohort nominates student representatives to voice their issues and represent them on committees. The Centre provides training and support for student representatives to carry out their role and students said they feel as though their contributions are valued. Although student representatives attend Academic Committee and Education Committee meetings, timetabling arrangements mean that this is not always the same student. The review team found there to be a lack of clarity among students around their role within the Centre's committee structure. Although the review team accepts that the current approach to student representation on deliberative committees was a response to difficulties in ensuring student attendance, the team considers that this approach presents a risk to continuity and to the strength of the students' role on those committees. The review team **recommends** that the Centre review the approach to student representation on deliberative committees to maximise the continuity and effectiveness of student participation.

2.68 The review team confirmed that student feedback is discussed at Academic Team meetings and feeds into the annual monitoring review process. The Centre informs students of actions taken as a result of their feedback through the VLE. Staff gave examples of when the Centre had responded to student feedback. This was supported by students, who said the Centre had made many improvements as a result of their feedback.

2.69 The Centre monitors the effectiveness of student representation through annual monitoring and has recently worked with students to review and enhance its student engagement system. The Centre has identified a need to ensure that it continues to be effective at engaging students in quality assurance and enhancement. It is developing a policy for student engagement that outlines the Centre's approach to engaging students

as partners and ensures students understand how they can inform the quality enhancement of their programmes.

2.70 In addition to established mechanisms for student engagement, the Centre demonstrates its strategic commitment to working with students as partners by regularly involving students in specific enhancement initiatives. Once it has identified an enhancement opportunity, the Centre brings together students and staff to collaborate on writing policy and shaping new approaches to learning, teaching and support. For example, staff and students have worked together on the development of the VLE, a pregnancy and maternity policy and a student engagement policy. The engagement of students as partners in processes for taking forward identified enhancement initiatives is **good practice**.

2.71 The Centre has in place formal processes to engage students individually and collectively in shaping their educational experience, which have enabled enhancement of the Centre's provision. While the Centre needs to review its approach to student representation on deliberative committees, the overall approach is sound. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.72 Oversight of the Centre's assessment processes is the responsibility of its awarding partners, who provide external verification through external examiners (the University) and EQAs (Crossfields). The assessment structure depends on the requirements of each programme, which is indicated in the programme specifications. Assessment details are also included in module specifications, as per agreement with the awarding partners. They are usually drafted by the Centre team and approved by awarding partners.

2.73 The Centre is guided by the University's regulations concerning assessment design, internal marking and giving feedback to students. Module specifications include clear mapping of each assessment against the intended learning outcomes. For the diploma, the Centre applies its own Assessment Policy, which provides details about relevant staff training, internal verification and external approval of assessor packages (by Crossfields). Curriculum area leaders draft the assessments (based on Crossfields' guidelines on learning outcomes and how to meet them) and the EQA assigned to the Centre approves these.

2.74 The arrangements in place for assessment would enable the Expectation to be met. To test their operation the team scrutinised a range of documentation including programme and module specifications, assessment briefs and documentation on the VLE. The review team also held meetings with staff, including representatives of the awarding partners, and with students and employers.

2.75 Staff were clear about the internal process of assessment approval, as evidenced by the sample of an assessment process provided that clearly showed editorial trail. As required by Crossfields, assessment follows a clear timetable and process. Marking for the FdA also follows a schedule.

2.76 Assessment and moderation processes are effective due to the double scrutiny through internal and external verification ensured for all programmes. An Internal Quality Assurance Report is completed for each diploma unit, using a Crossfields template; this includes feedback for the assessor, and any action points. Tutors/assessors are supported by the Internal Quality Assessors, whose roles are described in the IQA Handbook; the latter monitor assessment decisions and record outcomes. A lead EQA then checks assessed samples (also available on the VLE) and writes a report.

2.77 As per University regulations, the process of moderation for the University programmes includes internal second marking, external second marking, and moderation by University tutors, as well as external examiner review. The University's regulations also include feedback requirements for both formative and summative stages. These are applied by the Centre, as evidenced by the sample provided.

2.78 The Centre receives support from its awarding partners. Staff receive onsite training at Crossfields, workshops and through online courses, including a new assessor's orientation course from Crossfields. Assessors are supported by a toolkit provided by Crossfields. EQAs are inducted and briefed by the Head of Quality at Crossfields.

The induction process includes appointing an experienced EQA mentor, job shadowing, which covers quality assurance processes (including sampling of student work, assessor feedback and IQA reports), and participating in standardisation meetings to discuss student evidence and QA processes. Staff teaching on the University programmes attend an annual event at the University, where good practice in assessment is shared.

2.79 External examiners review students' work and attend Subject Standards Board; and include comments on all aspects of the assessment process in their reports. For the diploma, the EQA reviews assessments and confirms the awards. The 2015 EQA annual report praised the Centre for its 'proactive assessment strategy', which 'enables queries, discussion and feedback to inform CPD, course review and development'. Teaching staff have the opportunity to meet external examiners at Subject Standards Boards, and for the diploma, new assessors are mentored by an experienced EQA.

2.80 Students receive ample feedback, both formal and informal, on their assessments at both formative and summative stage. They confirm that they find it helpful and sufficient. They can express their views on assessments through a student feedback assessment process, which informs course logs, and further informs the annual monitoring. The sample provided - an extract from the assessment for each of the two programmes - shows that the majority of students agree that assessments are relevant to module aims and outcomes, tutors addressed student needs, guidelines and learning outcomes were clear, and assessment methods allowed them to demonstrate their knowledge.

2.81 Students can also raise any issues through Standardisation Meetings (for the diploma) or Subject Standards Boards (for the FdA). An example of student views on assessment being discussed at standardisation meetings is in March 2016 when they discussed peer feedback as assessment support and this was followed up at meeting in November 2016.

2.82 Overall, the team considers that the assessment processes in place at the Centre are reliable. Students are given sufficient opportunities to demonstrate their achievement of the intended learning outcomes for their programme. The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.83 The Centre uses external examiners for programmes validated by the University, and EQAs for programmes accredited by Crossfields, in the maintenance of academic standards. The role and responsibilities of the external examiners are outlined in the University's partnerships manual, and those of the EQA are outlined in the IQA handbook.

2.84 External examiners and EQAs are selected and appointed by the awarding partners who also determine the format of their reports. External examiners visit the Centre to scrutinise assessments, the assessment process and monitor the award of credit and qualifications.

2.85 External examiner reports and EQA reports are a key component of the annual monitoring process. They are reviewed by the Academic Team, shared with students and used to inform enhancement and professional development activities.

2.86 The selection and recruitment of external examiners by the awarding partners, and the consideration of external examiner reports at programme level, would enable the Expectation to be met. The review team tested the arrangements in place through scrutiny of a range of documentation (including documentation relating to the selection and appointment of external examiners and minutes of meetings where external examiner reports were considered). The review team also held meetings with staff (including representatives of the awarding partners) and with students and employers.

2.87 The staff who met the review team confirmed that they adhere to the requirements of the University's partnership manual, which identifies the process for recruitment of external examiners for the FdA. The Centre nominates external examiners to the University who, when appointed, attend the Centre and report to the Subject Standards Boards. All assessed student work is reviewed by external examiners following second marking and moderation by the University. External examiners are also consulted on module and programme modifications.

2.88 Reports from externals are shared with students via the VLE on the Meeting Point notice-board, and with staff. A report summary is included in the annual monitoring course log and actions emanating from it are reviewed by the AQMG.

2.89 Crossfields Institute appoints the EQA whose role is identified in the IQA Handbook. The EQA visits the Centre annually to monitor programme quality and sample assessed work using a designated area on the VLE. They provide annual reports for consideration by the Centre. Standardisation meetings, called 'Touchwood' meetings, are used to consider actions that arise from module and course logs as part of annual monitoring.

2.90 The Centre provided a number of external examiner and EQA reports for the team to review. These reports are distributed to all members of the Academic Team and shared with students on the VLE. The review team confirmed that external examiner reports form a central part of the Centre and the awarding partners' annual monitoring process and are discussed at Academic Committee. The Centre provided examples of action taken following external examiner and EQA comments.

2.91 Reflection at programme and provider level on the content of reports, coupled with the resulting action planning, ensures that external examiner and assessor feedback is

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

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

**Findings**

2.92 The Centre's programmes are subject to the monitoring and review process required by the awarding partners. For the FdA, the Centre complies with University processes for periodic review laid out in the Quality Manual, including a cyclical revalidation of programmes. The last revalidation event took place in 2013, and it resulted in a new five-year agreement at institutional and programme level. The Centre also implements the University's annual monitoring and review processes, which are laid out in its Partnerships Operational Manual and the Course Level Agreement for 2013-18. The latter stipulates the Centre should establish a course committee, which should meet once a semester to obtain student feedback and inform the annual course monitoring report to the University.

2.93 The Centre has a detailed schedule with the University, which confirms the stages of the annual monitoring process. This entails regular module and course logs that the Centre must provide to the University by December each year; the University considers them at taught provision committee level. Module logs are discussed at Subject Boards and inform the annual course log.

2.94 The Centre is responsible for drafting and updating of course and module specifications, as well as the course handbook (following the University template). Any proposed modifications must follow the course and module modification guidance set out in the Taught Provision Manual. According to the agreed schedule, the Centre must complete the annual monitoring form for the Quality Enhancement Unit by December. The two institutions have regular Performance Enhancement meetings, usually at the end of each year, to analyse together student performance data at module and programme level. Typical outcomes are confirmation of awards and consideration of external examiner reports.

2.95 At the culmination of the annual monitoring process, the University issues a Collaborative Annual Monitoring Statement written by the University's Head of Academic Programmes, an example of which for 2015-16 was provided to the review team. This includes outcomes of the annual course log and updates on any institutional developments at the Centre. The latest statement mentions that retention and completion rates are high at the Centre, as well as good levels of academic and pastoral support confirmed in student feedback reports.

2.96 For the diploma, the Centre complies with Crossfields Institute's 'centre monitoring' process, which is laid out in Crossfields' Centre Handbook and the Centre's Annual Monitoring Diagram. This consists of an annual external quality assurance visit by a member of Crossfields' Quality Team or an EQA appointed by them 'to review the centre's arrangements for learner support and guidance, centre resources, quality management systems, administrative systems, policies and procedures, management and assessment practice'. The visit focuses on 'delivery, certification, assessment, internal quality assurance (IQA), sampling learner portfolios, assessor feedback, IQA reports and standardisation activities'. Recent EQA sampling reports confirm consistency in the assessment practice and good support provided by IQAs to new assessors. This last point is also evidenced by the action points decided as a follow-up of IQA and EQA reports in July 2015, which include 'support to be offered to new assessors: submit 1-2 assessed pieces of work to their IQA for advance feedback before marking the rest'.

2.97 The outcomes of the annual review are included in an annual External Quality Assurance Report by Crossfields. The latest one, of December 2016, confirms that policies and procedures are effectively used at the Centre, with examples regarding academic malpractice, and complaints and appeals. Follow-up actions include a plan for assessors to start attending external practical workshops together with IQAs by March 2017, which has indeed been implemented in the schedule for workshops taking place February 2017 onwards. As a result of this review, Crossfield identified the Centre as low risk, and praised it for the initiative to develop a Pregnancy Policy for Learners. The previous report praised the Centre for the 'excellent support provided for assessors from IQAs; guidance is practical and based on continuous improvement, with the learners at the Centre of the process'.

2.98 The arrangements in place would enable the Expectation to be met. The team tested their operation by reviewing a range of documentation related to the process of programme monitoring and review, along with annual reports. The review team also held meetings with staff (including representatives of the awarding partners) and with students and employers.

2.99 The Centre's monitoring and review process is effective. As evidenced by the latest course log for 2015-16, submitted in September 2016, and a sample module log submitted in July 2017, the Centre engages in a significant review of progression data and student evaluation results, at both programme and module level. This is also evidenced by relevant staff activities/input, such as curriculum area leaders considering the module logs and discussing them at Academic Committee meetings; support staff collecting data on student feedback and providing reports to course leaders; and partner representatives (for example liaison staff and EQAs respectively) reviewing these reports, as part of the overall review process. New members of staff have also confirmed their involvement with the process, by doing their first module logs, reviewing the action plans from last year, as well as IQA reports and student surveys.

2.100 The Centre makes ample use of action plans, which are followed through in practice. Both module logs and the annual course log include action plans to address any issues arising from external examiner reports, student and academic meetings. For the current period, such follow-up actions at course level include a recommendation from an external examiner to 'reduce amount of feedback given at summative stage, external examiner suggests marking is too rigorous' and a student request to ensure that all new entrants are inducted together by September 2017. The latter has been actioned at the September 2017 induction event and discussed at the first Student Committee meeting held after that (November 2017). External examiners' comments about levels of feedback are discussed at Academic Committee meetings. At module level, follow-up actions include a student request to simplify and clarify learning outcomes for the respective module ('Diversity'). This has since been actioned, and the change included in the form and communicated to the University.

2.101 The Centre also has its own internal monitoring process. This consists of preparing module (and unit) logs, which are informed by module level IQA reports, assessment data, and student evaluations. The sample module log provided (for the Sensorial Unit 7, 2015-16) shows high achievement rates, for both online and face-to-face students, and an extremely high satisfaction rate (95 per cent) for the unit. Module logs inform the annual course log, which completes the annual monitoring for the diploma; so far, the Centre has undergone two such cycles, and both annual course logs, for 2014-15 and 2015-16, are provided. These are approved by the Academic Committee and shared at the IPDC organised by a membership association that governs professional development and education. Minutes of the Academic Committee meeting on 19/09/2017, for instance, feature updates on arrangements for the annual monitoring for the diploma and discussion of monitoring academic issues for the FdA.



2.102 Several aspects of the review activity take place at Academic Team and Student Committee levels. As evidenced by minutes of Academic Staff Team meeting, Standardisation Meeting and Minutes of Student Committee for the diploma, staff and students regularly discuss and evaluate a wide range of issues related to the learning process. Similarly, the minutes for Student Committee for the FdA show how students and staff (from both the Centre and the University) engage in detailed consideration of curriculum and workload, existing support for learners, assessment and communication aspects. Action plans are recorded and followed up. For example, students confirm that, following a discussion at an Academic Committee meeting in 2016, the attendance policy was changed to incorporate a recognition of time spent by students online, engaging with their subjects. The student voice is also heard through other channels - for instance, module feedback (given either online or on paper) and student/staff meetings. Examples of changes made following students' suggestions include developments to the VLE (requested by students two years ago), the pregnancy/maternity policy, and the consolidation of online student groups of four (replacing ad hoc online groups), which strengthens distance learners' engagement. Staff (and especially the Head of Academic Programmes) use VLE forums to launch consultations on specific initiatives, for instance, setting up an online library. This review activity at staff and student level informs the overall review process; minutes of course committee meetings feed into annual quality meetings.

2.103 Overall responsibility for academic standards at the Centre lies with the Education Committee, which delegates the responsibility for the monitoring and review process to the Academic Committee. As meeting minutes show, the Academic Committee considers issues raised at Student Committee meetings (for example, request for more revision time at the end of the diploma course, and good levels of satisfaction with support received by FdA students), and Academic Staff meeting; it also approves new policies. Student representatives attend these meetings. Issues arising from the Academic Committee are considered at Education Committee meetings.

2.104 The Centre seeks students' engagement at all levels of the monitoring and review process, through student membership at Academic Committee meetings, and student module/unit evaluation being considered by programme leaders and committees. Students have access to the annual monitoring and programme review reports. The review team highlights in Expectation B5 that the process for student representation on deliberative committees could be improved.

2.105 Overall, given the effectiveness of the Centre's implementation of its partners' monitoring and review procedures, as well as its own internal processes, the team considers that this Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.106 The Centre's approach to student complaints is outlined in the Complaints Policy and Procedure. This involves an informal stage, internal to the Centre, and the right to review by the relevant awarding partner once the Centre's processes have been exhausted.

2.107 The Centre has defined an internal appeals procedure for students enrolled on the diploma accredited by Crossfields and offers students the right to request a review of appeal decisions by the relevant awarding partner. The internal appeals procedure does not cover students enrolled on programmes validated by the University. The Centre refers students on these programmes to the appeals procedure outlined by the University.

2.108 The Centre keeps a central record of complaints and appeals, with oversight from Academic Committee.

2.109 The arrangements in place, including the procedures outlined in the academic appeals and student complaints procedure, would enable the Centre to meet the Expectation. To test their operation the team scrutinised a range of documentation relating to complaints and appeals (including policies, handbooks and example cases). The review team also held meetings with staff, including representatives of the awarding partners, and with students and employers.

2.110 The complaints and appeals procedures are clear, accessible to students via handbooks and the VLE, and are explained during induction. Students confirmed that they are aware of how official complaints and appeals are made and indicated that complaints are often discussed and resolved informally with tutors.

2.111 With a small cohort of students, there was only one appeal and one informal complaint for the review team to consider. In both cases, the Centre was timely in its responses and communicated clearly with the students involved.

2.112 The review team found the Centre to be effective at using complaints and appeals to enable enhancement. Although there has only been one appeal and one informal complaint, both were discussed by senior staff at meetings and have informed enhancements to the Centre's provision.

2.113 The Centre systematically reviews and updates its complaints and appeals procedures, works closely with awarding partners and refers to advice provided by the Office of Independent Adjudicators (OIA) to ensure that its policies and procedures align with sector guidelines and awarding partner requirements for student complaints.

2.114 The procedures the Centre has in place for handling academic appeals and student complaints are fair, accessible and timely. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.115 Students on all programmes are required to gain experience in a professional work placement (PWP) setting in order to meet their learning outcomes. PWP in an approved Montessori setting is central to the educational philosophy of the Centre. Diploma students studying by distance learning also undertake an apparatus workshop at either the Centre or another approved location.

2.116 The programme specifications for the University programmes are used to guide a wide range of detailed measures, which support PWP students and their mentors. Learning agreements signed by students and PWP mentors form the basis for the educational relationship. PWP mentor support is overseen by Academic tutors. Support is monitored by a PWP Committee, external examiners and IQAs as part of annual monitoring. IPDC is used as a vehicle for disseminating student feedback and sharing good practice.

2.117 The Centre manages a number of 'apparatus workshops' at its London Centre and 11 other approved centres to support online learners. Systems and processes are in place to approve and monitor centres.

2.118 The arrangements in place (including the centre's use of the FdA programme specification and systems for supporting, managing and maintaining oversight of its relationships with PWP providers) would enable the Expectation to be met. To test their operation the review team scrutinised a range of documentation (including handbooks, committee minutes and the relevant content of the VLE). The review team also held meetings with staff (including representatives of the awarding partners) and meetings with students and employers.

2.119 The Centre employs a Professional Placement Coordinator and an Academic Placement Tutor to support students preparing and registering for professional placement. A database of Montessori Schools Associations (MSA) approved schools is also available and PWP mentors are designated to support students through weekly feedback meetings and an e-portfolio. An interactive map of placement-approved schools internationally and nationally is on the on website, with a publicly accessible support blog. Students who met the team confirmed that PWP was discussed at interview and written confirmation of an approved setting for work placement is a condition of the offer interview with students. Students also have access to a placement handbook to support them during the placement, available on the VLE.

2.120 A detailed Handbook for Professional Mentors is provided with dedicated information on the VLE and website, with an associated mentors' discussion forum. Mentors meet annually or join webinars for professional updating. Oversight is maintained via a professional placement meeting, and the use of external examiners and IQAs.

2.121 A professional placement approval procedure ensures that settings meet minimum standards. Diploma settings are required to have two Montessori trained practitioners each with two years' experience. Seventy per cent of the materials in the Montessori inventory must also be available. Settings must be Ofsted inspected as 'good' or 'outstanding'.

2.122 The Centre specifies the minimum qualification and professional experience requirements for the placement mentor. Mentors are supported with a handbook, an overview diagram, guidance materials for their role and assessment, a dedicated mentor area on the VLE and biannual professional updating, either in person or via webinar. The Centre is currently developing compulsory training for placement mentors. A learning agreement sets the expectations of the mentor-mentee relationship and a mentor forum promotes discussion. Mentors confirmed that they meet students regularly and provide two witness statements and a sign off that the lesson plan have been implemented.

2.123 The professional placement tutor meets with students at regular 50-hour progression points. They have access to the student's e-portfolio to monitor students' progression. They also conduct two observational visits to the placement setting, to assess the students' professional practice and discuss assessments with the mentor. Placement tutors access a PWP handbook on the VLE. Where a professional placement tutor is unable to visit the placement, the student is observed by a third party in the setting.

2.124 The Centre is developing its support for placement tutors further, placing training materials online for those undertaking observations, and it intends to introduce overseas placement tutors to act as a link between nominated observation tutors, students, mentors and the Centre. Dissemination of student feedback on PWP occurs at the IPDC as part of annual monitoring.

2.125 Online students have to attend an apparatus workshop at the Centre or an approved centre. A detailed due diligence process carried out by the Head of Academic Programmes and an annual re-approval process is in place for approving centres. This also includes teaching observation and IQA of the practical assessment. These quality assurance requirements were introduced after discussion at IPDC and there are now 11 centres.

2.126 Placement modules are reviewed in the same way as other modules as part of the annual monitoring process. Apparatus workshop leaders attend the annual IPDC for professional updating and sharing of good practice. Student feedback is gathered on workshops and feeds into the annual monitoring process. The Centre has introduced support for students in preparation for the intensive workshop practical.

2.127 The awarding partners take ultimate responsibility for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities during the work placement elements of the Centre's programmes. There are extensive arrangements, managed effectively, for delivering learning opportunities with work placement providers and these are implemented securely. The comprehensive and detailed support for placements, which enables students to put their learning into practice effectively in their professional environment, is **good practice**.

2.128 The review team concludes that the arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with work placement providers are implemented securely and managed effectively. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.129 The Centre does not offer postgraduate research degrees therefore this Expectation is not applicable.

**Expectation: Not applicable**

**Level of risk: Not applicable**

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

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

2.131 All of the 10 applicable Expectations in this judgement area are met and all are judged to be of low risk.

2.132 There is one recommendation in this judgement area. The team considers that the arrangements for student representation on deliberative committees should be reviewed in order to maximise continuity and attendance. The recommendation reflects the review team's view that the arrangements for student representation on deliberative committees, although adequate, could be improved. The recommendation identified does not represent any serious risk to the management of the quality of learning opportunities.

2.133 There are a number of features of good practice in the approach taken by the Centre to managing the quality of student learning opportunities. In particular, the team identifies as good practice: the integration of Montessori principles in the approach to teaching and learning, which significantly enhances the student learning experience; the wide-ranging and highly effective support mechanisms, which allow students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential; the engagement of students as partners in processes for taking forward identified enhancement initiatives; and the comprehensive and detailed support for placements, which enables students to put their learning into practice effectively in their professional environment.

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

### 3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

#### Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

##### Findings

3.1 The Centre provides information about its programmes to the public and students through the website and prospectuses. Students also have access to the VLE, handbooks, and information guides, which have information about their programmes, the support available to them, the Centre's policies and minutes of meetings.

3.2 The Head of Academic Programmes has overall oversight for the production, monitoring and review of information, and is supported by the Head of Operations and the Marketing and PR Officer, who check marketing materials, and the e-learning team who publish materials on the VLE. The awarding partners approve any promotional material about their programmes.

3.3 The Centre reviews and updates information as part of its annual monitoring process and in response to student feedback.

3.4 These arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met. To test the operation of these arrangements the team scrutinised a range of documentation. The review team also held meetings with staff (including representatives of the awarding partners) and with students and employers.

3.5 As identified under expectation B2, prospective students have access to extensive information to support them during the admissions process. Students confirmed that the information they received about the Centre before applying was clear, accurate and sufficiently detailed to enable them to make a decision. They were also able to access this information through a diversity of mediums, including student videos and a support blog.

3.6 Students receive a thorough induction process. They complete an orientation course on the VLE to familiarise themselves with the location of key information and sign a statement to say they have read and comply with the Centre's policies. Students are satisfied with the quality of information available to them and find staff to be helpful and responsive.

3.7 The Centre ensures staff are aware of the Centre's policies and procedures for the maintenance of academic standards and assurance of academic quality through induction and staff meetings. Staff confirmed that they were aware of key documents used in the management of quality and standards and have access to them on the VLE.

3.8 The review team found gaps in the Centre's procedures for ensuring that information provided to students and stakeholders is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The Centre's marketing and publicity approval guidelines outline a clear formal procedure for producing and reviewing information for the public, but there is no such document to guide the oversight and audit for the management and production of student-facing information. There was a lack of clarity among staff around the procedure for the production, approval and review of information for current students within handbooks and the VLE. The review team **recommends** that the Centre develop formal policies and

processes for ensuring that information for students remains fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

3.9 The review team concludes that while information provided by the Centre can be considered accurate and reliable, formalising policies and processes would ensure information for students remains fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy in the future. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is moderate.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**



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

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

3.11 The Expectation in this judgement area is met. The associated level of risk is moderate as the recommendation relates to a weakness in the operation of part of the governance arrangements.

3.12 The review team considers that there are clear documented procedures in place for ensuring that externally provided information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. However, the arrangements for production, approval and publishing of internal student-facing documentation are not currently formally documented and the review team identified some lack of clarity on these procedures among staff. This presents a moderate risk as the processes in place are largely reliant on custom and practice and the actions of individuals. The team considers that more formality would ensure greater transparency and support formal tracking and monitoring processes in respect of information. Although this does not present any serious risks at present the review team considers that, without action, it could lead to more serious problems over time with the management of this area.

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

## 4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

### Findings

4.1 The Centre outlines its approach to enhancement of student learning opportunities by articulating its mission and aims in terms of offering a sustainable course development, maintaining academic standards, and treating students as partners, all of which are linked to the Quality Code. These aims are reiterated in the organisation's Strategy for 2017-20, where sustainable course development entails activities such as reviewing appropriate staff numbers and offering CPD, establishing a research culture to facilitate development of level 7 provision, enhancing graduate employment prospects, and engagement with apprenticeships

4.2 The processes in place at the Centre entail a culture of consultation and enhancement, both academic and support related. These arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met. To test their operation the review team scrutinised a range of evidence, including strategic and operational plans, policy documents, committee meeting minutes and external reports. The review team also held meetings with staff, including representatives of the awarding partners, students and employers.

4.3 A key area of development is the blended approach to learning, which the Centre piloted at FdA level 5, thereby extending the academic progression route for level 4 graduates in a way that is more compatible with work-based learning. The Centre plans to extend this approach to level 4 certificate and all the Centre's provision. This entails a combination of face-to-face and online engagement, including access to course materials and providing feedback on the VLE, using video resources, chats and so on. An important aspect of this is the creation of a 'tutor area' on the VLE, where tutors can access resources, updates, and information about policies, assessments and placements. Staff confirm that they frequently use this VLE area, for instance to answer students' questions about assignments, or to share elements of good practice identified in IQA reports. The strategic development of the VLE, backed up by resources, is a clear indication of the Centre's commitment to enhance the student experience, which is inherent in Montessori philosophy and transparent in the way the Centre conducts its activities; for example, its internal review processes and the way it engages students as partners in these. The effective development of the VLE has transformed the institution at all levels, helping it better implement its philosophical principles about moving forward together with the learners, rather than leading them. The VLE is now used not only throughout the teaching, learning and assessment process, but also in the provision of support services, and for enhanced communication with partners, including employers. The team considers the development and enhancement of the VLE, which has significantly enhanced learning, teaching and support for students and provides a valuable resource for the Centre's academic community, to be **good practice**.

4.4 Enhancement activities arise from monitoring and review processes taking place at module and programme levels, as well as through student feedback. One enhancement initiative was the introduction in May 2016 of a Toolkit to help diploma students needing extra time or not making sufficient progress. For example, if a student has been diagnosed with learning difficulties, the Centre would monitor them closely and inform them of the support available, pastoral as well as academic. Related to this are the Pregnancy and Maternity Policy and the Cause for Concern Procedure, introduced in February and August 2017 respectively. Crossfields identified the former as an element of good practice in its

External Quality Assurance Report of December 2016. There was significant student consultation on both VLE developments and the maternity policy, and there is an ongoing consultation taking place about the setting up of an online library.

4.5 Other key enhancement initiatives include student input in consultations on academic policies, for example the attendance policy and module modifications, as well as using peer feedback to support learning, discussed at a Standardisation Meeting for the diploma in November, where the IQA reports that 'peer feedback is deemed helpful by students'.

4.6 Students are engaged in the Centre's attempts to ensure and enhance their experience, which is set out in Strand 3 of its Strategic Plan: 'treating students as partners, actively engaged in improving the quality of their learning experience'. This is directly translated into the Centre's Operational Plan as an approach that includes listening to students' views through student representation, the use of student feedback survey, and discussing these at staff meetings especially organised for this purpose. The team considers this translation of the strategic commitment to enhancement at operational level, which ensures its consistent implementation, to be **good practice**.

4.7 The Centre's commitment to enhancement is implemented at all levels of the provision, through continuous efforts to improve both teaching and learning and professional and pastoral support for the students. For instance, the Centre sets up working parties that involve both staff and students to engage in consultation on how best to improve, for instance, the level of student engagement, or the support available for learners' wellbeing. One such group was set up earlier this year to develop a student engagement policy. This builds on previous initiatives on student engagement, such as the mapping exercise against the indicators from the Quality Code in early 2016, followed by discussions at a staff workshop especially organised for this purpose. The current focus is on consultations aimed to formalise a student engagement policy; to this end, a briefing paper is out for consultation, ahead of a December working party meeting, with a view to present a final draft at Academic Committee level in February 2018. The intended policy draft sets out methods and opportunities for student engagement, as well as details of how the Centre intends to review these.

4.8 Overall, there is abundant evidence of the enhancement of learning opportunities through initiatives arising at all levels - from student representation and response to student evaluation, through analysis of module and course logs, external examiner reports and onto internal annual monitoring and initiatives meant to enhance the quality of the student experience (for example, VLE development, maternity policy, and a special working party involving both staff and students, aimed to constantly improve student experience). This kind of initiative shows a commitment to systematically monitor and continuously enhance the provision at all levels, which is directly linked with the strategic aims of the institution, its ethos and culture. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

4.10 The single Expectation in this judgement area is met, with an associated low level of risk. There are no recommendations or affirmations.

4.11 There are two aspects of good practice in this area: the development and enhancement of the VLE, which has significantly enhanced learning, teaching and support for students and provides a valuable resource for the Centre's academic community; and the translation of the strategic commitment to enhancement at operational level, which ensures its consistent implementation.

4.12 The two features of good practice identified recognise the highly effective approach to the enhancement of learning opportunities. There is a strategic commitment to enhancement and this is being translated into implementation of enhancement initiatives. The commitment to enhancement is well embedded and there are plans for further development and enhancement of learning opportunities. The strategy for enhancement has a clear focus on improving the quality of student learning opportunities. As noted in Expectation B5, students are well supported and actively engaged in developing enhancement initiatives.

4.13 The review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities is **commended**.

## Glossary

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

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

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

### Academic standards

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

### Award

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

### Awarding organisation

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

### Blended learning

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

### Credit(s)

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

### Degree-awarding body

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

### Distance learning

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

### Dual award or double award

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

### e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

### **Enhancement**

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

### **Expectations**

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

### **Flexible and distributed learning**

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

### **Framework**

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

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

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

### **Good practice**

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

### **Learning opportunities**

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

### **Learning outcomes**

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

### **Multiple awards**

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

### **Operational definition**

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

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

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

### **Programme specifications**

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

### **Quality Code**

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

### **Reference points**

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

### **Self-evaluation document**

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

### **Subject Benchmark Statement**

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

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

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

### **Threshold academic standard**

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

### **Virtual learning environment (VLE)**

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

### **Widening participation**

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

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