Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of The Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education

March 2016

Contents

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 Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education. The review took place from 15 to 17 February 2016 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Nick Dickson
- Ms Barbara Howell
- Mr Ian Woodland (student reviewer).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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[1] The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code
[2] Higher Education Review themes:
www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2859
[3] QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us.
[4] Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers):
www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Educational-Oversight-.aspx

Key findings

QAA's judgements about The Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at The Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education.

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

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at The Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education.

- The integrated academic and pastoral support for all students, which is highly responsive and facilitates their development and achievement (Expectation B4).
- The comprehensive library provision, which is very effectively managed and enhanced, and provides an extensive and responsive service to students (Expectation B4).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to The Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education.

By September 2016:

- ensure that teaching and learning is more clearly differentiated by subject and level so that students are adequately prepared for their assessment (Expectation B3)
- put in place mechanisms to ensure effective oversight to manage the variability in practice in the provision of programme information to current students (Expectation C).

Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms** the following actions that the The Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education is already taking to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to its students.

- The work being undertaken to strengthen the student voice (Expectation B5).
- The introduction of plagiarism-detection software as part of the adoption of the common award framework (Expectation B6).

Theme: Student Employability

The majority of students study at Queen's because they have already been selected for a ministerial post or because they are already occupying one and wish to enhance their learning and skills within this role. Queen's approach to employability is therefore about preparing students for their professional role and office. All students undertake a placement module at some point in their study and students are very positive about their experience.

Queen's has strong links with its sponsors and church leaders and staff, which influences the design and delivery of the programmes and their future development. There is a post-training programme designed to prepare students for their future role.

Financial sustainability, management and governance

The Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education has satisfactorily completed the financial sustainability, management and governance check.

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

About The Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education

Queen's College Birmingham can trace its roots to 1828, but assumed its role in teaching theology to Anglican clergy in 1853. The current institution was formed by an amalgamation with the Methodist Handsworth College in 1970 to create an ecumenical theological college. The Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education (Queen's) has pursued its ecumenical mission through mergers with other institutions, extending its established work with Black and Asian Christians.

The main campus is situated in Edgbaston, Birmingham, and includes teaching and residential accommodation. A small second campus is situated at Shallowford House near Stone in Staffordshire. Queen's currently provides programmes for 388 part-time and full-time students, constituting 68 taught postgraduate students and 20 full and part-time postgraduate research students. There are 17 full-time members of faculty and five half-time posts. The majority of students are sponsored by the Church of England or the Methodist Church after being selected for public or ordained ministry in their denomination. A relatively small number of students come to study at Queen's independent of sponsorship as a result of their own decision to study.

The mission of Queen's Foundation is dedicated to excellence in theological education and personal formation by nurturing and equipping Christians in their discipleship; preparing people for mission and ministry in lay and ordained roles; and resourcing research that serves the mission of God in the world. To deliver this mission, Queen's is structured into two centres to organise student learning, support and formation: The Centre for Ministerial Formation, and The Centre for Discipleship and Theology. A third centre - The Centre for Ministerial/Professional Development - is planned for September 2016. There are also three strategic strands that shape all the activities of the Foundation, and these are research and scholarship, global Christianity, and black ministries and leadership.

The Queen's Foundation was first reviewed by QAA in 2012 for educational oversight and was subject to annual monitoring in 2013, 2014 and 2015. Queen's made acceptable progress in 2013 and 2014 with implementing the action plan from the 2012 review, and made commendable progress in 2015 with continuing to monitor, review and enhance its higher education provision.

There have been a number of major changes since the review in 2012. In 2012, the Methodist Church in Britain chose Queen's as one of two centres to provide learning and formation. This has resulted in an increase in full-time students and the development of a new part-time programme for students training for ordained ministry in the Methodist Church. Another major change has been the move to the Common Awards suite of programmes, validated by Durham University, by the Church of England in partnership with other churches. There is a suite of awards approved by the University, which forms the basis for each individual theological educational institution to develop its own pathways. Queen's is in

its second year of teaching its programmes recently validated by Durham University. As a consequence, Queen's is teaching out the undergraduate programme validated by Newman University. Finally, Queen's has entered a new partnership with Vrije Universiteit (VU) Amsterdam for its research programmes. After consultation with students who were in a validated research programme with the University of Gloucestershire, most students chose to transfer to Vrije Universiteit (VU) Amsterdam. All new research students are now being admitted to the VU Amsterdam programme after completion of a postgraduate research period with Queen's.

A number of key challenges facing the institution are identified in the self-evaluation document, including the separate reviews by both the Church of England and the Methodist Church on ministerial training in 2016; embedding the curriculum changes required by the Common Awards while teaching out programmes validated by Newman University; improving student engagement for distance and part-time learners; and securely managing relationships with five university partners.

Explanation of the findings about The Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Theological Education

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

1.1   Queen's has current validation agreements with Newman University, Durham University and Vrije Universiteit (VU) Amsterdam. It also has teach-out arrangements with the University of Gloucestershire for its research degree provision, which is now being offered by VU Amsterdam. Queen's uses its university validating award regulations, which are mapped to the FHEQ. All marking criteria are mapped to learning outcomes and there are programme specifications for every award. Programmes are validated by the awarding universities with whom Queen's work, and validating arrangements are robust. Appropriate Subject Benchmark Statements are used where available.

1.2   Queen's Academic Management Group has overall responsibility for setting and maintaining academic standards on behalf of its awarding bodies. To support this Group, there is a robust academic governance structure, including a research degrees committee and an academic development group, which also acts as the management committee for the Common Awards programmes.

1.3   Link tutors/liaison officers are appointed by each of the current validating bodies to support the delivery and operation of awards.

1.4   The team tested this area by examining documentation supplied by Queen's as well as in meetings with staff, representatives of the awarding bodies, and students. In addition, the team examined student handbooks and annual monitoring reports (AMRs).

1.5   Queen's has clear processes in place to support the meeting of this Expectation and is well experienced in meeting its obligations to each of its awarding bodies. However, the recent change of provider to the Durham University Common Awards Framework has caused some acknowledged tension in arrangements for teaching out the Newman University awards and the resultant embedding of the new programmes.

1.6   Queen's has considerable experience in successfully operating and delivering validated programmes awarded by a number of awarding bodies. This should ensure that detailed arrangements will be implemented fully. The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk 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

1.7   Ultimate responsibility for the setting and maintenance of the academic standards of the programmes offered by Queen's rests with its awarding bodies. The award of academic credit and qualifications is made in accordance with the overarching regulations and academic frameworks of the awarding bodies. The nature of specific responsibilities varies in ways outlined in the particular partnership documents and articulated in Queen's academic handbooks.

1.8   Queen's currently works with four awarding bodies: Durham University, Newman University, VU Amsterdam, and the University of Gloucestershire. Some of these relationships are ending and a teach-out arrangement is in place. Queen's offers programmes covering the full range of higher education provision, including research degrees. The multiple relationships formed with different university partners is as a result of funding arrangements by the Church of England, who effectively drive the need for the development of various academic programmes.

1.9   The Academic Management Group has overall responsibility for ensuring adherence to the policies and regulations of all of its awarding bodies, including assessment regulations. As part of this process, Queen's is responsible for setting, marking and moderation of assessment for the academic provision under the jurisdiction of its awarding bodies.

1.10   Queen's awarding bodies approve and appoint external examiners based on nominations from Queen's. The respective awarding bodies are responsible for training their external examiners.

1.11   Standardisation meetings are held by staff to ensure the comparability and appropriateness of marking standards across the organisation. These meetings take place regularly with input from senior management and use the assessment policy and exemplars of staff practice as evidence for discussion.

1.12   Students are provided with the relevant assessment information in their academic handbooks, which are updated annually.

1.13   The review team tested this Expectation through close examination of a number of evidence documents including the academic handbooks, Academic Management Group minutes, AMRs and external examiner reports. The team also met staff.

1.14   Queen's staff are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities in relation to the requirements of the awarding bodies. Reports from external examiners for the awards offered confirm that the awarding bodies are satisfied with Queen's management and delivery of their respective awards.

1.15   The review team found that Queen's has ensured that its responsibilities in this area are both fully understood and embedded in its governance processes. The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.16   Queen's delivers degree programmes on behalf of its awarding bodies, Durham University, Newman University, University of Gloucestershire and VU Amsterdam, and operates under their policies and procedures.

1.17   Definitive information on course aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements is given in the programme specification, student handbooks and module descriptors. The programme specification also provides a record assessment and teaching strategies, credit structure and reference to relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. A curriculum skills map enables students to be aware of the modules that assess the programme learning outcomes. Module descriptors detail the aims, content, learning outcomes, assessment methods and criteria, assessment strategies, and scheduled learning and teaching activities. These documents are required for the course approval and reapproval processes. Queen's provides clear guidance on the development of programme specifications and on module-level descriptors.

1.18   The team reviewed programme specifications, module definitions, course and module guides, and example transcripts, and explored the Expectation through meetings with senior staff and teaching staff, as well as partner representatives.

1.19   Through programme specifications and module definitions, definitive documents are made available to staff and students on the virtual learning environment (VLE). Learning outcomes are specified in the module handbook guides, are clear to students, and are mapped against defined programme outcomes.

1.20   Students confirm that they receive results and their provisional moderated component/module result with their module feedback sheets. Certificates are awarded by the validating university and records are kept securely in the database by Queen's. Queen's has clear policies and procedures for making changes to the definitive record, whether major or minor, and which are made through due process.

1.21   There are processes in place to provide a documentary reference point for the delivery, assessment, monitoring and review of its programmes of study, and the provision of records. There is evidence of Queen's managing its responsibilities for the review and monitoring of programmes and the keeping of definitive records for programme specifications for all of its higher education provision. There is also evidence of validation reports for all programmes.

1.22   Overall, the review team found that definitive programme information is accessible and appropriately managed by Queen's, and used in the delivery of programmes.

1.23   The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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

1.24   Responsibility for the processes for the approval of taught and research programmes rests with the respective degree-awarding body, who ensures that standards are set at the level required to meet the UK threshold standards for the qualification.

1.25   All programmes and modules approved under the validation of Newman University are taught degrees and have been mapped against Newman University regulations and qualifications frameworks.

1.26   The Common Award suite of programmes is approved by Durham University to ensure all programmes and modules have been mapped against its own regulations and qualifications frameworks, which includes a review of learning outcomes.

1.27   The review team concludes that the processes in place for each of the university partners for the approval of taught programmes and research degrees would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.28   The review team evaluated the effectiveness of the processes for programme approval through consideration of contracts with the validating bodies, diagram of university relationships, programme approval minutes, programme approval documentation, approval processes for the common awards MAP process at Newman University, and meetings with academic staff.

1.29   Queen's has a number of awarding bodies and, as set out in their respective contracts, it was clear that they have ultimate responsibility for assuring that the academic standards of their respective awards are met and maintained. They are further responsible for ensuring that the appropriate quality mechanisms are in place for the management of programmes that they franchise or validate.

1.30   Responsibility also rests with those bodies for the assurance that any conditions of programme approval are met, and that any recommendations for action arising out of the collaboration and review are given appropriate consideration by Queen's.

1.31   The team was satisfied that Queen's makes use of those frameworks, regulations and processes of the awarding bodies through meetings with staff, the approval documentation provided, and the commendable comments on the high standards of the documentation by approval panels.

1.32   It was found that Queen's follows the approval process as set out by its validating bodies and that those are clearly understood by the staff. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.33   The awarding bodies ensure that the achievement of relevant learning outcomes has been demonstrated through assessment via scrutiny of the assessments by external examiners appointed by those bodies. External examiners also have oversight of module handbooks, programme and module specifications, and a sample of assessment questions if changes are proposed.

1.34   Queen's follows assessment guidelines as set out by their respective awarding bodies' handbooks. Subject assessment boards for both Newman and Durham programmes are held at Queen's, with the link tutor/liaison officer present or invited plus the external examiner. Exam boards are held at Durham University for Common Awards, with the University liaison officer and external examiner in attendance. For Newman University programmes, the external examiner and University link tutor attend the subject assessment board at the University, along with staff from Queen's.

1.35   Queen's provides an induction for new staff on assessment policies via a mentor system and they will also be introduced to moderation practices prior to taking on the role of first marker. Regular marking standardisation events take place to ensure that staff are clear about expectations and to take oversight of differences between the awarding bodies and levels of study.

1.36   The team finds that the policies and procedures in place to implement the frameworks provided by its University partners and Queen's own procedures for its own staff in relation to the achievement of learning outcomes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.37   To test the Expectation the team reviewed the examination and academic board minutes, regulations and templates from the respective awarding bodies, external examiner reports, marking criteria, module descriptors, module and academic handbooks, approval documentation and approval panel minutes. The team cross-referenced this evidence through conversation with staff and students.

1.38   The academic handbooks clearly set out the respective credit and programme outcomes. From a review of the handbook for BA (Hons) Theology for Newman University, the team noted that the majority of Level 5 modules have a module at Level 6 with the same title. Following a review of those modules the team found that in one case the learning outcomes were identical for both levels, and in a second case the variation was minimal. The team was informed that students at Levels 5 and 6 had been taught together on occasion for those modules, due to small cohort sizes for the respective levels and also to give greater choice to the two sets of students (see Expectation B3).

1.39   For BA (Hons) Theology, the programme had met the requirements of the awarding approval panel, and external examiners noted that the assessment procedures are

appropriate, marking standards are high, and the standard is in keeping with that of other institutions.

1.40   Staff at Queen's described how they had adopted the processes of their validating bodies, recognise the distinction between the different levels, and use set marking criteria. Students met, both on campus and those at Shallowford House, found learning outcomes, assessment and criteria clear. The team therefore viewed that appropriate processes are in place, which are well understood for marking assessments at the appropriate level.

1.41   Although it was found that the validating body had approved modules at different levels with the same or similar learning outcomes, the levels of assessment as set out in the marking criteria are clear to both staff and students. 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 (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

1.42   The review of programmes and modules are set out by the respective awarding bodies. For Durham, a curriculum-mapping form is used to record changes to programmes and monitoring takes placed via annual assessment, along with reports from external examiners. Newman University programmes are subject to the Newman AMR process and Annual Strategic Review meetings.

1.43   The review team finds that the policies and procedures in place for the monitoring and review of programmes would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.44   To test the Expectation the team considered the AMRs and associated meeting minutes, minutes from the Undergraduate and Postgraduate Group Meetings, Academic Management Group minutes, and through meetings with academic staff.

1.45   Undergraduate and Postgraduate Programme Group Meetings and, from 2014-2015, the Academic Board Group (which replaced the function of the Programme Groups) show careful consideration of module reviews.

1.46   Programme teams submit an AMR for Newman University in line with the quality assurance procedures of the University. It was clear from a review of those reports that they contain new actions compared with the previous year's report, academic priorities, items of good or innovative practice, and additional questions for 2014-15.

1.47   The monitoring and review process includes annual meetings with the validating partner to ensure the academic quality and rigour of the programme is in place. The senior staff at Queen's and link tutors from Newman University met by the team confirmed that these take place in conjunction with mid-point updates to review action plans.

1.48   For the recently introduced Common Awards it was confirmed that the monitoring would be through an annual self-assessment report, as set out by the Durham Common Awards Theological Education Institution (TEI) Handbook, comprising students' formational pathways, the Common Awards programmes delivered by the TEI, governance, and actions planned in those three areas.

1.49   The review team concludes that through its annual monitoring process as set out by the awarding bodies, Queen's has sound arrangements for ensuring the maintenance of academic standards. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the 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

1.50   Queen's is not an awarding body and therefore is reliant on its university partners for the development and design of programmes and qualifications. Following a recent change instigated by the Church of England, Queen's moved over to the University of Durham's Common Awards framework (Cert HE, Dip HE, BA and MA), which forms the basis for each provider to develop its own pathways. A validation visit was carried out by Durham University in February 2014 to approve the pathways offered by Queen's, and this was signed off via a contract. Queen's has entered a teach-out arrangement with Newman University for the undergraduate awards that are now being provided by Durham.

1.51   Queen's has sound processes for the monitoring and review of programmes. There are programme committees in place for all provision, which review a wide range of aspects of the programmes. All programmes are monitored annually and robust annual AMRs are produced for consideration at the committees. Queen's has completed its first annual self-evaluation for Durham University in 2014-15 and is waiting for a response from the University. The University liaison officer also completes an annual report. Queen's academic handbooks provide staff with a detailed view of the monitoring and quality systems.

1.52   The review team tested the effectiveness of the monitoring and review processes by examining documentation supplied by Queen's, including partnership agreements and procedural documents, AMRs, minutes of committee meetings, programme specifications, external examiners' reports, and programme handbooks and collaborative provision reviews. Meetings were also held with appropriate staff and students.

1.53   The processes for programme monitoring and review are working effectively. There is appropriate and robust annual monitoring in place for all programmes and an effective periodic monitoring process for degree programmes. Validation and other review events make explicit reference to appropriate external reference points and, where necessary, professional standards. Validation and revalidation involve the use of external experts, both academic and professional. These procedures indicate that review processes are carefully followed, have appropriate degrees of external and employer participation, and that there is appropriate follow-through of responses to revalidation conditions and recommendations.

1.54   There is also evidence that Queen's conducts regular and effective development events for staff to maintain and enhance the development and monitoring of higher education programmes. These training events are well attended and appreciated by staff.

1.55   Overall, the evidence shows that Queen's is effectively and robustly managing its responsibilities for monitoring and reviewing its higher education provision. It is operating in accordance with the requirements of its awarding partners to ensure that academic standards are being maintained. The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

1.57   All Expectations in this area are met, with low risk. There are no recommendations for this judgement area. Queen's works effectively with its partner universities in the maintenance of academic standards, adhering to the frameworks and regulations of its degree-awarding partners. Queen's has mechanisms in place to ensure that standards are maintained and that appropriate use is made of external expertise and reference points where appropriate.

1.58   The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding bodies at the College **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 processes for the approval of taught and research programmes rests with the respective awarding bodies.

2.2 Durham University's Common Awards suite of programmes was developed by the sponsoring professional bodies in consultation with representatives from relevant theological educational institutions. The process for approving any new modifications or changes to those awards is set out in Common Awards policies for approval, and those changes can be submitted biannually on set dates.

2.3 Guidelines for minor amendments for Newman University are set out in the Minor Amendments Panel guidelines.

2.4 The awarding bodies are responsible for the assurance that external advisers or experts are part of the validation or revalidation processes or, in the case of Newman University, external examiners for minor amendments.

2.5 Students have been involved in the design of the Common Awards Pathways through their attendance on Queen's Undergraduate Programme Boards and Academic Board.

2.6 The review team considers that the process of programme design, development and approval would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.7 The team tested the Expectation through a review of Common Award approval policies, the Minor Amendment Panel process, minutes from the Academic Board, Academic Management Group and the Undergraduate and Postgraduate Programme Groups, validation documentation, and meetings with senior staff and students.

2.8 Common Awards have been developed by the sponsoring professional bodies and representatives of the Theological Educational Institute. However, the team reviewed the validation of the Newman University awards and found the documentation and panel discussion to confirm the process as both thorough and robust.

2.9 Academic Board, Academic Management Group and Undergraduate and Postgraduate Programme Group Meetings include student representation, and discussion has taken place on the introduction of Common Awards at those meetings. Staff and students further confirmed student involvement in the approval of the Common Awards.

2.10 Queen's follows the requirements of its validating bodies for minor changes to programmes for the addition, removal or significant changes to a module. The team found Queens to engage with the process through careful deliberations of minor amendments.

2.11   The review team concludes that Queen's operates within their scope and guidelines, as set out by their respective awarding bodies, for the design, development and approval of its programmes. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the 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

2.12   Queen's has a clear policy and process by which students' applications are received and considered. The admission of potential applicants is in line with the awarding bodies who approves the programmes. Applicants can also enrol through sponsorship of the various churches that have a close relationship with Queen's. Student recruitment, selection and admissions policies are linked to Queen's strategic plans, which include commitments to providing theological education to independent learners and to working collaboratively with sponsors and stakeholders.

2.13   The admissions and recruitment policies and procedures ensure the equitable treatment of students. Procedures are well understood by staff, and policies and strategies are regularly monitored and revised.

2.14   Queen's provides clear admissions criteria that are agreed with the awarding bodies. Detailed guidance in relation to the operation of admissions processes is provided. Admissions criteria are reviewed during programme approval and review. This information is contained in Queen's operations manuals. The team concludes that there are policies and procedures in place that would enable Queen's to meet the Expectation.

2.15   The review team tested Queen's practice in relation to admissions by scrutinising guidance provided by Queen's; scrutinising information provided for potential students; reading minutes of relevant meetings; and reviewing the experience of admissions with staff and current students.

2.16   There is evidence that staff involved in admissions processes are aware of and understand the institution's policies and practices. Queen's has adopted a systematic approach to providing potential students with appropriate information, enabling them to make informed decisions about studying at Queen's. Information is delivered at open days and applicant visit days for potential students, where there is also opportunity to meet students and staff, and to tour facilities. Details of the application process and course content are set out on Queen's website, awarding bodies' websites, and with sponsoring churches. The review team found the information clear, accessible and well produced. Students who had used this pre-application information to inform their decisions reported positively on its effectiveness and judged it to be fit for purpose. They reported that it had been supportive when making the transition from an applicant to an enrolled student.

2.17   A comprehensive induction programme to the transition has been developed across all areas of the provision. Students commented positively on their experiences of recruitment and admission processes, highlighting that Queen's provided support in these inductions to highlight individual needs and provide both pastoral and study support.

2.18   Overall, the review team considers that Queen's is operating its admission policies and procedures fairly and consistently, and concludes that the Expectation is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.19   The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy is in place and is used to drive the strategic approach to learning and teaching via the stakeholders involved. The Quality in Formation review is used by the funding bodies to drive strategic approaches from their point of view. Links between research and teaching are developed via the Academic Management Group and associated research committees with a formal agenda item on research. The Library Committee provides guidance on learning resources and reports to the Academic Management Group. Standard module surveys are carried out and reported to the Academic Management Group, and any issues are acted upon (for example, students requested additional e-learning resources, and these were supplied). The responses to the surveys provide input to the development and review of teaching, learning and assessment practice.

2.20   The full range of assessment methods is used, with the emphasis on formative assessment. This is appropriate for the subject area and the range of adult learners involved. Personal tutorials aid effective learning and teaching using the Learning and Formation Agreement. Programme and module information is available in appropriate formats, both hard copy and electronically via the VLE. Student success data is reviewed at relevant assessment boards, but Queen's notes that the relatively small numbers of students completing means that data is difficult to interpret.

2.21   Community meetings provide an open forum for staff and students to discuss issues in a supportive environment, and aids the building of the culture at Queen's, as well as leading to shared learning between students and staff of differing denominations. Students were appreciative of this approach, and could demonstrate how it aids their learning and provides support for those students studying at a distance.

2.22   All academic staff undergo a thorough induction and probationary process with respect to strategies for learning and teaching and assessment. Additionally, they have access to staff development and conference attendance to enhance their teaching and assessment knowledge and skills. Good practice is shared in a formal format with a standing agenda item at committee meetings, and teaching staff were able to discuss how this has impacted on their teaching practice.

2.23   Students with disabilities are supported and provided with a contracted specialist if required. While Queen's is effective at identifying and providing adequate support for student disabilities at an early stage, it could improve issues around physical disabilities and access at Shallowford House, and the residential side of College life.

2.24   Queen's is currently delivering some joint Level 5/6 teaching for the BA Theology. The College is delivering a number Newman University modules in the same class as the Durham Common Award Framework modules. The 10 credits Newman Level 5 Ethics module is taught alongside half of the lessons provided for the 20 credit Level 5 Durham Ethics Module; this reflects the additional module content of this larger module but co-teaching where the content is the same. However, there are some Newman modules that have the same awarding body and which are being co-delivered at Levels 5 and 6, and for these modules there is no indication of additional preparation for students to be able to achieve at the higher level. Levels are differentiated by assessment criteria, but these are

not available in the Newman University academic handbook available on the VLE, although Queen's does provide these in hard copy to students. In another case, two Newman University modules were being taught together at Levels 5 and 6, each had individual module handbooks, and the assignments were at different levels. However, the learning outcomes were almost identical. It was therefore not clear how Queen's was differentiating learning outcomes at the two levels when these outcomes were almost identical. The review team **recommends** that by September 2016 Queen's ensures that teaching and learning is more clearly differentiated by subject and level so that students are adequately prepared for their assessment.

2.25   The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is moderate, reflecting insufficient emphasis given to assuring standards where there are differentiated learning outcomes for co-delivered modules.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

Findings

2.26   Queen's strategic plan has aims and objectives associated with the provision of resources and subsequent monitoring and evaluation to enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. The Principal has ultimate responsibility for implementing and reviewing the strategic plan, supported by the Academic Management Group.

2.27   Implementation of the plan is monitored through AMRs in place for all programmes, input from link tutors/liaison officers, and external examiner reports. Each programme-level monitoring report is informed by end-of-module evaluation, the outcome of teaching observations, external reports and student feedback.

2.28   The Academic Management Group has oversight of the delivery of learning and teaching at programme level. The development of the student learning experience is also monitored through academic performance via the Learning and Formation Agreement, and small group and one-to-one student reviews. It is further supported by reviews of the learning environment. The induction programme for students covers briefing on learning resources, including library provision, online resources including the VLE, and academic referencing.

2.29   Queen's acknowledges that its relationship with funding bodies (namely the Church of England and the Methodist Church) effectively drives the choice of programme that students are allowed to attend, and thus students learn in an environment that is in tension with the expectations of student choice and student-centred learning. The personal tutorial system is robust, and includes reporting to funding bodies where required. Queen's has developed an access course for potential Centre for Discipleship and Theology students in response to an identified need. In addition, Queen's has developed a blended learning course (the QCC course) in response to identified student need and this is proving to be successful. The integrated academic and pastoral support for all students, which is highly responsive and facilitates their development and achievement, is **good practice**.

2.30   Students are very content with library provision. Learning resources are regularly reviewed and are considered at appropriate committees. Surveys are robustly carried out, and return rates are very high as a result. Feedback from students has led to the library developing resources to develop students' academic skills and recently has enhanced its provision to include more e-resources to support those students who are learning at a distance. Students found these to be useful, and found the library management and support systems effective and responsive. The comprehensive library provision, which is managed and enhanced effectively, and which provides an extensive and responsive service to students, is **good practice**.

2.31   Queen's operates peer teaching observation within the classroom environment. This fosters sharing of practice and elicits feedback on performance. In addition, peer observation of teaching is supported by regular appraisals, and staff reported that these have enhanced their teaching practice.

2.32   The implementation of Queen's learning, teaching and assessment policy is supported by the staff development policy. Design of the staff development programme is informed by the outcome of annual monitoring, student feedback and teaching observation. Academic staff are encouraged to undertake staff development activity and maintain

currency within their subject areas, and several staff are undertaking doctoral studies. Internal staff development sessions take place on a regular basis and staff also attend external courses and conference sessions as appropriate.

2.33   The implementation and delivery of the College's strategic aims, including those associated with student development, is generally effective through its governance and monitoring processes. For example, monitoring of performance has revealed that some students have low submission and completion rates. Queen's has reacted to this and actions are underway to ensure that their particular needs are identified.

2.34   In practice, strategies for teaching and assessment enable Queen's to ensure effectively that there is a clear context for the facilitation of developmental opportunities and, through this, student achievement. Teaching staff enthusiastically take up the opportunities offered to them to attend both external and internal development events. There is a robust environment that encourages the development and sharing of good practice. This also contributes significantly to the student experience.

2.35   Overall, the review team finds that appropriate policies and processes are in place and working effectively and therefore concludes that the Expectation is met, with a low level of risk.

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

2.36   Queen's engages with students in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience through module feedback, termly meetings of the Staff Student Community Forum (SSCF), student representation on the Academic Management Group and Academic Boards, and community meetings. A student member of SSCF attends the termly meetings of Governors. Community meetings are timetabled in the weekly programme and residential weekends, giving opportunity for students and staff to raise any issues. There are similar weekly meetings between international students and the Global Christianity Team. Student representation is detailed in the academic handbooks.

2.37   Queen's documentation shows commitment to active student engagement and participation while acknowledging that there is room for greater participation. Queen's is in the process of implementing measures to strengthen formal student academic representation to ensure the appointment of representatives from all areas of provision and at all levels.

2.38   The review team considers that Queen's has appropriate systems and procedures in place to enable the Expectation to be met. The team noted that the system is currently under development, with plans to expand and restructure student representation and introduce greater formality in some areas, without reducing the quality of interaction between staff and students that gives rise to informal feedback. The team **affirms** the work being undertaken to strengthen the student voice.

2.39   The review team tested the effectiveness of the College's approach to engaging students as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience in meetings with senior staff, students, teaching staff and professional support staff. The team also reviewed relevant policies and procedures and other documentation, the student submission to this review, and minutes of meetings attended by students.

2.40   Module and programme-level feedback is gathered formally through student evaluation questionnaires and students confirmed that staff are very approachable and keen to respond to suggested improvements in teaching delivery and academic support. The response rate for these mechanisms is at times low and Queen's has plans to trial the use of the VLE for these surveys.

2.41   Queen's policy is that student representatives are appointed either by their peers or through self-selection, although there is some tutor involvement. A job description for students has been in place since 2014-15. Queen's does not have a formal system of training for student representatives, although it was confirmed that students are adequately prepared for the role through individual conversations with staff and a briefing meeting for student academic reps held towards the beginning of the academic year.

2.42   Staff and students confirmed that there is significant opportunity for informal representations to be made, and gave examples of issued raised by students which had then been effectively addressed. The review team noted the minutes of a sample of committee meetings, which confirmed that students were either present or had sent apologies for absence.

2.43   Students offered some comment on student representation, relating to the need for a structured representational system across all sites; they concluded that the student voice

could be more effectively heard by Queen's, perhaps by placing greater emphasis on the role. While Queen's is giving more attention to the representation of distant learners, placement-based students and students studying from Shallowford House, the team noted that it does not have a formal mechanism for reviewing the effectiveness of student representation.

2.44   Overall, the review team considers that students have the opportunity to make individual and collective representations. Queen's acknowledges that there is room to strengthen student representation and the team has made an affirmation in relation to this. The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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

2.45   Queen's makes assessment policies for their respective validating bodies clear to students via the relevant academic handbook. Module handbooks provide further clarity on assessment processes and also weightings. Newman University assessment policies are set in the Academic Regulations, and for Durham University many of the policies for Common Awards have been implemented in 2015-16 for the first time.

2.46   The volume of assessment and associated credits is set by the validating bodies, with the timing of assessment set by Queen's and spread over a twelve-month period to support the majority of students who are part-time. Modules are assessed solely through coursework, with submission deadlines stated in module handbooks and on the VLE.

2.47   Queen's uses core staff and occasionally contracted staff for teaching and assessment. External markers are now involved in assessment training, and staff new to Queen's are provided with mentor support tailored to their individual development needs.

2.48   The awarding bodies make clear the procedures and accountability of examination boards and assessment panels, with results from the local boards submitted to the validating partners for entry onto their own systems and reference to the overarching boards.

2.49   The Accreditation of Prior Learning Policy describes the process for applying to transfer credits and for accreditation of prior experiential learning when a student has gone beyond five years after qualifying.

2.50   The policies and procedures in place to ensure the fair conduct of assessment would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.51   The team tested the Expectation through a review of the minutes from examination boards and external examiner reports, the student submission, module handbooks, academic handbooks, module descriptors, marking criteria, Accreditation of Prior Learning Policy, Admissions Policy, and through meeting academic staff and students.

2.52   The team found that module handbooks include learning outcomes, assessment criteria, submission dates and, in some cases, further guidance from the tutors. However, in one example, differences were found between the description of the summative assessment in the module handbook and the module descriptor.

2.53   Academic handbooks contain details of assignment deadlines, assessment procedures, mitigating circumstances, extensions and Individual Learning Plans and, in the case of the Newman academic handbook, also Level 7 assessment criteria.

2.54   External examiners noted that the standard of assessment is in keeping with other institutions, marking is thorough, feedback is exemplary, and good practice is shown in moderation.

2.55   Assessment rules in general, and plagiarism regulations in particular, are stressed both in writing in the General Academic Handbook and in dedicated sessions for new

students. Students generally consider that assessments are appropriate and reflect the learning outcomes as stated in the module handbooks, with grading criteria generally understood. Staff are also clear about the requirements for assessments for the respective bodies, and commented on second marking as part of the moderation processes as well as the use of standard feedback sheets.

2.56   The respective policies for the awarding bodies set out the accreditation of prior learning or accreditation of prior experiential learning requirements. The staff met by the team fully understood the requirements of those policies.

2.57   Queen's does not currently use plagiarism-detection software; however, students confirmed that they are expected to complete a declaration that the work is their own. The team learnt that Queen's is intending to purchase the software in conjunction with the roll-out of the Common Awards Framework. The team therefore **affirms** the introduction of the plagiarism-detection software as part adoption of the Common Award Framework.

2.58   There are some inconsistencies in the information and guidance provided to students and these are discussed further under Expectation C. Students, however, appeared clear about what was expected of them and external examiners were confident that assessment standards had been maintained. Plagiarism software is currently not in use; however, the team learnt that its introduction is imminent. The review team therefore concludes that, overall, Queen's has a framework in place for managing assessment and the Expectation is met with the level of risk low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code*, Chapter B7: External Examining*

Findings

2.59   Queen's operates its external examiner systems under the regulations defined by its university awarding partners. Clear definitions are in place in academic handbooks. These appointed experts visit Queen's at least once per year to meet programme teams. The role and responsibilities of the external verifier and examiner are defined by the awarding bodies and they carry out their duties according to their regulations. Queen's can suggest names for external examiners but responsibility for appointment and training resides with the respective university.

2.60   The role of the external examiner is explained to students in programme handbooks. Reports are made available to students through the VLE, and to student representatives via the Academic Management Group. External examiner reports are used via AMRs to the respective university awarding partners.

2.61   Policies, strategies and action plans, together with the academic handbooks, show that Queen's fully understands that the fundamental function of external examiners is to confirm that awards are made at appropriate standards, benchmarked against levels elsewhere in the sector. Evidence examined by the review team also indicates that the role of the external examiner is effectively outlined in appropriate documents such as the academic handbook.

2.62   Teaching staff have a clear understanding of the importance of the role of external examiners and their own responsibilities in responding to comments from them. They also fully understand the need for publication of reports to students.

2.63   There is clear evidence that Queen's responds effectively, timeously and robustly to examiner comments in the appropriate annual report. These reports are considered at all levels of Queen's in a well regulated process, starting with programme leaders and going through the various committees. External examiners' reports inform action plans effectively at both programme and provider level.

2.64   The role of external examiners is well embedded in Queen's quality assurance systems and it makes scrupulous use of their expertise. Queen's also makes robust use of all external reports. The 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

2.65   Since 2011-12 there has been one Churches' Quality In Formation Review by sponsoring churches and a number of validation events and annual reviews by both Durham and Newman Universities. Queen's has found value in the heavy programme of events, to include a review of programmes and processes.

2.66   An Academic Management Group has assumed responsibility for the Durham University Common Awards and Newman University awards and has responsibility for the local monitoring of the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. This Group ensures that there is an overall coherence to the academic programmes of the College, and permits wider discussion about practice, quality and enhancement

2.67   AMRs are produced for both validating universities, which reflect on programme operation. Queen's has completed its first annual self-evaluation in 2014-15 for Durham University and is waiting for the University's response.

2.68   All amendments and review go through the validating university processes, and review of programmes at Queen's also involves contributions from stakeholder professional sponsors.

2.69   External reference points are also taken from the annual report on the partnership between the Queen's Foundation and the Diocese of Worcester, the criteria set by the Church of England for the end of Initial Ministerial Education (IME) Phase 1, and the competences expected by the Methodist Church at the point of stationing as probationers.

2.70   On a broad level, students contribute to the review process as a core part of the Academic Management Group (AMG), and therefore contribute to responses to external examiner reports and the drafting of AMRs.

2.71   The review team considers that these arrangements for programme monitoring and review would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.72   The team tested the expectation through consideration of the AMRs, Annual Partnership Meeting minutes and Newman University Processes Meeting, Worcester Readers Annual Report, terms of reference of the Academic Quality and Standards Group (AQSG), minutes from Academic Management Group and by meeting staff.

2.73   As part of the annual review of the programme, Annual Partnership Review meetings are held and the programme team is required to submit an AMR to Newman University based on a standard template. The team found the review meetings to consider the previous year, external examiner reports, long-term strategy and staff developments. Annual reports from 2012 to 2015 contain new actions taken from the previous year's report, academic priorities, and items of good or innovative practice and additional questions for the following year. The annual reports are based on a standard template provided by the University, which provides limited opportunity to report on student performance data.

2.74   The annual monitoring and review of Common Awards is clearly set out in the Durham University handbook. The team further confirmed with staff, and a review of the terms of reference of the AQSG (a subgroup of AMG) that the Group, when operational,

will coordinate the completion of the annual self-evaluation for the validating body and also respond to external examiner reports as set out in the Common Awards TEI Handbook.

2.75   Undergraduate and Postgraduate Programme Group Meetings and, from 2014-15, following the merger of those groups, the Academic Management Group, show careful consideration of individual module reviews.

2.76   External reference points include an annual report from the Diocese of Worcester, written as the first cohort has completed their learning and formation. It is informed by the observations of the Readers' Advisory Groups (comprising Worcester Diocese and Queen's staff) and overall it presents a positive picture of the partnership and the Common Awards programme.

2.78   Overall, the team viewed the processes in place for the annual monitoring and review of programmes, in conjunction with oversight by the respective awarding bodies, to enable the effective maintenance of standards and the assurance of quality of learning opportunities. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated 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

2.79   The University partners are responsible for the governance of the academic appeal procedures. Queen's is responsible for handling student complaints, and its systems are reviewed and monitored by its partner universities. Queen's has its own internal appeals and complaints procedures, which students must follow in the first instance regardless of degree-awarding body or awarding organisation. The complaints and appeals procedures are provided in programme handbooks. All complaints are logged with the Senior Management Team and complaints are reviewed by the Principal. Queen's has implemented a committee to address complaints and appeals.

2.80   The team considered that the design of the College's policies and procedures for academic appeals and complaints would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.81   The review team tested the Expectation through a review of documents, including student handbooks and written policies, reports on annual monitoring and minutes of meetings, and by examining information on complaints and appeals on Queen's VLE. In addition, the team also explored complaints and appeals through meetings with students and staff.

2.82   Complaints procedures are clear and made available to existing and potential students via handbooks and the VLE, and are made outward facing on the website. Queen's has effective procedures in place for appropriate staff to review and escalate complaints if necessary. For recruitment, selection and admission, there are transparent systems and signposting in place to direct students to the appropriate policy.

2.83   In its meetings with students and staff, the review team was informed that complaints are managed positively through close and immediate dialogue with students. Thus, the great majority of issues are resolved informally as they arise, which means that formal complaints are rarely taken forward by students. Students who met the review team indicated that they know where to go for information if they wish to make a formal complaint. Likewise, the team found no evidence of the published appeals process being used by students at the College but students were clear about whom they would contact to raise an issue.

2.84   In summary, the review team found that the responsive nature of the academic and pastoral support for students means that complaints are often resolved informally without recourse to the formal stages of the procedure. Students are aware of complaints and appeals procedures, and the information is consistently available and accessible. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.85   There are no arrangements in place at Queen's for delivering learning opportunities with organisations other than the awarding bodies with whom it currently works.

2.86   Queen's operates a module that includes a five-week placement for full-time students, which is assessed both in terms of public ministry and the academic award at the end of the first year. The Placement Handbook identifies responsibilities for all parties involved, and a member of the administrative team provides logistical support to students and supervisors. Meetings with placement supervisors are usually held by video conferencing to avoid unnecessary travel expense, and students confirmed that these meetings are working well. Training sessions are held for potential supervisors, and the timing of these has been adjusted according to feedback.

2.87   The review team considers that the placement arrangements are robust, with issues identified in the 2012 Review for Educational Oversight report addressed. Overall, the team concludes that 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

2.88   Queen's has entered a new partnership with Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU Amsterdam) as part of its strategy to embed research at the heart of the institution. The majority of students who were originally studying the validated PhD with the University of Gloucestershire have chosen to transfer to VU Amsterdam, with all new PhD students being admitted to the VU Amsterdam programme. The arrangements for programme development between the awarding body and Queen's are effective: an annual student review of supervision teams and a new programme of research training, combined with an annual conference in Amsterdam, demonstrate this.

2.89   Queen's strategic plan identifies its approach to embedding research into the culture of the institution, and this is being carried out effectively. The Research Degrees Committee and General Research Committee report to the Academic Management Group, and there are standing items relating to research on other committee agendas. Queen's is strengthening the research supervisory capacity of staff through making a doctoral qualification (or equivalent) an essential, rather than a desirable, qualification for new appointments. Several staff are currently undertaking doctoral studies, supported by Queen's. Honorary research fellows have been recently appointed to strengthen particular disciplines.

2.90   The admissions process with the new research degree-awarding partner is robust. The Director of Research, the research fellow and a liaison professor at VU Amsterdam assess each application and, where the candidate meets all the admissions criteria, the research proposal shows potential, and supervisory support can be assured, the candidate is interviewed. An application is assessed by the Research Degrees Committee before any formal offer is made. An induction programme is provided for all new postgraduate researchers and their supervisors at the start of each academic year, and at other times as necessary, based on a rolling programme. The induction programme explains the process of working with the adviser on the proposal, the development of the Training and Supervision Plan required by VU Amsterdam, the expectations of students and advisers, and the support and training offered by research staff at Queen's and VU Amsterdam. Students transferring from the previous awarding body to VU Amsterdam confirmed that they had received adequate support in negotiating the admission process and were satisfied with the new supervisory arrangements

2.91   The arrangements and environment for delivering research degrees are robust, and the recent move to VU Amsterdam has been managed effectively. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

2.93   All of the Expectations in this area have been met. The level of risk is considered to be low with the exception of Expectation B3, which is considered to be medium. The team makes one recommendation and this relates insufficient emphasis given to assuring standards where there are differentiated learning outcomes for co-delivered modules. The team also affirms two actions being taken by Queen's in this area: the work undertaken to strengthen the student voice and the introduction of plagiarism-detection software.

2.94   Two features of good practice are identified by the review team for this judgement area: the integrated academic and pastoral support for students and the comprehensive library provision.

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

3   Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Findings

3.1   Queen's publishes a wide range of information about its higher education provision for potential and current students, staff, employers and other stakeholders. This is produced in hard copy and in electronic format on its website, which is the primary means of external communication. The information published includes Queen's mission, values and ethos statements, its facilities, programmes of study, awards information, entry requirements, application procedures, and careers guidance. The latter is appropriately focused on students entering the ministry. Overall responsibility for information lies mainly with the Senior Management Team, with the Academic Board responsible for programme information and all digital or printed material.

3.2   The team tested the College's approach to meeting this Expectation by examining the content and accuracy of information published on the College's website, student handbooks and programme information published on the College's intranet, Student Zone, and information for staff in the College's common folder. The team also met senior and teaching staff and students.

3.3   Staff are aware of how to access management information, and have received appropriate information to assist in evaluating modules and programmes. The review team was able to review evidence used to share information between partners, stakeholders and students across sites, and is confident that it is used effectively to share information.

3.4   The website contains a variety of information for prospective students and the general public to learn about the courses on offer and management of Queen's. Key information, such as governance, policies and procedures and a full course directory, is available, with links to awarding body websites. The website and prospectus are managed through a multidisciplinary team consisting of both academic and administrative staff. All information, including that from awarding bodies, is checked and processed by the staff coordinator who oversees accuracy before finalisation from the Principal. Website information regarding awarding bodies is checked independently by the university partner. Queen's also provides information to prospective students through open days, through sponsors and through its dedicated enquiries team.

3.5   The administrative team has adopted and developed an online resource that is welcomed by both staff and students. The new website ensures timely and open communications regarding both academic and pastoral support available at the institution. Students receive a copy of the induction programme handbook at induction, as well as an academic handbook that contains information about their course, support services, and the regulations of Queen's.

3.6   Students receive a module outline for each module they are enrolled on, and these are made available on Queen's VLE. Guidance is provided to module leaders on the content of module outlines, which should include module learning outcomes, formative and summative assessment, and teaching methods. Queen's encourages the use of the VLE through the ongoing development both at Queen's and with its partners.

3.7   Queen's provides graduates with an academic transcript and a certificate in line with the awarding body, which is managed by the Queen's administrative team. The Governors receive Queen's annual report and accounts. This is in addition to the reports from both staff and student representation.

3.8   Information relating to policies and procedures, as well as external examiners' reports, programme specifications and academic handbooks, are available to students and staff through the VLE. Information for research degree students is provided through Queen's website and the doctoral training partnership websites.

3.9   The publication of policies, procedures and governance information, the information for applicants and current students, and the accessibility of quality assurance documentation and processes would enable this Expectation to be met. The effectiveness of these processes was tested through the scrutiny of Queen's website, the VLE, and various documents, including handbooks provided to current students. The review team also met current students, teaching and professional staff to evaluate effectiveness in this area.

3.10   Queen's website provides comprehensive information to prospective students on the courses offered at undergraduate and postgraduate level. Information about the governance of Queen's is easily accessible, and policies and procedures are readily available to the public on the website. Sponsored students are directed to the appropriate programme directly from their sponsor. Independent students may be guided through their present employers or with guidance from Queen's.

3.11   The website for both prospective and existing students contains useful information. Students whom the review team met commented positively on both the external and internal websites and the purposeful information that they contain. The varied mode and route of entry was supported by the induction when enrolling at Queen's.

3.12   All students receive academic and module handbooks. Through an evaluation of these handbooks the review team notes that there are anomalies regarding information presented in electronic format compared with that of the hard copy that is distributed to students on enrolment. These anomalies consist of information that can mislead students.

3.13   In addition, students are not always clear on where to find key information about their individual pathways through the academic programme within the various handbooks. Queen's provides information on suggested content of academic handbooks, and is responsible for ensuring their accuracy; however, there is no central oversight of this process to ensure that the correct information is presented. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that by September 2016 Queen's puts in place mechanisms to ensure effective oversight to manage the variability in practice in the provision of programme information to current students.

3.14   Administrative support is provided to students on an informal and formal basis to ensure competency when using the VLE. This has been commended by students at the Birmingham site; however, students at Shallowford House have expressed concern in attending such training and in the level of support. Students regularly use the VLE to submit electronic assessments and receive feedback. The review team heard a mixed picture from students on the effectiveness of the VLE. Some students cited issues with the accuracy and timeliness of information given, especially in relation to modules.

3.15   Overall, Queen's provides fit-for-purpose, accessible and trustworthy information to the public, to prospective and current students, and to staff. There are some shortcomings in the management of information for current students on their programme of study, which the recommendation addresses. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is

met and the associated level of risk is moderate, as reflecting some weaknesses in the operation of Queen's arrangements to manage information.

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

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

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

3.17   The Expectation is met and the level of associated risk is considered moderate, reflecting some weaknesses in the operation of Queen's arrangements to manage information; these weaknesses were found to relate to a relatively small area of the information produced by Queen's. The review team makes one recommendation to put in place mechanisms to ensure effective oversight of programme information.

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

4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1 The last four years have been dominated by the development of new programmes and new university relationships. However, with the Common Awards now nearly halfway through its implementation, Queen's has taken a more systematic approach to the review and enhancement of its provision. Queen's defines the learning process as formational, with its focus on the development of character, relationships and ways of being appropriate to the representative roles of ministers. The focus of enhancement has therefore been placed on hospitality, community, research and the library.

4.2 Hospitality in the form of student feedback and induction processes for new students has been identified as an aspect that would enhance the student experience. A new member of staff has been appointed with responsibility for Hospitality and Wellbeing, and they have sought to improve the experience for new students during the induction period in September 2015. Student volunteers have been recruited to provide assistance to new students through the sharing of arrival dates with current residents, providing a personal welcome and support for the induction process. Accommodation has now been allocated by mixing both year groups and weekly and permanent residents throughout the accommodation blocks, and all residents, their partners and children have been provided with a welcome meeting.

4.3 The buddy system initiated by students with support from the staff member responsible for hospitality was introduced during the first week of term and feedback on the system has been positive.

4.4 There is a weekly pattern of community meetings to help integrate learning and formation, and to shift the focus away from formal learning of specialist skills and knowledge to reflecting on the overall life experiences. Sponsored and international students are required to attend with other students welcome. Over the past three years, in light of feedback from staff and students, and formal review in 2014-15, the programme of community meetings has been simplified and is more coherent.

4.5 In 2014, the Governors agreed that research and scholarship should be central to Queen's activities. To enhance the research culture, Queen's has introduced a new role of Director of Research and a half-time research fellow to promote research degrees, support research students, help all tutors to develop their research activities, and initiate termly meetings (three meetings held) and the development of research projects.

4.6 The library conducts an annual survey, which seeks to identify enhancements to the service, and all students, as part of their induction, are encouraged to provide feedback to the librarian and report concerns at any time. As a result of the survey changes have been made. For example, frequently asked questions are now posted on the library website and Queen's has appointed a tutor with specific responsibilities for library matters at Shallowford House. Informal feedback from students has prompted the introduction of e-books.

4.7 The team found that the design of the College processes for enhancement of its higher education provision would allow the Expectation to be met.

4.8 The review team tested the evidence through the analysis of a range of documents: the terms of reference of and minutes from Academic Management Group, Library

Committee minutes, notes of the Staff Student Community Forum and Foundation Staff Group, the statement on enhancement, Community Formation meetings, staff training notes, library survey, and the student submission. The team also discussed enhancement in meetings with the Principal, senior staff, teaching and support staff, and students.

4.9   Queen's states that it is most systematic in its approach to enhancement of student learning opportunities at the level of module and pathway review. Queen's has chosen hospitality and community as enhancement themes because they are central to the formation of students and, secondly, the themes of research and the library because these are intuitional matters that are essential to support student learning.

4.10   Hospitality and services, including student concerns and issues, is a standing item on the agenda of Management Group Meetings. The staff met by the team confirmed the importance of making people feel welcome through the setting up of a buddy system. The students described how they provide email contact to students before they arrive and meet first-year students to see how they are they are getting on.

4.11   Queen's holds weekly community meetings to nurture and support one another as disciples and it is expected that the meetings will enhance the overall experience of learning and formation. Staff training sessions have paid particular attention to establishing a community of learners. The students met by the team spoke positively about the sense of community, which was very supportive given the challenges of the first year.

4.12   To help embed research across Queen's, a new Research Fellowship post was introduced to support research projects and activities. Queen's has also introduced termly staff meetings with a focus on Development and Enhancing the Research Culture. The meetings provided opportunity to present an overview of publications, the feasibility and benefits of collaborating on joint projects, past, present and potential research-focused events, past experience of, and possible future funded, research projects, and study leave. Staff met by the team described an increase in research seminars as a result of the new research post and an increase in honorary research fellows, with an expected induction in June.

4.13   The team noted that the Library Committee carefully considered student suggestions and complaints. Minutes and the Annual Report from the Library Committee received by Academic Management Group and Library Matters is an agenda on Queen's Staff Group meetings. The team further learned of the value of the library annual survey with personalised responses from the librarian and how it will now be extended from first-year students to students from all years. The students met found the library to be well stocked, very useful, and staff more than willing to help if books or journals are not available.

4.14   The review team concludes that the institution is taking deliberate steps and has integrated enhancement in a planned manner, which engages both staff and students across Queen's. The review team is confident that the enhancement initiatives undertaken by Queen's are having a positive impact on, and improving the quality of, the student learning experience. The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

4.16   The Expectation about enhancement is met and the level of associated risk is considered low. The review team finds that there are appropriate quality assurance arrangements in place to identify opportunities for enhancement, and that deliberate steps are being taken at provider level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities. Queen's chose hospitality and community as enhancement themes because they are central to the professional formation of students and, secondly, the themes of research and the library because these are institutional matters that are essential to support student learning. The review team is confident that these enhancement initiatives are having a positive impact on, and improving the quality of, the student learning experience.

4.17   The review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at Queen's **meets** UK expectations.

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1 Opportunities for student employability are nurtured through the provision of placements with a range of sponsors. All placements are overseen by both the sponsor and Queen's, and are intended to give students new experiences and to challenge them. Both Queen's and sponsors take the role seriously and offer placements based on individual student strengths. Students met by the team were very positive about their placement experience and that they had been matched to their individual needs at an early stage. There can be flexible arrangements for students depending on their personal circumstances.

5.2 Queen's has strong relationships with sponsors and key figures that influence students' learning and future development. Queen's emphasises employability - mostly within the specific context of public ministry - through content design, delivery and assessment of academic modules, and the personal tutorial system.

5.3 There is a 'Bridging in to Ministry' programme at the end of sponsored students' training programme that provides students with some space to prepare mentally, emotionally and spiritually for their new role in the Ministry, and provides sessions relevant to the entry of curacy and probation. Queen's also supports students who decide to withdraw from their studies through signposting to relevant agencies and providing guidance through both academic and personal circumstances.

5.4 There is clear evidence of church leaders and senior church staff having input to the curriculum to enhance future student employability. Queen's nurtures student employability through its maintenance of relationships with graduates who are now in employment. This offers opportunities to develop further work placements and to share experiences through fostering a strong sense of community.

5.5 Overall, the review team confirms that the system of placements makes an important contribution in preparing students for their future or existing professional role, fostering greater understanding and preparedness for the world of work and within the ministry, as well as increasing the likelihood of success in securing and enhancing employment during study and after graduation.

Glossary

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

e-learning
See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or **e-learning**)
Learning that is delivered or supported through the use of technology.

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

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

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