



Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of The Royal School of Needlework

June 2018

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About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at The Royal School of Needlework. The review took place from 30 May to 1 June 2018 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Ms Suellen White
- Professor Denis Wright.

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

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

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.

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

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

² QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk.

³ Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers): www.qaa.ac.uk/reviewing-higher-education/types-of-review/higher-education-review.

Key findings

Judgements

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

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

Good practice

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

- The integrated approach to learning, including individual tuition, practice and experimentation, peer to peer and work-based learning, which supports the development of students' academic and professional potential (Expectations B3, B4 and Enhancement).
- The careful and individualised pastoral support mechanisms, which allow students to develop to their full potential (Expectation B4).
- The innovative approach to formative and summative assessment, including self-reflection, which contributes to students' personal and professional development (Expectation B6).

Recommendations

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

By January 2019:

- develop and maintain reference material that provides a central resource of the procedures for the management of quality and enhancement (Expectations B1, B8, C and Enhancement).

Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team did not make any affirmations.

Financial sustainability, management and governance

The financial sustainability, management and governance check has been satisfactorily completed.

About the provider

The Royal School of Needlework (RSN) is a specialist institution providing education and training in hand embroidery. The School was founded in 1872 with two principles: to keep the art and techniques of hand embroidery alive and have embroidery recognised alongside fine art; and to provide paid occupation to educated women who would otherwise have been destitute. It is a charity and a company limited by shares.

RSN is governed by a Council of Trustees. The School's mission is 'to teach, practise and promote the art and techniques of hand embroidery' and its vision is 'to be known and recognised as the international centre for hand embroidery, offering a common approach to embroidery, open to all levels from beginners to advanced students of all ages; to be both the custodians of the history of hand embroidery techniques and active advocates of new developments in hand embroidery'.

RSN has offered higher education courses in hand embroidery since 2009 commencing with a foundation degree, later supplemented with a top-up honours degree validated in 2011. The BA honours degree in Hand Embroidery for Fashion, Interiors, Textile Art (which has now fully replaced the foundation degree and top-up) was validated in 2014. The degree is validated by the University for the Creative Arts (UCA) and is due for periodic review in 2018-19. The degree is a full-time, three-year programme.

In addition to the higher education provision, RSN also offers its own short courses at certificate and diploma level and the Future Tutors programme, a three-year course that trains tutors for the School and provides a further education-level teaching qualification.

RSN had its first QAA review, a Higher Education Review (HER Plus), in 2014. The 2014 review concluded that the School met UK expectations in respect of academic standards, information and enhancement, and that the quality of student learning opportunities was commended. The review team made no recommendations and identified a number of areas of good practice. A subsequent annual monitoring visit in 2016 concluded that RSN was making commendable progress with implementing the action plan from the 2014 HER Plus and had continued to review, embed and enhance the identified good practice.

At the time of the review visit there were 52 students studying on the BA programme.

Explanation of findings

This section explains the review findings in greater detail.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

1.1 The Royal School of Needlework (RSN) has a collaborative partnership agreement with the University for the Creative Arts (UCA), which validates and awards the BA (Hons) in Hand Embroidery for Fashion, Interiors, Textile Art. UCA's policies and procedures are designed to ensure that validated programmes are equivalent to those of comparable awards delivered at UCA; that they align with the Quality Code, the FHEQ, award characteristics, and relevant QAA Subject Benchmark Statements; and that the quality of learning opportunities allows students to meet the programme learning outcomes. RSN develops and designs the curriculum and gains approval for the BA course through UCA validation and review procedures.

1.2 The arrangements in place would allow the Expectation to be met. The review team tested the effectiveness of these arrangements by examining relevant documentation. The team also met RSN staff and representatives of UCA.

1.3 The relevant UCA regulations, policies and procedures for the setting and maintenance of standards are followed by RSN staff and are accessible via the University's website. RSN staff members who met the review team were clear about the use of external reference points during programme design and approval, and how policy matched the Expectations of the Quality Code. RSN staff are kept informed of developments in quality assurance through training and review events organised by UCA.

1.4 The UCA Quality Assurance Handbook and Common Credit Framework provide guidance to RSN staff for development of the degree programme. The RSN course team aligns the proposed elements of the degree programme with the Subject Benchmark Statement requirements. The BA programme specification and course handbook describe the overall aims and the intended learning outcomes of the course. Unit handbooks map assessment criteria against the learning outcomes for each unit. The degree was validated in 2014 and the process was found to be effective at the QAA review in 2014. The degree programme will be subject to five-yearly periodic review by UCA in 2018-19.

1.5 The UCA pro forma for external examiner reports refers to Subject Benchmark Statements and the FHEQ. The external examiner reports for 2015-16 and 2016-17 confirmed standards in relation to similar UK degree programmes, the relevant Subject Benchmark Statement and the FHEQ.

1.6 The review team concludes that appropriate procedures and guidelines are in place to assure academic standards, and that RSN meets its delegated responsibilities for aligning programme outcomes with the appropriate level in the FHEQ, ensuring that it operates consistently within the Expectation. The Expectation is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.7 The degree complies with the academic regulations and requirements of the UCA Quality Assurance Handbook and Common Credit Framework. The course academic framework is approved by the UCA Academic Board Regulations for Conferment of Awards.

1.8 UCA has overall responsibility for the setting and maintenance of academic standards through its quality assurance procedures (at validation, annual academic monitoring and periodic review) overseen by the UCA Academic Quality Committee, which reports to its Academic Board. The UCA Board of Study for the School of Crafts & Design oversees the degree and approves proposed non-material changes to the course.

1.9 The arrangements in place, including the application of UCA's quality assurance systems, and structures and processes at RSN, would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.10 The review team tested these arrangements through scrutiny of a range of documentation, including UCA's academic regulations, policies and procedures and documentation relating to governance structures. The review team also met RSN staff, a trustee and representatives of UCA.

1.11 UCA criteria for the award of academic credit and qualifications, and its regulations, policies and procedures, are available online. The degree course units are aligned with the UCA Assessment Policy Statement at validation and periodic review. The RSN degree programme specification unit descriptors, and course and unit handbooks, are available on the student portal (MyUCA) and clearly describe the assessment requirements students must meet to receive credit and the award. Students who met the review team confirmed they knew how to access the information they need on assessment and credit.

1.12 The RSN's Course Leader manages the BA course and chairs the RSN Course Board of Study, which meets once each term. The Board of Study follows UCA's terms of reference and is the formal forum for discussion of the operational aspects relating to delivery of the curriculum, implementation of policies and quality assurance mechanisms, review of learning and teaching, receiving and monitoring student feedback, and overseeing deployment of resources for the degree.

1.13 The Course Board considers the annual academic monitoring report, the external examiner report, the course action plan and student feedback. The Board is attended by the two other academic staff members, a departmental administrator, the UCA Collaborative Partnership Liaison Officer, two student representatives from each year of the degree and (where possible) the RSN Chief Executive Officer and RSN Marketing Manager. The Course Leader attends the UCA School Board of Study meetings and UCA Undergraduate Assessment (Examination) and Re-Assessment meetings. The external examiner also attends the UCA Assessment meeting.

1.14 RSN is governed by a Board of Trustees (Council) that meets six times a year. Council maintains oversight of the degree programme, with an academic trustee in an advisory role. Council receives a report from the Course Leader at each meeting, with a

more comprehensive annual report being considered at the June meeting. Council also receives external examiner reports, annual monitoring reports and course action plans.

1.15 The Chief Executive and the Course Leader report to RSN Council and attend UCA's Annual Executive Partner meeting for RSN, which is concerned with strategic management issues relating to the partnership, financial matters, course operation and liaison, resources, recruitment and marketing and staff development.

1.16 The review team concludes that the UCA academic policies and regulations for the award of academic credit and qualifications are accessible to RSN staff and students, and that there are governance processes in place to ensure their effective application. The Expectation is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.17 RSN complies with the UCA Definitive Course Documentation Policy. Changes to the degree are approved by UCA. RSN is responsible for producing the definitive programme information, which is published annually by UCA as the programme specification. UCA provides templates for the required documentation and assesses course standards against national benchmarks. Application of the UCA Common Credit Framework Regulations ensures parity across subjects in terms of the amount of work per unit/credit and the levels of assessment.

1.18 The arrangements in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.19 The review team tested the implementation of these arrangements by scrutinising documentation including definitive course documentation. The review team also met RSN staff and representatives of UCA.

1.20 The UCA School of Crafts and Design Board of Study oversees and approves proposed non-material changes to the degree course; material changes require approval at periodic review. Details of approved course units and changes are monitored and held centrally by UCA. UCA Registry sends all course documentation to the Course Leader each year for sign off, and approved documents are uploaded to RSN central records.

1.21 Information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected achievements is disseminated to students and staff through the programme specification, unit descriptors and handbooks. The programme specification is produced as part of the validation documentation and revised annually. UCA holds and maintains all student records for RSN degree students; the Course Leader completes monthly returns to UCA on student attendance.

1.22 The review team concludes that RSN fulfils its delegated responsibilities to make available information on the aims and intended learning outcomes and expected achievements for the degree course, that this provides a definitive record of the degree, and that it is approved, monitored and modified through consistently applied processes. The Expectation is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.23 Responsibility for ensuring that the degree is of a minimum threshold standard resides with UCA, and this is set out in the Collaborative Partnership Agreement. RSN follows the policies and procedures of UCA for the approval of its degree as set out in UCA's Common Credit Framework Regulations and Quality Assurance Handbook.

1.24 Adherence to UCA's procedures, combined with close monitoring and engagement with RSN by the relevant University staff, would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.25 The review team explored how RSN meets the Expectation by examining UCA's policies and procedures for programme approval, minutes of relevant committees, and the degree validation documents. The review team also met RSN staff and representatives of UCA.

1.26 UCA's Link Tutors and the external examiner verify the standard of the degree and assessments twice a year in accordance with UCA's Quality Assurance Handbook. Additional oversight of academic standards is provided annually via the annual academic monitoring report, external examiner's report and the Link Tutor's annual report. UCA also considers the performance and trends of the degree in comparison with other degree courses. UCA's Common Credit Framework Regulations ensure that the degree meets the requirements of the FHEQ. Although RSN does not have documented procedures for the internal approval or realisation of the degree prior to UCA's approval process, the team was satisfied that academic standards are set at the correct level. Records of consultation with students via the Course Board, the external examiner and Council before validation under UCA's process were evident.

1.27 UCA approved the course in 2014 for five years, following its earlier validation of RSN's foundation degree in 2009, and the top-up to honours degree level in 2011. A periodic review of the course is scheduled for 2019. The validation report from 2014 confirmed that the degree met UCA's Common Credit Framework Regulations. The approval panel for the validation event included one external academic and one member from industry. The panel approved the course with three conditions and one recommendation, which were subsequently addressed and were signed off by UCA.

1.28 The review team concludes that the processes for programme approval, as set out by UCA, ensure that the academic standards of the degree meet UK threshold standards. The Expectation is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.29 The procedure for awarding credit is set out in UCA's Common Credit Framework and the Assessment Policy Statement. Learning outcomes are specified in the programme specification and unit descriptors and were approved at the validation of the degree in 2014. UCA's Assessment Policy Statement notes that the purpose of assessment is to enable students to demonstrate that they have achieved the stated learning outcomes of a unit, and that they have achieved the standard required for the unit credit to be awarded. Credit is awarded by UCA at its Assessment Boards.

1.30 The arrangements in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.31 The review team tested these arrangements through examination of documentation, including UCA's Common Credit Framework Regulations and Assessment Policy Statement, and the external examiner's annual report. The review team also met RSN staff and representatives of UCA.

1.32 UCA staff confirmed that RSN's academic assessment procedures complied with the Common Credit Framework and Assessment Policy. UCA's Head of School also confirmed that performance of the degree was compared with other degrees awarded by UCA as part of its annual monitoring process.

1.33 The Course Leader manages the assessment process. Each unit is assessed via coursework, which includes a series of tasks aligned to the components for assessment and mapped to the unit's aims and learning outcomes. Course units contain formative and summative assessments, with assessment deadline dates published in an academic calendar for staff and students. All work is clean double-marked and a moderation overview sheet is created by the assessment team. Percentage grades are awarded using UCA's grading nomenclature and sample projects for all units are verified by UCA.

1.34 The review team checked the external examiner's report, which confirmed that the standards set were appropriate to the level of the award and comparable to awards at other institutions, and that students achieve the appropriate standards. The Course Handbook contains guidance on referencing and rules for academic misconduct. However, the style of assessments (portfolio-based containing practical and written work) means that this is mitigated by the individual and practical nature of assessments, with different projects set each year.

1.35 The team found a systematic and thorough approach to quality processes, including the award of credit. There is a close working relationship between UCA and RSN. RSN staff attend UCA's Board of Studies and Examination Boards and UCA's Quality Assessment and Enhancement Officer and Collaborative Provision Officer attend RSN's Course Board meetings. The UCA Course Leader for Textiles visits RSN throughout the year. The RSN

Course Leader is also included in the mailing list regarding academic developments at UCA. UCA's Collaborative Provision Officer is the primary contact for quality issues. Each year the Course Leader downloads UCA's documentation and shares it with staff and lecturers so all are aware of the most recent versions to work to. The Course Leader maps each level to the FHEQ with an increasing independence of study for students as they progress through the course. Students are also directed to the assessment criteria and how these relate to the learning outcomes in the unit handbooks.

1.36 The review team concludes that RSN's arrangements for the assessment of learning outcomes ensure that UK threshold standards and the standards of the validating University are satisfied. The Expectation is therefore 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

1.37 RSN follows UCA's academic principles and procedures, as set out in UCA's Quality Assurance Handbook, Collaborative Partnership Agreement and programme specification. This includes the processes for external examining, as set out in UCA's Quality Handbook, whereby the external examiner is required to report annually on the standard of the degree. UCA sets out its definitive course documentation which includes checks to ensure courses are reviewed and monitored and align with UK threshold standards and its own standards. UCA's procedures require the degree to be monitored annually and reviewed periodically on a five-year cycle. The annual academic monitoring report includes data on performance, achievement and trends which are compared against other degrees awarded by UCA.

1.38 The arrangements in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.39 The review team tested the effectiveness of these arrangements by scrutinising documentation including UCA's policies and procedures, external examiner reports, annual academic monitoring reports and minutes from Course Board and Council meetings. The review team also met RSN staff and representatives of UCA.

1.40 There was evidence to support RSN's claim that it works with UCA to ensure that what is submitted to UCA is of an acceptable standard. Besides UCA's monitoring and review processes, RSN's Council and senior management provides its own oversight to ensure the standards and quality of its degree course.

1.41 RSN uses UCA's annual monitoring template, pre-populated with data, which is completed and considered by the Course Board before sign-off by the University. The template allows for consideration of teaching effectiveness, assessment performance, feedback from the external examiner and students, and a course action plan. Performance and trends are checked against other degrees awarded by UCA. UCA monitors the action plans and expects actions to be completed within one year.

1.42 At the time of the review visit, a periodic review had yet to take place as the degree had been validated in 2014. However, there was evidence that processes had started for the periodic review, scheduled for 2019, with discussion at the Council meeting of April 2018.

1.43 The review team concludes that, given the timing of the periodic review and the evidence from annual monitoring, RSN has achieved its responsibilities for ensuring that UK threshold academic standards have been met. The Expectation is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.44 RSN follows UCA's policies and procedures to ensure that the threshold academic standards of the degree are set and maintained, as articulated in UCA's Common Credit Framework Regulations. Within the framework of these policies, external and independent expertise is used at various stages in the approval, delivery, monitoring and review of the degree and associated assessment processes.

1.45 A development team was established for the validation of the degree in 2014, which included external academic and industry representatives nominated by RSN and approved by UCA. UCA's periodic review processes include external and independent expertise and the degree is scheduled to undergo periodic review in 2019 under those guidelines. An external examiner, nominated by RSN, is appointed by UCA and feeds into the annual monitoring process. Further independent advice is provided through the role of the academic trustee on RSN's Council.

1.46 These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.47 The review team tested these arrangements by scrutinising documentation including UCA's policies and procedures, the validation report from 2014, annual academic monitoring reports and their corresponding course action plans. The review team also met RSN staff, a trustee and representatives of UCA.

1.48 The team found evidence of ongoing consultation with the external examiner, and of consideration of their reports. These confirmed the external examiner's oversight of assessments and fed into the annual monitoring process. Discussion with the independent academic trustee confirmed they provided an independent view as part of their role and, although not part of the team, staff had spoken to them about course development. The external examiner's report confirmed that UK threshold standards were set, delivered and achieved. The Course Leader confirmed RSN's benchmarking activities against external documentation, including the FHEQ, the Quality Code and the QAA relevant Subject Benchmark Statement. It was confirmed that the 2017 Subject Benchmark Statement for Art and Design would be taken into consideration and mapped against course content as part of the periodic programme review, scheduled for 2019.

1.49 The review team concludes that RSN makes effective use of external and independent expertise in meeting the requirements of UCA. The Expectation is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

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

1.53 RSN's engagement with UCA's regulations, policies and processes ensures that there is effective use of external reference points, including FHEQ, Qualification Characteristics and QAA Subject Benchmark Statements; that there are sound arrangements for assessment and the award of credit; there is effective use of internal and external expertise; programme approval arrangements ensure that academic standards meet threshold requirements; and definitive records are appropriately developed and maintained.

1.69 The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1 RSN is responsible for the design and development of the degree course and the learning and teaching strategy to deliver the course to the appropriate FHEQ level. As set out in the collaborative agreement, UCA is responsible for the degree's validation and approval. RSN follows UCA's policies and procedures for programme validation and approval, as set out in the University's Quality Assurance Handbook. When designing and developing the degree, RSN must adhere to UCA's Common Credit Framework Regulations. RSN does not have a documented procedure for programme design and development.

2.2 While adherence to UCA's processes for course approval would allow the Expectation to be met, the lack of a documented process for designing and developing the degree by RSN contributes to the recommendation in Section C.

2.3 The review team explored how RSN met the Expectation by considering documentation, including UCA's documented policies for programme approval, the report from the previous HER (Plus), the validation report from 2014 and associated minutes. The review team also met RSN staff, representatives of UCA, students, employers and alumni.

2.4 A course proposal form must be approved by UCA before a new course can be developed. UCA is responsible for ensuring the degree course is at the required level of the FHEQ, and for its validation and subsequent periodic review. RSN produced a programme specification using UCA's template. This includes learning outcomes and objectives. It is revised annually and published. RSN described its processes for designing and developing its degree. A strategy meeting at the beginning of the year is held before the course documentation is produced. This is presented to UCA for initial consideration before final presentation at the validation event. The process includes benchmarking externally. The validation panel has to complete a questionnaire to confirm that the benchmark mapping exercise has taken place.

2.5 The BA degree was first validated in 2014 and the validation process was judged to be effective at the HER (Plus) in 2014. UCA's process for programme approval was implemented satisfactorily and the panel made three conditions and one recommendation, which were subsequently addressed and were signed off by UCA via its Board of Studies.

2.6 Following validation, the course follows UCA's policy for material and non-material course changes, as set out in UCA's Quality Assurance Handbook. Material changes require approval at periodic review while non-material changes may be proposed annually. RSN explained that it wanted a cohort to complete the new degree before any changes were considered. Thus, the first non-material change to the degree since validation was the addition of an optional unit in Tambour embroidery. This was approved at UCA's School of Crafts and Design Board of Studies in February 2018 for implementation in September 2018. The changes proposed followed consultation with students and three industry collaborators.

2.7 Evidence of adhering to UCA's policies for programme approval was apparent. However, there was a reliance on the knowledge of key staff as opposed to written guidance for RSN's processes for design and development of the degree.

2.8 The review team concludes that there are effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes. The Expectation is therefore met and the risk is low. However, the internal approach for programme design and development is not documented and this contributes to the recommendation in Section C.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.9 UCA is responsible for student admissions. Admissions follow UCA policies and procedures with the exception that RSN interviews all applicants due to the specialised nature of the degree course and its location in Hampton Court Palace.

2.10 The adherence to the UCA Admission Policy and admissions procedures allows the Expectation to be met.

2.11 To test these arrangements, the review team examined the operation of admissions policies and procedures and looked at the information provided to applicants. The review team also met RSN staff, representatives of UCA, students and alumni.

2.12 The RSN degree is marketed externally through specialist publications, advertising, flyers, media releases, events and exhibitions, and via the RSN and UCA websites. Open days at RSN allow potential applicants to meet staff and current students ('student ambassadors') and to see degree study spaces, work in progress and finished work. An Open Day presentation highlights the course content and structure. Additional Open Days were offered in 2017-18, prior to the UCAS deadline. The students who met the review team found the information they received about the course before application was accurate, clear and useful; most had attended an Open Day and had found it useful in deciding on whether to apply for the degree course.

2.13 Applicants can apply via UCAS or independently. Applicants are sent details of the UCA applicant portal; applicants with a disability are encouraged to contact the UCA admissions team to discuss support needs. The Course Leader liaises with UCA admissions on applications and the scheduling of interviews, which are held in the spring and summer terms. Interviewees are asked to bring an edited work portfolio to interview, together with an example of their written work. Portfolios are reviewed prior to interview. The interview, with two members of staff, enables RSN to determine whether a candidate may be more suited to the certificate and diploma or Future Tutors programme. Students who met the review team spoke positively about the interview process. The review team considered RSN's application procedures effectively manage students' expectations about the degree course.

2.14 Applicants who cannot attend are interviewed by telephone, with a digital portfolio requested in advance, and an interview transcript is made to ensure transparency and fairness. There are set guidelines for interviews, including a pro forma that is completed after each interview and prior to an academic decision on entry.

2.15 Interview decisions are sent to UCA by the Course Leader and disseminated to candidates via UCA/UCAS. RSN is responsible for its own licence with UK Visa and Immigration and for issuing the 'Confirmation of Acceptance' (CAS) letters to International students that are required for Tier 4 (general) student visa applications. RSN degree administrators have attended training on completing CAS forms. From 2017-18, in

accordance with UCA Applicant Feedback Policy, the Course Leader sends an email to applicants explaining the decision. Decisions to reject are reviewed by the Head of UCA's School of Crafts and Design.

2.16 The programme specification is sent to applicants when they are made an offer. On acceptance, the RSN Welcome Guide is sent to students. Students who met the review team were satisfied with the amount and accuracy of the information they received prior to starting the course.

2.17 The review team concludes that the recruitment and admissions practices for the RSN degree adhere to UCA Admissions Policy and ensure a robust, transparent and consistent approach to decision-making in accordance with the admissions policy and procedures of UCA. The Expectation is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.18 The provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices for the RSN degree is underpinned by UCA's academic regulations and the requirements of the Quality Assurance Handbook and Common Credit Framework. RSN describes the BA as a design and concept led course. 'Learning through making' is central to the RSN strategic approach to the development and delivery of the degree.

2.19 Adherence to UCA policies and procedures on learning and teaching would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.20 To test the operation of these arrangements, the review team looked at relevant documentation. The review team also met RSN staff, representatives of UCA, students, employers and alumni.

2.21 Matters concerned with learning and teaching, including deployment of learning resources, are discussed at the termly RSN Course Board meetings, with oversight of the degree by RSN Council. The Course Leader, supported by the Chief Executive, oversees learning and teaching. The provision of learning opportunities is reviewed annually by the degree academic team at planning meetings at the end of each academic year. RSN staff who met the review team referred to good practice being shared and embedded in the course.

2.22 At the time of the 2014 review there was an Education Sub-Committee of the Council, which is no longer in operation. The review team was told that the subcommittee had primarily been established to oversee the transition from the foundation degree to the full honours degree and to assist the then course director in what was a period of change. Following this, RSN had considered that the role of the subcommittee was duplicating work being done elsewhere. The review team considers that RSN's current committee arrangements are satisfactory given the volume and nature of the higher education provision, but that should there be any significant development in the scope and/or volume of the provision RSN may wish to revisit the formal committee structure for higher education.

2.23 The degree offers small teaching groups in bespoke studio apartments with a specialist library and textile handling collection. In each year of the course, practice and theory are closely aligned with the opportunity to access the RSN handling collection and library to inform both theory and practice. Each year group has dedicated studio space. Studios are open from 09:00 on weekdays and, in response to a request from students, there is one late evening opening per week. Activities to develop independent learning include the studio culture, competitions and peer sharing of work.

2.24 RSN is committed to an integrated approach to learning and teaching, including studio practice sessions; individual and group tutorials; technical stitch; theory lectures and seminars; visiting lecturer workshops; peer-to-peer learning; critical viewing of exhibitions; shows; research and experimentation units in Years 1 and 2; live project unit in Year 2;

dissertation and critical reflection unit and major project unit in Year 3; and opportunities for extracurricular work and placements in all years of study. This enables each student to find the most appropriate way to learn.

2.25 Self-reflection is included in all course units and work placements, something that is valued by students and staff. The review team learned that the self-evaluation form used in tutorials has been adopted by UCA. Careers advice is individually tailored to each student.

2.26 Professional practice is embedded throughout the course and is responsive to student needs. There is a visiting lecturer programme, which allows RSN to work with industry practitioners with all student groups. Students are supplied with information on professional conferences and workshops by email, through posters or at meetings with staff.

2.27 The Live Project unit in the second year allows all degree students to work with relevant sector professionals, and there may be the opportunity for a student to participate in professional projects at RSN. Employers who met the review team commented on the professional approach of RSN students.

2.28 The student submission for the review had raised some issues about the availability and allocation of work placement opportunities. It was clarified at the visit that these issues had arisen from a particular employer changing its requirements. Students who met the review team felt there were sufficient work placement opportunities, with large projects spread between students so they all get an opportunity. Students were very positive about project/placement opportunities, and their value in helping with practice in the studio and in developing employability skills. Alumni spoke of how valuable work placements, and the course in general, had been in their subsequent careers.

2.29 Personal development of students is monitored weekly through presentations of their work at tutorials. Students are encouraged to share their learning experience with their tutorial group. Students were very positive about small group teaching on the course. Students get written feedback on their work and can also ask about an assessment during tutorials.

2.30 The review team considers the integrated approach to learning, including individual tuition, practice and experimentation, peer-to-peer and work-based learning, which supports the development of students' academic and professional potential, to be **good practice**. The careful and individualised pastoral support mechanisms which allow students to develop to their full potential, has led to a feature of good practice under Expectation B4.

2.31 Student course representatives who met the review team referred to actions taken by RSN in response to student feedback, including the introduction of a Combined Dissertation and Critical Reflection unit in Year 3; increased numbers of guest lecturers; employment of a textiles technician; improvements in allocation of studio rooms; and studio late opening.

2.32 RSN monitors and evaluates arrangements and resources to enable student development. Students commented positively on the RSN library and collection. Students noted that other learning resources at RSN were satisfactory, and that they can also use facilities at UCA campuses. Students were positive about being able to use resources at UCA, for example, laser-cutting facilities. However, they expressed some dissatisfaction with the arrangements for library loans from UCA as they have to visit the Farnham campus, rather than the nearer Epsom campus, to collect books.

2.33 Continuing professional development for RSN academic staff is identified through staff appraisal and course planning. UCA runs Course Leader away days and other staff

development opportunities. The RSN academic team is active in presenting papers as part of academic research/scholarly activity. Staff attend conferences and workshops to keep up to date.

2.34 The review team considers that RSN has effective processes to support, monitor and enhance learning and teaching, including systems to collect and act on student feedback and to support staff development. There is a feature of good practice identified concerning the integrated approach to learning, including individual tuition, practice and experimentation, peer-to-peer and work-based learning, which supports the development of students' academic and professional potential. The Expectation is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement

Findings

2.35 RSN undertakes, through its partnership agreement with UCA, to commit sufficient finance and resources for the operation of the degree course. Resources and other issues relevant to student development and achievement are considered at the annual Executive Partner Meeting. UCA oversight of the RSN provision is through annual academic monitoring and is delegated to the UCA School of Crafts and Design Board of Study and the Annual Executive Partner Meeting.

2.36 RSN's adherence to UCA policies and procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.37 The review team tested the operation of these arrangements through examination of documentation. The review team also met RSN staff, representatives of UCA, students, employers and alumni.

2.38 The Finance and Investment Subcommittee of RSN's Council considers resourcing issues for the degree course. Council holds an annual strategic planning day involving senior managers. Annual academic monitoring enables RSN staff to review arrangements and resources for students and how these are helping to develop student development and achievement. Action plans are considered at UCA and RSN Course Boards and at annual Executive Partner Meetings.

2.39 RSN students, as registered students with UCA, can qualify for loans from Student Finance England. Most RSN fundraising is aimed at providing student bursaries. Students are advised about bursaries in the Course Handbook, and a full list of available bursaries is published at the beginning of the autumn term. The Bursaries: Degree and Future Tutors Subcommittee of Council, which includes the Chief Executive, awards student bursaries. In 2017-18, 55 per cent of RSN degree students received a bursary ranging from £250 to £2,500. RSN also promotes links to various providers who can assist students financially in terms of sponsorship or scholarships.

2.40 Students are provided with the RSN Welcome Guide prior to the start of their degree course, which includes contact details for academic and administrative staff and an outline of the course induction week. The induction programme for the degree includes an introduction to UCA student services, introductory workshops by a UCA Learning and Teaching Librarian on research skills, and guidance on essay writing.

2.41 Students who met the review team were satisfied with the induction process. RSN students and staff referred to student support being discussed at induction; that information on student support was also available on posters at RSN and on MyUCA; and that students could contact the RSN course administrators or the Course Leader for advice.

2.42 Some RSN staff have disability awareness training and two staff members are trained in mental health first aid. Degree administrators attended mental health and well-being support events run by UCA, one qualifying in British sign language. RSN is looking to provide additional on-site support for students.

2.43 RSN staff work with UCA's Gateway Services Team to support RSN students with disabilities. Where needs are identified at application, UCA will put a learning agreement in

place. UCA specialist support staff undertake screening and support meetings with students at RSN.

2.44 Each year group is allocated a year tutor, who is the main point of contact at RSN in regard to pastoral and academic support and guidance. Students who met the review team were aware and appreciative of the support available to them and knew who to go to for advice and support.

2.45 RSN staff monitor student attendance on a daily basis and follow up non-attendance; staff also monitor late submission of work. Personal development of students is monitored weekly through presentations of their work at small group tutorials. Students referred to the good contact time they had with lecturers. Most students said staff listened to their issues and took action. Students who met the review team stated that staff were good at responding to student emails, and that they see RSN staff daily. At the end of each week, students are supplied with the following week's schedule, which includes information on staff availability and any external events.

2.46 The review team considers the careful and individualised pastoral support mechanisms, which allow students to develop to their full potential, to be **good practice**. The integrated approach to learning, including individual tuition, practice and experimentation, peer-to-peer and work-based learning, which supports the development of students' academic and professional potential, has led to a related feature of good practice in Expectation B3.

2.47 The review team considers that RSN has effective procedures in place to fully support individual student development and achievement. The Expectation is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student Engagement

Findings

2.48 RSN adheres to UCA's Student Engagement Strategy. It engages its students, both formally and informally, at course and unit level and also generally regarding their learning and personal development. Formal student engagement is predominantly via the student representatives and student evaluation surveys. There are two course representatives for each year of the course. They attend the Course Boards, which are held each term, and interim Course Board meetings which are ad hoc to allow for timely consideration of issues, if necessary. Training for course representatives is provided by UCA's Student Union.

2.49 Course representatives contribute to the annual monitoring process via consideration of the degree's annual academic monitoring report by the Course Board (the membership of which includes all the course representatives). Student feedback may prompt changes to the programme and/or its delivery. Students are also encouraged to engage informally with RSN and participate in external activities, including competitions and displays. Students contribute to their personal learning throughout their course.

2.50 These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.51 The review team analysed the effectiveness of student engagement by scrutinising how RSN adhered to the appropriate UCA policies, student representation at the Course Board and interim meetings and informal activities that take place. Board minutes, reports and action plans and UCA's policies were examined. The students' virtual learning environment (VLE) was viewed. The review team also met RSN staff, representatives of UCA and students. The team also discussed the student submission document, which was generally positive about student engagement, with staff and students.

2.52 There was evidence that RSN had considered suggestions made in the student submission and was implementing improvements, where possible and appropriate. An example was the hiring of a temporary technician until the permanent member starts in August, and the opening of the studios during the Easter break.

2.53 Students confirmed that two student representatives for each year group are elected by their peers. They receive a one-day induction event hosted by UCA to prepare them for their role. While helpful, students thought that the necessary information could have been covered in a written document rather than a visit to UCA. A part of the student representative role is being a member of RSN's Course Board; they make up a significant proportion of the membership of this committee. Students and staff confirmed that the Course Board is the principal mechanism for student engagement and that, informally, students can ask for extra meetings if needed. Students were satisfied with the feedback given to them following Course Board meetings and confirmed that besides feedback from the course representatives, minutes from the meetings were circulated for information. Other engagement mechanisms include unit student evaluation surveys and meetings with support and academic staff. While there are no specifically identified office hours, students felt they could email or talk to staff at any time. RSN also informed the review team that student focus groups were held for course validation and review events.

2.54 The size of the higher education provision and the specialist and vocational nature of the course allows for informal student engagement to be effective. Weekly tutorials, small

year groups and the opportunity for interim course board meetings mean that issues can be addressed in a timely way. Examples of changes made in response to student feedback include additional time for one unit, tutor guidance on the use of Photoshop, and the introduction of a new optional unit. Student participation is actively encouraged by RSN and students were positive about the impact of their engagement. Students feel they have a voice in the delivery of their course and their personal learning environment.

2.55 The review team concludes that RSN continues to implement the good practice of having effective systems in place to engage and respond to the student voice, as highlighted in the previous HER (Plus) report. RSN takes deliberate steps to engage all students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. The Expectation is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.56 RSN adheres to UCA's Assessment Policy Statement, which provides an overview of the University's approach to assessment and its supporting processes and templates. The Statement sets out the principles of assessment and the assurance of academic standards via setting, marking and moderating assessments through to demonstrating that the learning outcomes of the unit have been met before the award of credit. UCA has assessment templates; for example, formative and summative feedback forms, and assessment cover sheets. Assessments are delivered and processed within UCA's Common Credit Framework Regulations. Assessments are defined as coursework and may include written and practical work, presented as a portfolio within each unit. Student grades and awards are confirmed at UCA Examination Boards.

2.57 These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.58 The review team tested the operation of these arrangements by reviewing RSN's adherence to UCA's relevant academic regulations, policies and procedures, and by scrutinising the unit handbooks and external examiner reports. The review team also met RSN staff, representatives of UCA, students, employers and alumni.

2.59 There is a robust process for designing, setting and marking assessments and for feeding back to students. Work is clean double-marked with grades given before the overall moderation of the cohort. A third marker (internal verifier) reviews if there is a wide discrepancy, although this rarely happens. The external examiner is involved at appropriate stages. Theory work is sent to them and they view practical work when they visit. There is a matrix of how many units they see at each level. Staff conceded that anonymity is a challenge because of the nature of the assessments and size of the cohorts. Planning events to look at the spread and timing of assessments take place before the start of the year and there was staff training for those who were new to assessing students. Assessments are overseen by the external examiner and UCA's Link Tutor. UCA hold Examinations Boards, which the Course Leader attends, to ensure grades are submitted correctly.

2.60 Unit descriptors form the body of the course document and are used directly in terms of how the course's aims and objectives are built. The unit handbooks include assessment criteria for each learning outcome and are mapped accordingly. Each unit includes a series of tasks aligned to the components for assessment and mapped to the unit's aims and learning outcomes. Units contain formative and summative assessments, both providing feedback to students. The unit descriptors provide guidance to students on indicative grades linked to percentage ranges. Before the start of each unit, staff give a briefing on the learning outcomes and how they map to the assessments, so that students understand the assessment criteria, the mark schemes and what they must do to achieve their grades. Students found these documents informative, but some students reported that some of the wording used to define levels could sometimes be vague. However, they acknowledged that RSN staff provided explanation in their assessment feedback. Students commented positively on the self-evaluation which they had to do at the end of each unit.

They said this helped them evaluate their own progress and contributed to their personal development. Tutorials also include reflection methodologies that allows successful outcomes to be demonstrated and areas for development highlighted.

2.61 Feedback is given after both formative and summative assessments. Students commented positively on the assessment feedback they receive. They reported that feedback is specific, clear, helpful and timely and gave advice on what to do next time. They receive it one to two weeks after the assessment deadlines. Following student feedback to RSN on this issue, assessment feedback had improved so that it is now more personalised with bullet points. Formative assessment feedback is given as comments and may be developmental and individualised. An example cited was feedback from the technical stitch tutors in the first year so that students can enter the course with limited prior experience of stitch.

2.62 Students liked the strong element of self-reflection, the peer-to-peer approach to some assessments, the mark schemes with categories so they know what they have to achieve and, more generally, assessment feedback provided by lecturers. In particular, they reported how the Live Project helped them to develop themselves and their personal interests, and to build their experiential work into the course.

2.63 The review team concludes that the innovative approach to formative and summative assessment, including self-reflection, which contributes to students' personal and professional development is **good practice**.

2.64 Prior learning is discussed at interview and may form part of the portfolio considered for admission, but credits against the degree cannot be claimed due to the specialised nature of the course. Entrants may be admitted directly into levels 5 and 6 of the degree, following transfer from another higher education provider, but they must undertake an intensive summer course of technical stitch tuition to equip them with similar skills to their peers. The transfer of students from other universities is unusual and no students that the team met had transferred from elsewhere and thus done the summer course.

2.65 RSN follows UCA's Academic Misconduct Regulations and students must complete UCA's assessment cover sheet, which includes that they abide by UCA's regulations on plagiarism. Staff highlighted that the specialist and individualised nature of the assessments mitigates against academic misconduct.

2.66 The review team concludes that RSN operates equitable, valid and reliable assessment processes, 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. The Expectation is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining

Findings

2.67 UCA has the overall responsibility for the external examining arrangements, as set out in the collaborative partnership agreement. RSN adheres to the policies and procedures for the recruitment and appointment of external examiners as set out in UCA's Quality Assurance Handbook, Section G: External examining. The Handbook also sets out the role of the external examiner. The process aligns to normal higher education practice with the external examiner reviewing assessments and sampling assessed work for each unit, writing an annual report and attending Assessment Board meetings.

2.68 The external examiner process enables RSN to demonstrate that threshold standards are upheld and maintained. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.69 The review team tested the operation of these arrangements by reviewing RSN's adherence to UCA's relevant academic regulations, policies and procedures, by scrutinising the external examiner's reports and RSN's Course Board and Council minutes. The review team also met RSN staff, representatives of UCA and students.

2.70 External examiners are appointed by UCA following nominations made by RSN. A new external examiner was appointed for the 2017-18 academic year following the previous external examiner finishing their three-year tenure. New external examiners are offered an induction by UCA's Quality Team (also attended by RSN's Course Leader), although the new external examiner was unable to attend due to inclement weather conditions. However, the Course Leader ensured they were equipped with the information necessary for their role.

2.71 The external examiner's duties include activities at course and unit level. The external examiner's annual report is completed using UCA's template and includes a summary and qualitative section for comments. Completed reports are sent to RSN and UCA. The review team saw completed reports and evidence of them being discussed at RSN's Course Board and Council meetings. UCA staff confirmed they considered the reports as well as overseeing the processing of external examiner comments and recommendations through the Course action plan and annual academic monitoring report.

2.72 Examples of the implementation of actions following the external examiner's comments included improvements to the display of students' work and helping students to view each other's work. The external examiner visits RSN once a year to view students' work and to help provide context to their practical work. They also attend UCA's Assessment and Reassessment Boards. UCA publishes the external examiner's annual report on its VLE, which students have access to. The reports provided evidence that the external examiner checked assessments and sampled students' work. The team was satisfied that the external examiner is fully engaged with RSN and UCA's external examining processes, and thus provided confidence in the standards of the degree.

2.73 The review team concludes that RSN makes scrupulous use of UCA's external examiner. The Expectation is therefore 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

2.74 UCA has overall responsibility for the monitoring and review of the degree programme. The annual monitoring and periodic review process is conducted in accordance with UCA's procedures, as set out in the relevant sections of its Quality Assurance Handbook. RSN has adhered to these procedures for programme monitoring and confirms it will follow these processes when the programme is reviewed. There is an annual cycle of monitoring that considers course action plans, the external examiner's report, student feedback, student performance and the Link Tutor's report. UCA also has a five-yearly cycle for programme review although RSN has yet to go through this process.

2.75 These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.76 The review team tested the operation of these arrangements by considering documentation, including previous annual academic monitoring reports and course action plans, UCA policies and procedures, the external examiner's reports, Course Board and Council meeting minutes. The review team also met RSN staff, representatives of UCA and students.

2.77 UCA provides RSN with an annual monitoring template, pre-populated with student performance data, which is benchmarked and flagged if there are any issues. External examiner comments and student feedback from surveys (both internal and NSS) feed into the report. The Course Leader responds following discussions with the course team and produces the Course action plan, which is considered by RSN's Course Board and Council. Students contribute to annual monitoring at the Course Boards. It is then presented to UCA for sign-off by the School Board of Studies. The annual academic monitoring report is comprehensive and includes metrics, comparisons with UCA data, significant achievements, potential risks, student satisfaction data, external examiner feedback and employability data.

2.78 In addition to the formal UCA process for annual monitoring, RSN undertakes an annual review of the course in the summer. The Course Leader facilitates meetings with the course team, including visiting lecturers, to agree where changes and improvements can be made to the students' learning experience. Students confirmed that they contributed to this review and provided examples of improvements. These included their professional practice being integrated better into the course by linking it to the Live Unit in the second year and the critical reflection part of their dissertation in the final year.

2.79 UCA has standard processes for material and non-material changes to programmes. Material changes are done through periodic review, while non-material changes can be approved by UCA as part of the annual review of the programme, albeit one year in advance so that potential applicants can make an informed decision. The team saw evidence of student feedback being considered, for example the introduction of the Tambour unit.

2.80 RSN has yet to go through UCA's process for periodic programme review. The review team saw evidence that preparations had started for the next periodic review, which is due to take place in 2019. This included Executive Partnership Meeting agendas and minutes where the forthcoming review has started to be discussed, and discussions with

senior and academic staff at RSN. Course representatives confirmed they were aware that a programme review was to be done next year. RSN and UCA staff articulated the process that would be followed for the periodic review. This process is not, however, documented and this contributes to the recommendation in Part C.

2.81 The review team concludes that RSN's processes for monitoring and review of its degree course are effective. The Expectation is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints

Findings

2.82 RSN follows UCA policies, regulations and procedures for academic appeals, complaints and academic misconduct. Although RSN follows UCA's complaints procedure, RSN fulfils the first stage of the procedure through initial consideration of a complaint.

2.83 These arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.84 To test these arrangements, the review team looked at the operation of the appeals and complaints procedures through examination of relevant documentation. The team also met RSN staff, representatives of UCA and students.

2.85 Students making a formal academic appeal do so directly to UCA. Students are made aware of the UCA student academic appeals regulations and complaints policy, and how to make an appeal or a complaint. When students submit work they are made aware that by doing so they are confirming they understand and are compliant with the UCA Misconduct Regulations. All student written work is screened using plagiarism-detection software before being submitted for assessment.

2.86 The complaints procedure is clearly signposted in the course handbook. The first point of review for a complaint is the RSN Chief Executive or a member of Council. Only if the complainant is not satisfied with RSN's response do they take it forward to UCA.

2.87 Staff and students who met the review team were aware of UCA's appeals and complaints policies and procedures, and where to look for information. Students knew whom to ask at RSN if they had any concerns.

2.88 RSN academic and support staff provide a highly supportive environment for students and aim to identify any issues at an early stage. No formal complaints or academic appeals have been made by RSN students in the past four years.

2.89 The review team found that appropriate appeals and complaints procedures are in place and they are accessible to students. The Expectation is therefore 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

2.90 UCA has ultimate responsibility for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities in relation to working with others. This Expectation therefore applies to RSN in terms of its management of learning opportunities, which are delivered by work placement providers. RSN follows the UCA Placement Learning Policy and procedures.

2.91 These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.92 To examine this Expectation, the review team examined documentation relating to the management and evaluation of work placements. The team also met RSN staff, representatives of UCA, students, employers and alumni.

2.93 Information for students on work placements is provided in the programme specification and the Course Handbook, both of which are available on MyUCA. Work placements can be self-initiated or obtained through RSN. Work placements obtained through RSN may take place at RSN or externally, and may involve more than one student on a particular project. The Course Leader briefs students before they go on work placements.

2.94 The Course Leader determines the content and timeline of proposed work placements and the academic team decides how placements are managed on a bespoke basis. Placements are declined if they compromise the professional standards of RSN, or conflict with the academic timetable and potentially disadvantage students in their degree studies.

2.95 In meetings with the review team, work placement providers were very positive about their interactions with RSN staff and the professional approach and level of technical expertise of RSN degree students.

2.96 Work placement providers are supplied with the UCA Placement Learning Policy and are required to complete the UCA Placement Learning Agreement, which includes details of who will supervise the student and Employers Liability Insurance. Placement providers also complete a risk assessment form.

2.97 Students are asked to write a reflective report on their work placements. While work placements are not an assessed part of the degree course, it was clear from meetings with students, staff and an employer that students can derive considerable benefit from work placements in terms of their academic and professional development. Some students focus on specific research projects or career investigation rather than work placements. All students take the Live Project unit working with industry professionals, where their work forms part of the course assessment.

2.98 As noted in paragraph 2.28, the student submission raised issues about the availability and allocation of placements which arose from one particular placement opportunity. Placement students who met the review team felt there were sufficient work

placement opportunities and that RSN provided sufficient advice and support, in some cases altering coursework deadlines to enable students to benefit from a placement opportunity.

2.99 The review team concludes that RSN's arrangements for managing its relationship with organisations to whom it has delegated responsibilities for supporting learning opportunities are implemented securely and managed effectively. The Expectation is therefore 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

2.100 RSN does not offer research degrees therefore this Expectation is not applicable.

Expectation: Not applicable

Level of risk: Not applicable

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

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

2.103 The review team identified a number of features of good practice in the approach taken by RSN to managing the quality of student learning opportunities. In particular, the review team identifies as good practice: the integrated approach to learning, including individual tuition, practice and experimentation, peer to peer and work-based learning, which supports the development of students' academic and professional potential; the careful and individualised pastoral support mechanisms that allow students to develop to their full potential; and the innovative approach to formative and summative assessment, including self-reflection, which contributes to students' personal and professional development.

2.104 There are no recommendations in this judgement area, although there is a related recommendation in Expectation C concerning documentation of the procedures for the management of quality and enhancement (see paragraph 3.7). There are no affirmations.

2.105 The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities is **commended**.

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Findings

3.1 Information about the RSN degree course is published by both RSN and UCA on their websites, on social media, and in hard copy. All such information published by UCA or via external agencies is checked for content and accuracy by the RSN Course Leader. All published marketing and other published information about the RSN degree is checked by UCA for compliance with the Competition and Markets Authority Guidelines.

3.2 The arrangements in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

3.3 To test the implementation of these arrangements, the review team examined published information. The review team also met RSN staff, representatives of UCA and students.

3.4 RSN is responsible for producing the definitive course information, the programme specification, to a standard UCA template which the University publishes annually. UCA and RSN marketing and external relations staff work closely together to ensure the quality of published information on the RSN degree.

3.5 Students who met the review team said the information provided on the degree during the admission process was accurate and useful. Course and unit handbooks and other course materials are published on MyUCA, which students find to be a very helpful resource during their studies.

3.6 With regard to information for RSN staff with responsibility for academic standards and quality, the review team found that many of RSN's processes and procedures for the management of higher education provision are not documented. For example, the review team found that while RSN adheres to UCA processes for programme approval (that allowed Expectation B1 to be met), there is a reliance on the knowledge of key staff as opposed to written guidance for the design and development of the degree. Similarly, the review team learned that the internal approaches to periodic review and enhancement at RSN are not documented. The review team **recommends** that RSN develop and maintain reference material that provides a central resource of the procedures for the management of quality and enhancement.

3.7 The review team concludes that the quality of the information produced by RSN about its higher education provision is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The recommendation made relates primarily to information for internal staff. It is not indicative of a need for any major operational, procedural or structural change and presents no serious risks to the management of this area. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

3.9 The single Expectation in this judgement area is met and the associated level of risk is low.

3.10 There are no identified features of good practice and no affirmations. The review team made one recommendation, that RSN should develop and maintain reference material that provides a central resource of the procedures for the management of quality and enhancement. The recommendation is not indicative of a need for any major operational, procedural or structural change and presents no serious risks to the management of this area.

3.11 The review team concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the School **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 UCA's Quality Strategy states that the University is committed to the continuous enhancement of the quality of its students' learning opportunities. This strategic approach to enhancement includes the use of external and internal (student) feedback to enhance student learning opportunities; annual impact and effectiveness monitoring in relation to year-on-year data performance; and identifying and sharing of good practice through quality management processes.

4.2 RSN's approach to enhancement is to adhere to the quality assurance requirements of UCA, as set out in the Quality Strategy, and to take an ongoing and integrated approach to continually improving the degree course and its delivery. This approach is informed by data, critical reflection, external expertise and the engagement of students and staff at all levels. There is an annual review of the course which reflects on the previous year and plans for the forthcoming year, in addition to monitoring throughout the year.

4.3 While RSN does not have a documented enhancement strategy articulating this approach, these arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

4.4 The review team tested RSN's approach to enhancement by examining documentation, including annual academic monitoring reports and action plans, minutes of Course Board and Council meetings, unit handbooks and other documents, for example emails and schedules. The review team also met RSN staff, representatives of UCA, students, a trustee, employers and alumni.

4.5 There is evidence that RSN puts enhancement at the centre of its curriculum development and when enabling opportunities for its students. The course is systematically reviewed each year whereby the previous year's course is evaluated with regards to what worked well and what needs improvement. The plan for the forthcoming year is discussed and agreed among staff and lecturers before a degree year overview report is presented to Council. Visiting lecturers and part-time tutors, who are professionals in their own right, are included in these discussions. Enhancement activities are discussed and agreed to determine their impact. The course structure is designed to allow for some flexibility, so that ongoing improvements can be made relatively easily and promptly, although material changes are reported to UCA to seek approval.

4.6 When reviewing the course, various information is drawn on, including from annual monitoring activities, feedback from students, industry, the external examiner and the academic trustee, and through general benchmarking with other courses. UCA's Creative Education Strategy is also referred to and this has enhancement objectives intended to measure the course (such as internationalisation, employability, sustainability). Students and staff highlighted the opportunities (and success rate) for students entering competitions, which evidenced that the course is well connected and is well respected, both nationally and internationally. An example of a recent competition, won by an RSN student in two categories, was the coveted Hand and Lock Prize. Attendance at external conferences and workshops are also made available to students.

4.7 Students confirmed the ongoing drive to continually improve the course and provided examples which they thought had enhanced their learning experience. These

included changing round studio rooms, better integration with their project and placement work and more visiting lecturers. They particularly welcomed the critical reflection that had been embedded throughout the course and specifically in the Live Project; this helped them to develop themselves both personally and professionally in preparation for their future careers. Employers also commented positively on how well RSN students were prepared for the workplace.

4.8 The review team was confident that, although not documented, deliberate steps at provider level are being taken to improve the quality of RSN's students' learning opportunities. However, the lack of documentation to support this contributes to the recommendation in part C. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

4.10 The single Expectation in this judgement area is met and the associated level of risk is low. There are no identified features of good practice and no affirmations.

4.11 There are no recommendations, although there is a related recommendation in Expectation C concerning documentation of procedures for the management of quality and enhancement.

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

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms that may be used in this report.

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

Academic standards

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

Award

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

Awarding organisation

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

Blended learning

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

Credit(s)

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

Degree-awarding body

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

Distance learning

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

Dual award or double award

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

e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

Enhancement

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

Expectations

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

Flexible and distributed learning

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

Framework

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

Framework for higher education qualifications

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

Good practice

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

Learning opportunities

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

Learning outcomes

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

Multiple awards

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

Operational definition

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

Programme (of study)

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

Programme specifications

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

Quality Code

Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is the UK-wide set of **reference points** for higher education providers (agreed through consultation with the

higher education community, and published by QAA), which states the **Expectations** that all providers are required to meet.

Reference points

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

Self-evaluation document

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

Subject Benchmark Statement

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

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)

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

Threshold academic standard

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

Virtual learning environment (VLE)

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

Widening participation

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

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