



Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of University College of Estate Management

September 2016

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About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at University College of Estate Management. The review took place from 20 to 22 September 2016 and was conducted by a team of four reviewers, as follows:

- Dr James Freeman (student reviewer)
- Dr Steve Hill
- Mrs Alison Jones
- Mr Mike Ridout.

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

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

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

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

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.² A dedicated section explains the method for [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).³ For an explanation of terms please 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/about-us.

³ Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers): www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Educational-Oversight-.aspx.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about University College of Estate Management

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at University College of Estate Management.

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

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at University College of Estate Management.

- The robust assessment design and approval procedures that use the expertise of both academic and professional staff (Expectation B6).
- The use of integrated academic and support teams to take a strategic and collegiate approach to the design, delivery and support of student learning opportunities (Enhancement and Expectation B4).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to University College of Estate Management.

By April 2017:

- formalise its peer review activities to systematically enhance teaching and learning practice (Expectation B3)
- adopt a strategic approach to the timing of delivery that maximises opportunities for all students to fully engage in synchronous online learning activities, such as webinars (Expectation B4).

Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms** the following action that University College of Estate Management is already taking to make academic standards secure and improve the educational provision offered to its students:

- the steps being taken to induct and train student representatives to participate more fully in the quality assurance and enhancement of their educational experience (Expectation B5).

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

About University College of Estate Management

The institution was founded in 1919 as the College of Estate Management, with a charitable mission to provide education, training and research for the land, property and construction industries. It was granted a Royal Charter in 1922. In October 2010, the institution was awarded taught degree awarding powers and was subsequently granted University College title in November 2015. Since 2015, the institution has operated under the new title of University College of Estate Management (UCEM). Based in Reading, UCEM moved to new premises close to the town centre in July 2016.

The core purpose of UCEM is 'to provide truly accessible, relevant and cost-effective education, enabling students to enhance careers, increase professionalism and contribute to a better built environment'. UCEM has traditionally delivered distance learning programmes, although a new Five-Year Strategic Plan, brought in with the advent of degree awarding powers, has heralded a shift to be a fully online provider of programmes. UCEM's vision is 'to be the leading, vocational, online university'. UCEM currently has over 3,000 students registered in 110 countries worldwide, with 40 per cent of the student population studying overseas. The majority of students study part-time while in employment and all programmes are delivered and assessed in English through the UCEM virtual learning environment (VLE).

UCEM is governed by a non-Executive Board of Trustees. The Principal reports to the Board and is responsible for the management of UCEM as Chief Executive Officer. The Principal is supported by a Senior Leadership Team, composed of a Deputy CEO and Vice Principal Strategy and Business Management and four Vice Principals each responsible for one of the following areas: Student Experience; Learning and Teaching; Commercial and Business Operations; and Finance and Resources. A wider senior management group forms the Operating Committee that meets fortnightly. Heads of Faculty are appointed to the three academic faculties and oversee teams of Programme Leaders and UCEM Tutors, who are based in the UCEM offices, and Associate Tutors who work remotely. Professional services staff are grouped into four main teams that provide support to staff and students, namely Academic Operations, Online Learning, Retention Achievement and Success and Student Services. Two research centres have recently been established: the Property and Construction Research Centre and the Online Learning Research Centre. The purpose of these centres is to promote and enhance research activity within UCEM to the benefit of the sector and the student experience, through developments in research-informed teaching and online pedagogic practice.

The Academic Board is the principal academic authority and is responsible to the Board of Trustees for all academic matters. Academic Board delegates its powers to a number of subcommittees: the Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Committee (LTEC); Quality, Standards and Enhancement Committee (QSEC); Research Committee; Independent Appeals Boards; Progression and Award Boards; and Boards of Study. Outside of this committee structure, an Academic Audit Committee acts independently as a reference point for the Board of Trustees on UCEM's academic health. The policies and procedures governing academic provision are published in a UCEM Code of Practice. This consists of a series of detailed chapters dedicated to aspects of the quality assurance and enhancement framework, and is reviewed systematically on a two-year cycle through QSEC and Academic Board. The Code of Practice is complemented by other key documents such as the Academic and General Regulations and programme specifications.

UCEM has well-established academic partnerships with the University of Reading and the Open University for the validation of awards. Since the acquisition of degree awarding powers, UCEM has developed a student-focused strategy to manage the discontinuation of programmes validated by these awarding bodies, referred to internally as 'legacy'

programmes. The final cohort of students on Open University awards completed in July 2015 and those on University of Reading awards are envisaged to complete by 2018. To date, 14 new UCEM degrees have been approved, two of which have been completed and awarded under its own degree awarding powers. At the time of the review, UCEM had no other academic partnerships for the delivery of UCEM awards.

Strong relationships exist with professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) nationally and internationally, with a large number of programmes being accredited and/or recognised by such organisations. Industry representatives are also involved at various levels within the organisation through the Board of Trustees, external examiners, validation panels and Professional Engagement Forums.

Explanation of the findings about University College of Estate Management

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

1 Judgement: the setting and maintenance of the academic standards of the awards offered by the provider and the maintenance of the academic standards of the awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies

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 UCEM aligns its higher education awards against the FHEQ and the Higher Education Credit Framework. UCEM's Academic and General Regulations for Students are aligned to the FHEQ. In turn, these regulations ensure that the UCEM Code of Practice: Programme Development and Validation that includes templates for programme specifications and module descriptors is also aligned. Reference is made within these regulations and templates to Subject Benchmark Statements and UK credit values. UCEM also draws upon relevant internal expertise regarding subject benchmarks: for example, a member of the senior management team is a member of the subject benchmark panel for Land, Construction, Real Estate and Surveying. UCEM provides training to support its staff in carrying out their new responsibilities for aligning programmes with national frameworks.

1.2 UCEM is currently teaching out provision validated by the University of Reading. These programmes are subject to the validating body's own regulations and processes, and responsibility for alignment with the FHEQ therefore ultimately rests with the awarding institution.

1.3 The alignment of programmes to the FHEQ and use of other frames of reference allow the Expectation to be met in principle. To test the effectiveness of the above approach, the team scrutinised regulations, programme specifications and other documentation produced as part of UCEM's validation procedures. The team also met academic and senior staff during the visit.

1.4 UCEM makes frequent and effective use of the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements throughout the design and delivery of its programmes. For example, qualification levels and other reference points are outlined in the Academic and General Regulations and programme specifications contain provision for stating the levels of final and intermediate awards, Subject Benchmark Statements and a grid system that ensures learning outcomes for each level are clearly articulated and mapped against QAA and PSRB benchmarks. Unit descriptor templates contain clear indications of unit-level and learning outcomes.

1.5 Programme design and validation processes use external panel members to ensure alignment with frameworks and expectations, including professional body members where appropriate. Annual programme reviews ensure continuing alignment of units to programme outcomes and levels.

1.6 Staff receive effective training about national benchmarks and frameworks in the context of programme validation and assessment design. Academic and senior staff met at the review demonstrated a thorough understanding of national reference points and how these shape delivery alongside the requirements of PSRBs.

1.7 The review team considers that thorough use is made of reference points in programme documentation to secure threshold academic standards. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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

1.8 Overall academic governance arrangements and responsibilities are defined by UCEM's Royal Charter and Bye-Laws. A Board of Trustees oversees UCEM's educational mission and retains ultimate responsibility for academic standards. An Academic Board is responsible to the Board of Trustees for academic matters, and it in turn delegates its powers to its subcommittees as outlined above. Notably, QSEC is charged with securing the standards of awards, benchmarking, reviewing provision and evaluating the effectiveness of new strategies. LTEC is responsible for developing, monitoring, reviewing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities. Legacy, undergraduate and postgraduate Boards of Studies monitor, evaluate, approve and enhance programmes of study, for example by undertaking an annual review of programme documentation. A separate Academic Audit Committee sits outside this structure and reports independently to the Board of Trustees.

1.9 The regulatory framework includes Academic and General Regulations for Students and programme-specific Assessment, Progression and Award regulations. Regulations are reviewed annually by the Academic Regulation's subcommittee of QSEC and include input from external examiners where necessary. The UCEM Code of Practice provides the framework for all academic policies and procedures, which is reviewed at regular intervals. The Code and regulations are available to staff and students through the VLE and website.

1.10 The clearly defined academic governance structure and regulatory framework enable the Expectation to be met in principle. To evaluate operational effectiveness, the team scrutinised the minutes of key committees and met with staff and students to discuss the approach.

1.11 UCEM has established transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks for the award of academic credit and qualifications, which are aligned to the FHEQ. An Academic Regulations Subcommittee, which reports to QSEC, has been introduced following a review of regulations to consolidate responsibility for the production, amendment and evaluation of regulations. Staff and students met by the team understand the academic regulations as they relate to their roles and responsibilities.

1.12 Updates to the UCEM Code of Practice are approved through Academic Board, after which the Academic Quality Unit sets up training to outline the changes to staff. At the same time, updated documents are posted to the VLE and emails are circulated detailing implications for staff. One significant regulatory change was the introduction of in-year re-sits for legacy programmes which was made after consultation with stakeholders and has enabled UCEM to teach out its validated provision in an effective manner.

1.13 Academic Board maintains effective oversight of academic standards. Its membership allows the Principal and other senior staff to take an overview of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. In 2014, UCEM reviewed its governance arrangements leading to revised terms of reference and the addition of supporting subcommittees. QSEC conducts its business effectively as do Boards of Studies. Progression and Award Boards are carried out in accordance with their terms of reference and UCEM's academic regulations. The Academic Audit Committee provides valuable

trustee oversight of academic activities, and its functions are clearly distinguished from those committees with operational responsibility.

1.14 The review team considers that UCEM operates an effective academic governance structure and regulatory framework. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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

1.15 The definitive record for each programme is the programme specification which is used as the reference point for delivery. UCEM has templates for programme and module specifications and records of study that reference the FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements and PRSB requirements where appropriate. Proposed changes are recorded on a Programme Change Log, which identifies the appropriate scrutiny process and records dates when changes are approved. Programme specifications for the discontinuing provision with the University of Reading follow the awarding body format.

1.16 The design of these templates allows the Expectation to be met in principle. The review team explored the use of definitive records by analysing examples of specifications, programme materials and diploma supplements, and by meeting with academic and support staff.

1.17 Programme and module specifications clearly reference award levels and credit, relevant Subject Benchmark Statements and PSRB requirements and map programme learning to modules. These documents set out key information comprehensively including: final and intermediate awards; validation and professional accreditation; entry requirements; programme aims and learning outcomes; structure; and learning, teaching and assessment approaches. Programme specifications of legacy programmes have remained unchanged during run-out from the versions in force at the final intake to each programme and are similarly comprehensive.

1.18 Systematic records of study are provided through a Diploma Supplement issued to students on completion of their programme. This document is unchanged from the template used by University of Reading awards although the review team noted that information on the terminology for academic levels in the FHEQ required updating.

1.19 The definitive final copies of programme specifications reside with the Academic Quality Unit. These are made available to internal and external stakeholders via the website and the VLE programme landing pages. Programme specifications are systematically reviewed and approved annually through the Board of Studies and the Academic Quality Unit tracks cumulative programme changes.

1.20 The review team considers that UCEM maintains comprehensive definitive records of its programmes that constitute the reference point for delivery, assessment and provision of records of study. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.21 The design and approval of modules, programmes and qualifications are underpinned by the UCEM Code of Practice: Programme Development and Validation. This sets out the processes, procedures and documentation relating to programme approval and is designed to align with the Quality Code. New programme proposals are subject to preliminary approval followed by an iterative internal scrutiny process of programme documentation and a final validation event that includes external expertise. QSEC is responsible for appointing validation panels, and Academic Board has oversight of new and revised programmes to ensure that processes for ensuring standards are implemented appropriately. Since the acquisition of degree awarding powers in 2012, 14 major UCEM programmes have been validated.

1.22 The design of the process allows the Expectation to be met in principle. The review team explored the effectiveness of the approach by reviewing policy documents, validation reports and minutes of relevant committees and by meeting with UCEM staff involved in programme design and approval.

1.23 Validation events demonstrate effective use of external academics and representatives from relevant professional bodies, and approval is conducted in line with UCEM's frameworks and procedures. Academic Board demonstrates appropriate oversight of proposals for new or revised programmes.

1.24 The Academic Quality Unit exercises its responsibility for managing the approval calendar effectively, convening validation panels and maintaining records of validation reports and programme documents. All outcomes of validation events are reported to the relevant Board of Studies, QSEC and Academic Board and academic staff demonstrate good awareness of approval procedures and the relevant reference points for development. Where students transferred from partner universities' validated provision to UCEM programmes, detailed transfer arrangements are documented, which include student consultation.

1.25 An interim external review commissioned to assess UCEM progress since gaining taught degree awarding powers in 2012 found that arrangements for the management of quality, standards and information were robust. Some improvements for consideration were made and as a result the Quality Handbook was reconfigured as an introduction to UCEM's Code of Practice. A systematic development programme is also in place for revisions to the Code.

1.26 The review team considers that UCEM has effective systems in place to ensure that threshold academic standards for qualifications are appropriately considered and approved in the design of programmes. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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

1.27 As noted under Expectations A1 and A3.1, UCEM's programme development and validation process ensures credit, qualifications, learning outcomes and assessment methods are formally scrutinised and approved prior to delivery. The assessment of learning outcomes is then conducted in accordance with the UCEM Code of Practice: Strategy for Teaching, Learning and Assessment. All validated module descriptors state the learning outcomes and all summative assessments are linked to the assessment of learning outcomes outlined in the module descriptor. Module Award Boards review, finalise and record the successful completion of a module, the grade and the number of credits achieved. Progression and Award Boards confer UCEM named awards and Academic Board is responsible for ensuring and maintaining the academic standards of all programmes.

1.28 The design of the system and procedures in place allow the Expectation to be met in principle. The review team explored the effectiveness of the approach by considering documentation relating to the award of credit and qualifications and meeting with staff responsible for the oversight, operation and management of assessment.

1.29 The overview of the production process provides a clear and detailed outline of the steps required for internal and external verification and approval of assessment tasks. Assignment Marking Guides distinctly state the learning outcomes that will be tested by the given tasks and the assessment criteria that will be used to judge performance. The Scrutiny Board undertakes a thorough final review of the assessment artefact, assessment criteria and the marking guide to ensure fitness for purpose. Following approval by the Scrutiny Board, the coursework assessment is edited and then posted onto the VLE and in the case of examinations, these are held securely by the Examinations Office.

1.30 Qualifications are awarded in accordance with the academic regulations at constituted Award Boards that are attended by external examiners. External examiner reports confirm academic standards are met and that these are comparable to other higher education providers. For University of Reading programmes, Module Boards confirm the marks before results are deliberated at Results Boards and confirmed at the relevant Faculty Examiners' Meeting.

1.31 The review team considers that UCEM has appropriate assessment processes in place for the award of credit and qualifications. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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

1.32 The processes and procedures for monitoring and reviewing of programmes are set out in the UCEM Academic Infrastructure Introductory Overview and detailed further in the Code of Practice: Programme Monitoring, Amendment, Review and Discontinuation. Annual Programme Reports are produced using a standard template and draw on a range of information including module reports, external examiners' reports, key performance indicators and feedback from students and industry. These reports are considered at Annual Programme Review meetings after which they are revised accordingly for presentation at the appropriate Board of Studies. Each Board of Studies produces an annual summary report to Academic Board. In addition, Academic Board receives and approves a portfolio of annual reports including an Academic Quality and Standards Report and separate reports relating to complaints and appeals, retention and progression, academic misconduct, and external examining.

1.33 The design of the monitoring and review procedures allows the Expectation to be met in principle. To test the effectiveness of the approach, the review team considered annual monitoring documentation relating to programmes offered by UCEM and legacy partner programmes. The review team also held meetings with staff responsible for the oversight, operation and management of programme monitoring.

1.34 Clear reporting lines are in place through the various deliberative committees, ultimately to the Academic Board and the Board of Trustees, and documentation demonstrates that the processes for overseeing standards through annual monitoring are consistently applied. Managers and academic and support staff met by the review team described fully the operation of these committees together with the procedures for monitoring and their respective roles. Programmes validated by other awarding bodies are subject to annual and periodic review and UCEM fulfils the requirements of these bodies fully.

1.35 The first periodic review of programmes validated by UCEM since it gained taught degree awarding powers will take place in 2017, as part of a revalidation of the undergraduate suite of programmes. This will be undertaken in accordance with the Code of Practice: Programme Monitoring, Amendment, Review and Discontinuation.

1.36 Overall, the review team considers that sound processes are in place for the monitoring and review of programmes to ensure academic standards are set and maintained at the appropriate level. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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

1.37 UCEM uses externality in its programme design, development, approval and reapproval processes and through the use of external examiners. The Code of Practice: Programme Development and Validation sets out guidance on the range of external reference points and sources of opinion including external representation from both higher education and industry professionals. The Code of Practice: External Examining sets out the processes and procedures in place to appoint, train, support and manage examiners in their role. Each programme has two external examiners to represent both academic and professional practice perspectives.

1.38 The provision for engagement of external and independent expertise in UCEM procedures allows the Expectation to be met in principle. In testing the use of externality, the review team considered relevant documentation relating to external examining and programme approval and met with managers and academic and support staff.

1.39 UCEM maintains a thorough understanding of the wider needs of employers and industry through its close and well-established links with the property and construction sector, professional bodies and employer forums. In particular, an annual Professional Engagement Forum is held, the outcomes of which feed into appropriate Boards of Studies and Annual Programme Reviews. UCEM engages fully with its professional bodies and employers as part of programme development and approval, and effective processes are in place to ensure external input from both higher education and professional practice. Further external involvement and recognition is achieved through the successful accreditation of UCEM awards by PRSBs together with the subsequent review meetings that take place with these bodies. Staff met by the review team described fully the linkages with industry and articulated clearly the benefits accruing from this engagement.

1.40 UCEM engages systematically and actively with external examiners in accordance with its policies and procedures and with those of its awarding body. In ensuring that threshold academic standards are set, delivered and achieved, external examiners are involved in agreeing the content of examinations and in determining coursework assessment. External examiner reports are well structured and confirm the provision of sufficient assessment evidence that enables outcomes to be fulfilled and met, and ensure that comparable judgements relating to academic standards are made.

1.41 The review team considers that external and independent expertise is used effectively at key stages of the processes for setting and maintaining academic standards. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

1.42 In determining its judgement on the setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards at UCEM, the review team considered the findings against the criteria as outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All Expectations in this area are met and the level of risk is considered low in all cases.

1.43 The review team considers that UCEM has appropriate structures and arrangements in place to ensure that academic standards are set at a level that is consistent with UK threshold expectations and with internally set academic standards. Procedures for the maintenance of these standards, and those set by the remaining validating partner, are also sound and appropriately implemented. Governance, academic and regulatory frameworks are comprehensive in scope and have been subject to regular review and refinement, notably in light of the acquisition of degree awarding powers and the associated transfer of responsibility for academic standards. Good use is made of externality and independence at key stages of setting and maintaining standards through the involvement of external examiners, sector representatives and widespread links with PSRBs.

1.44 The review team therefore concludes that the setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards by UCEM, and the awards offered on behalf of other degree-awarding bodies, **meet** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1 The processes for the design, development and approval of programmes are set out in the UCEM Code of Practice: Programme Development and Validation. As summarised in section A3.1, this document outlines an iterative process of internal development and approval, resulting in a validation event, ultimately reporting to Academic Board. The process was designed to take account of the Quality Code and the requirements for PSRB accreditation and is periodically reviewed, with training provided in its use.

2.2 The processes outlined in the UCEM Code of Practice allow the Expectation to be met in principle. The review team tested the effectiveness of the approach by reviewing relevant documentation including sample committee minutes, programme validation reports and supporting papers. The team also met staff involved in programme design and approval.

2.3 Processes for the design, development and approval of programmes are clearly articulated and are robust in their implementation. The business case for a new programme is considered by the Product Board, with the academic case being considered separately by the relevant Board of Studies and finally approved by Academic Board. Validation panel nominations are approved through QSEC and normally include a student or recent alumni well as external and practitioner representatives. Validation panel members receive detailed training in procedures to facilitate effective participation and, in some cases, external chairs are appointed. Internal staff are also trained to support their role in the programme development process.

2.4 Comprehensive validation documentation includes programme and module specifications, relevant regulations and consideration of any relevant professional body requirements. Where relevant, professional body requirements are met through partnership meetings which consider programme provision and development as agenda items. Programme modules are systematically mapped to Subject Benchmark Statements and PRSB competencies to ensure thorough coverage of requirements. Following validation, academic staff work with the instructional design team to produce programme materials. Validation outcomes are reported to the Board of Studies, QSEC and Academic Board and programme development activities are recorded on the Programme Development and Validation Tracker document.

2.5 The review team considers that the processes in place for the design, development and approval of programmes are clear, effective and well documented. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.6 UCEM defines its admission protocols in its Code of Practice: Admissions and Recognition of Prior Learning, which has recently been revised and approved by Academic Board. The Code is benchmarked to QAA reference points, UCEM's own Royal Charter and sector best practice guidelines. Entry requirements are set at validation, stated in programme specifications and on the website, and are reviewed annually with recommendations for change made and approved through Boards of Studies. UCEM makes use of the National Academic Recognition Information Centre to evaluate equivalence of overseas qualifications.

2.7 Applications are made through a central Admissions Team, who deal with requests for the recognition of prior learning in accordance with the relevant programme Exemptions Policy, and operate a service-level agreement on applicant response times. Students may initiate their application through appointed UCEM Representatives who are agents based overseas. UCEM also has a centre in Hong Kong to support the admission and application process. UCEM collects admissions data and surveys its applicants. Complaints and appeals can be made through the complaint and appeals procedures as outlined in section B9 of this report.

2.8 Clearly articulated policies, procedures and entry requirements enable the Expectation to be met in principle. To test the operation of the admissions procedures, the review team met a broad range of students and staff involved in admissions. In addition, the team scrutinised published recruitment materials and sample admissions documentation.

2.9 The admissions policies and procedures are sound and the overall process is understood by staff and students met by the team. Professional services staff involved in admissions are well supported and trained and the different roles of support and academic staff are clearly understood. Suitable processes are in place for checking students' qualifications and identities upon application through a system of local verification. Entry criteria, international qualifications and language requirements are clearly articulated in programme specifications and on the website. Unsuccessful applicants receive helpful letters informing them of UCEM's decision, their right to appeal and other qualifications that may better meet their immediate needs.

2.10 Students consider the programme information received in advance of study to be helpful and accurate and designated staff are available to support students in the application process. As outlined in section C of this report, the information available for prospective students is subject to approval and quality control measures. Although some students reported that the weekly workload was not accurately described, the correct hours per UK credit are indicated on UCEM's website. Prior to formal online induction, the Student Advice Team contact students to check they have everything they need and programme leaders run a 'welcome webinar'. Reasons cited by students for applying include the reputation of UCEM in the sector, the extent of professional body recognition and positive recommendations from alumni.

2.11 International agents are used to promote programmes, although all admission decisions are made by UCEM staff and the information used by agents is created and approved by UCEM's marketing team. Agents are both verified before appointment and continually monitored. Student feedback contributes to an annual review of these agents and the Academic Quality Unit oversees appointments and training.

2.12 Clear terms and conditions govern the changes that can be made to programmes. Students receive these terms and conditions, and fee information, at the point of offer. Data on application and admissions is considered in aggregate at Academic Board and at programme level through Annual Programme Reports to inform any changes to the recruitment and admissions process. UCEM is in the process of enhancing its use of data through a data warehousing project.

2.13 The review team considers that UCEM has a well-defined set of admissions and recruitment policies and protocols that operate effectively. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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

2.14 UCEM's strategic approach to learning and teaching is set out within its Code of Practice: Strategy for Teaching, Learning and Assessment 2013-2018 which was approved by Academic Board in 2013. Following degree awarding power acquisition, the Strategy was partly superseded by an updated institutional Mission and Strategic Vision approved in January 2014 by the Board of Trustees. The Strategic Vision forms part of UCEM's Five-Year Strategic Plan to become an online university which uses technology to provide a consistent learning experience for students, wherever their location of study. UCEM guidance on work-based learning provides supplementary information to the existing Code of Practice.

2.15 LTEC maintains oversight of the learning and teaching strategies and reports annually to Academic Board on the effectiveness of the strategic approach to learning and teaching. LTEC has instigated a revised Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy which will be approved by Academic Board in December 2016, reflecting UCEM's increased focus upon online learning pedagogy, the Consolidated Enhancement Plan and the No Student Left Behind (NSLB) initiative.

2.16 Responsibility for the coordination of research and scholarly activities lies with the Research Committee, together with the Online Learning Research Centre and the Property and Construction Research Centre. UCEM's Senior Leadership Team approved a revised Research Strategy and this was followed by Academic Board approving revisions to a Research and Advanced Scholarship Code of Practice in June 2016.

2.17 The framework for teaching and learning allows the Expectation to be met in principle. The review team tested the approach through meetings with staff and students and considered a range of documents related to learning and teaching, including online resources.

2.18 UCEM's learning opportunities and teaching practices clearly underpin its vision and strategic approach to provide students with an interactive online learning experience. Students' learning opportunities are provided via the VLE, supported by webinars and a variety of technologies to enhance the learning experience, including e-textbooks, e-lectures, expert videos, tutor videos, e-learning activities, study forums, podcasts, study papers and quizzes. The VLE allows students to personalise their learning and access via laptops, tablets and smartphones is provided. Programmes are mapped to professional standards and academic levels so that transition to independent and reflective learning is supported progressively through the learning activities.

2.19 There has been significant investment in resources in terms of additional staff appointments, a new campus location, a revamped e-library and the CEM Academic Offer (CAO) Project. The CAO Project has led to the successful development of the academic portfolio solely for online learning. A new suite of academic programmes had been approved based upon these CAO principles. The project has resulted in positive developments for the VLE, such as the blueprint for modules that provides a consistent approach to online

pedagogy, unified learning resources for students and webinars to support synchronous learning opportunities. The NSLB initiative has also had a beneficial impact upon the student experience through the enhancement of learning materials, the variety of media approaches within modules and the revamped e-library. UCEM has been successful in achieving an International E-Learning Award for excellent use of online tools to facilitate learning.

2.20 Learning materials are managed effectively through a production system involving authors, instructional designers and editors who check the content and accessibility of study materials. The Online Research Centre has helped in the strategic drive for online provision by undertaking a benchmarking review for LTEC which has resulted in recommendations to further enhance the accessibility of learning materials.

2.21 UCEM has clear processes for the appointment, induction, appraisal and development of staff to support teaching excellence. Programmes are delivered through a combination of UCEM Tutors based at the institution and Associate Tutors who support module delivery remotely. An Academic Development Programme provides a schedule of events for staff to enhance online delivery skills and is supplemented by the VLE tutor development area and webinars. In addition, training webinars provide guidance to tutors on the incorporation of scholarly and research-led teaching. New members of staff confirm that they can undertake a skills gap analysis and access online training modules with mentor support before undertaking webinar delivery. All staff met were complimentary about the collegiate support available to develop and share new learning materials, facilitated by the instructional designers.

2.22 An annual Learning and Teaching Conference, established since 2009, provides useful opportunities for updates and exchange of good practice around pedagogy and delivery formats. UCEM intends to develop a continuing professional development (CPD) framework providing an accredited route to Higher Education Academy (HEA) fellowship in addition to enabling CPD activities to be captured and shared at the annual UCEM conference. Currently, staff are encouraged to gain HEA fellowship through other routes, supported by a UCEM tutor who is a HEA Principal Fellow. Staff met by the review team confirmed that HEA accreditation and the annual conference allowed them to showcase their teaching and research activities, including PhD work, and to share good practice. Staff also consider the quarterly Academic Forums beneficial in allowing exchange practices on the use of technology and to be responsive to student feedback by learning different approaches for content delivery.

2.23 A collegiate approach to peer review is facilitated through the medium of online delivery as all teaching interactions are captured and retained electronically. Programme administration teams monitor forums and learning materials and report to module and programme leaders as issues arise. Similarly, Module and Programme Leaders review forum threads produced by colleagues and both academic staff and instructional designers regularly access the recorded webinars conducted by colleagues to review the learning materials produced by tutors. Staff met by the review team provided accounts of their engagement in peer review as a constructive and supportive experience. Staff confirmed that peer review operated on an informal, ad hoc basis. There is no requirement for all staff to engage in a formal peer review process and thus there is currently no mechanism for the institution to use or evaluate outcomes to inform future approaches. Although the need to develop a more systematic approach to peer review activity has been raised through LTEC and Academic Board meetings since 2015, details are in draft form and still at the action-planning phase. In view of this, the review team **recommends** that UCEM formalise its peer review activities to systematically enhance teaching and learning practice.

2.24 The review team noted that online resources from an external provider had been recently used in the development of modules. These resources had been carefully

considered by the online team and Module Leader working collaboratively to determine the best combination of module learning resources. The review team was reassured that the lead time for producing learning materials was such that materials could be redesigned should such external resources become unavailable.

2.25 Overall, the review team considers that UCEM operates sound procedures to systematically review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement

Findings

2.26 UCEM's strategic approach to enabling student development and achievement is outlined in its Code of Practice: Strategy for Teaching, Learning and Assessment 2013-2018 which is complemented by the No Student Left Behind (NSLB) initiative. Strategic oversight is managed through LTEC which reports to Academic Board on monitoring, assuring and enhancing the quality of students' learning opportunities. Other relevant policies include the Code of Practice: Equality and Diversity, Code of Practice: Disability and Special Educational Needs and Code of Practice: Careers Education Information and Guidance which outline approaches to enabling student success in study and career aspirations.

2.27 The Student Charter sets out UCEM's commitment to work in partnership with students to provide a supportive and challenging learning environment. The Charter was developed in collaboration with students and emphasises their responsibility to engage with learning. Preparation for learning is addressed through a compulsory non-credit-bearing induction module and additional support materials.

2.28 Programme and Module Leaders, together with Student Services, share responsibility for enabling student development and achievement. A Student Advice Team operates as a single point of contact on the Student Central section of the VLE. In addition, a Retention and Success (RAS) Team provides student support and interventions to improve student progression and achievement, including responsibility for the induction module delivered through the VLE. Student Services has a strategic and operational plan relating to student development and achievement which is monitored through module reviews and measured against key performance indicators approved by Academic Board.

2.29 The NSLB initiative, launched in September 2015 to strengthen student retention, encourages staff to be accountable for resolving student issues, working creatively where possible to improve the service provided to students. NSLB activities now form part of the overarching strategic approach to enhance the students' learning experience. UCEM's Consolidated Enhancement Plan monitors all enhancement activities on a thematic basis, including NSLB, identifying responsibility for action, status and milestone deadlines.

2.30 The approach outlined above allows the Expectation to be met in principle. The review team tested the effectiveness of the student support mechanisms and resources through meetings with staff and students and considered a range of documents related to student development and achievement, including online resources.

2.31 UCEM continues to evaluate and develop its arrangements for support through activities aligned to the NSLB initiative. The matrix-accredited Student Services department was restructured in 2014, resulting in more clearly defined roles and responsibilities and the introduction of the Student Advice Team. UCEM has also invested in resources and new appointments through the RAS Team to support students through the development of study skills materials and guidance on use of e-resources, including the e-library. UCEM has also appointed an Academic Programmes Coordinator to support students on its legacy programmes during the teach-out phase.

2.32 The Student Advice Team works closely with the RAS Team, meeting weekly to discuss individual student cases and referring issues to relevant academic or support staff

as required. A readiness for learning questionnaire has been developed to support induction in which areas for individual additional support are identified and addressed. Students met by the team confirm that they are made aware of the support available from Student Central, including for dyslexia, mitigating circumstances and disability considerations.

2.33 The induction module, maintained and enhanced by the RAS Team, offers a well-conceived and fit-for-purpose introduction to the online learning environment and students met by the review team confirmed its value. The induction sets expectations effectively and introduces students to the key learning technologies and other study skills resources. Programme maps indicate clearly how each module develops during the student journey, supplemented by helpful weekly overviews and a progress bar providing a structured approach to support students' understanding and planning of workload. Synchronous and asynchronous activities such as forums, webinars and tutorials are beneficial in encouraging students to interact with each other and with their tutors and foster a sense of belonging through communities of learning.

2.34 Student comments on the method of delivery are generally positive and students particularly note the value of webinars and the desire for more to be provided in module delivery. Students note that webinars are not always held at times that enable full participation due to student work commitments or overseas time differences. All webinars are recorded so that they can be watched after the event, although this only allows for a passive rather than interactive experience. Senior staff noted that webinars do not introduce new material so engagement is not compulsory, although this did not resonate with the importance placed on webinars as a learning tool by both the staff and students met. Some staff had varied the timings of activities across the day, evening and over weekends, although it was noted that there was no directive to consider timings in light of the student cohort and there was also no current mechanism to systematically review student take-up. The review team therefore **recommends** that UCEM adopts a strategic approach to the timing of delivery that maximises opportunities for all students to fully engage in synchronous online learning activities, such as webinars.

2.35 The UCEM Code of Practice relating to equality, diversity and disability enables UCEM to ensure that any physical, virtual or social learning environments are safe, accessible and reliable for students. In addition, the Disability and Wellbeing Adviser provides directed support to students with disabilities and records are maintained in all programme reports. Individual support is provided to students on a case-by-case basis with adjustments made to reflect specific learning needs and explicitly recorded within Annual Programme Reports, providing effective monitoring.

2.36 The new Student Central facility on the VLE provides a proactive service to students who require advice outside the module teaching, enabling support to be directed effectively to the relevant area for response. Programme Leaders and module teams work collaboratively with the members of the RAS Team and Student Advice Team to respond to student issues effectively and to identify common areas for improvement. Staff work together on the design of materials to allow diverse perspectives and approaches to be reflected in the development of learning approaches and support strategies. The use of integrated academic and support teams to take a strategic and collegiate approach to student learning opportunities is recognised elsewhere in this report to be good practice (see paragraph 4.11).

2.37 The review team noted steady improvement in the overall student satisfaction evidenced through iGraduate surveys, despite some NSLB initiatives not yet being fully operational. UCEM has responded positively to feedback such as introducing an e-book platform to ease accessibility to core textbooks online and the strategic decision to allow for

in-year resit examinations on legacy programmes, which has enabled greater progression and completion rates.

2.38 Students confirm that programme content is highly relevant and reflects the needs of industry, improving their career prospects. All applicants, students and recent alumni have access to the UCEM Careers Service and the Careers Team confirm that location-specific advice on careers and employment opportunities is also made available to students.

2.39 Overall, the review team considers that UCEM has appropriate procedures in place to monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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

2.40 The UCEM Code of Practice: Student Engagement outlines the approach to the student voice and in particular lists opportunities for student engagement, such as representatives' membership of committees, student surveys, involvement in programme validation, and a commitment to share outcomes from external reports and surveys. UCEM recognises the challenge of engaging learners who are studying entirely online and has recently developed key performance indicators as part of a strategic effort to increase student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement. It has also worked with students to articulate its commitment to student representation in a Student Charter.

2.41 UCEM has designed a three-tier system of student representation. First, each programme can appoint a cohort student representative to report issues raised by their peers and feed back on actions taken by staff. Second, student representatives are invited to sit on deliberative committees, such as Academic Board and Boards of Studies. Third, after a competitive nomination process, UCEM appoints a Lead Student Representative who sits on the Board of Trustees and liaises fortnightly with the Vice Principal. Opportunities to become student representatives and take part in deliberative committees are published on the VLE and in the Student Handbook. A Student Representative Handbook outlines procedures for election and support. In addition to this system of representation, UCEM gathers student feedback through a range of surveys, such as the iGraduate institution-wide survey and module-level feedback forms.

2.42 The combination of programme and institutional-level feedback mechanisms enables the Expectation to be met in principle. To evaluate the effectiveness of the approach, the review team scrutinised relevant documentation including committee minutes and student survey results. The team also met with students, their representatives and members of staff.

2.43 Student representatives are involved effectively in programme validation procedures, including as members of the panel. Likewise, the terms of reference for annual programme reviews enable student representatives to be included in annual monitoring processes and students have also participated in the annual staff conference. Provision is in place for Programme Leaders to hold discussions with student representatives each semester. Some students met by the team were aware of having a representative, although most reported little or no communication with their representative. Reports on meetings held with students and their representatives are now included on Boards of Studies agendas to encourage greater consistency in practice.

2.44 Engagement of students in deliberative committees is a challenge given the online nature of provision and UCEM has recently re-advertised vacant roles, having taken advice from the Lead Student Representative on how to encourage greater participation. From 2016, student representatives are now members of QSEC, LTEC, Boards of Studies and Academic Board with regular agenda items for student comments. In particular, the appointment of a Lead Student Representative, and their position as a Trustee, has significantly improved the student voice within the senior committees of UCEM.

2.45 UCEM provides a Student Representative Handbook and the chairs of deliberative committees meet with new student members before their first meeting. The Student Liaison

Officer also offers briefings to student representatives. However, not all student representatives met by the review team reported that training or support had been provided and evidence indicated that the effectiveness of student representatives could be improved. UCEM have put in place an action plan to provide additional training beyond induction, which includes plans to develop a more formal role specification and organise training sessions on how best to gather and present feedback to staff. The production of these training materials was not yet complete at the time of the review and the team therefore **affirms** the steps being taken to induct and train student representatives to participate more fully in the quality assurance and enhancement of their educational experience.

2.46 In light of low survey participation rates in 2015, UCEM has reduced the number of surveys to minimise the demands on students. One consequence of this, however, has been a reduction in UCEM's ability to systematically collect qualitative feedback, since the iGraduate survey and module-level feedback focus on quantitative feedback. In mitigation, Academic Board receives a rigorous analysis of the iGraduate survey outcomes and the Module Leader Report form captures both informal and formal student feedback. Student representatives can also raise concerns via an online forum and a webinar introduced to explore survey results. Moreover, the Student Experience Team monitor the representatives' forum to quickly address issues raised and a short weekly feedback survey now features a limited amount of qualitative feedback to enable tutors to adapt delivery. Tutors are also now trained in how best to encourage feedback.

2.47 Good use is made of student feedback to inform improvements and both students and staff cited numerous examples of changes made in response to student comments. Programme reviews consider student feedback and Support Services also make use of student feedback to improve provision and actively seek feedback as part of their matrix accreditation. Changes made in response to feedback have not always been effectively communicated to students. Academic Board is taking a more strategic approach to address this, including greater use of the Student Hub to communicate institutional responses and for changes to module delivery to be flagged to students through the VLE.

2.48 Overall, the review team considers that mechanisms for involving students as partners in quality assurance processes are generally sound, although the effectiveness has been limited by the levels of student engagement to date. Current initiatives are seeking to address this engagement and the team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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

2.49 UCEM's assessment procedures are set out in the Code of Practice: Strategy for Teaching, Learning and Assessment. General and programme-specific Assessment, Progression and Awards Regulations are in place which are reviewed regularly through the Academic Regulations Subcommittee of QSEC. Scrutiny Boards operate to ensure that assessments are appropriately written and set at the right level prior to issue. Following assessment submission, a two-stage moderation process takes place to consider marks. Module Boards and Progression and Award Boards (named Results Boards for legacy programmes) approve module marks, check student progression and award qualifications.

2.50 Policies and procedures are in place to ensure assessments are designed and conducted to meet the needs of students studying in different locations and for those with protected characteristics who may need reasonable adjustments. Support systems are provided for staff to manage, undertake and monitor assessment together with providing timely feedback to support student learning. Good academic practice is developed through the induction module and supporting materials are available on the VLE. Information on collusion and plagiarism is available in the Student Handbook and Academic Misconduct Policy with the Academic Board receiving an annual report on any cases of misconduct.

2.51 The design of the approach to assessment allows the Expectation to be met in principle. To test the approach, the review team considered documentation relating to the processes for managing, assuring and reporting the outcomes of assessment. Meetings were also held with staff and students to discuss their assessment experiences.

2.52 The assessment production process clearly outlines the timetable and steps to be taken for the approval of assignment briefs and examination papers. Using a standardised template, Module Leaders author assessments in the semester prior to delivery which are then subject to internal verification and to comment by the external examiner with iterative amendments made as required. The final production stage involves the Scrutiny Board checking assessment components and advising on alignment with UCEM assessment policy, module intended learning outcomes and the appropriateness of the assessment type and academic level. This Board comprises academic staff and members of the RAS Team who comment on the proposed assessment task in terms of its accessibility to students studying remotely and across different countries. Managers and academic and support staff met by the review team spoke of the effectiveness and value of the Scrutiny Board and the benefit accruing from the range of staff involved in this process. The review team considers the robust assessment design and approval procedures that use the expertise of both academic and professional staff to be **good practice**.

2.53 UCEM and Associate Tutors are supported in their role through the Engaging Our Students programme and the tutor resources available on the VLE. Staff new to assessment are mentored in their role by the Programme Leader or Module Leader. Academic staff met by the review team confirmed the availability and value of support for assessment.

2.54 Students are prepared for academic writing through the completion of the compulsory induction module which includes activities designed to develop writing and referencing skills. The Student Handbook provides supporting information on coursework and preparing for examination, with additional resources available on the VLE. Students met by the review team noted the value of the induction module and other resources available in helping their understanding of academic writing and plagiarism. Students confirm that requirements for assessment are clearly articulated and that feedback on assignments is generally received in line with the timings outlined in the Student Charter. The timely electronic return of feedback on assessments is monitored by support staff and centrally documented. Students met by the review team highlighted the value and usefulness of feedback received, although a few comments were made regarding the slow return of hard copies of the assessment artefact. UCEM plans to move to fully online submission which will address this issue. Formal procedures are in place for mitigating circumstances and extensions, and these are clearly articulated, available to students on the VLE and understood by the students met by the team.

2.55 Assessment moderation uses a two-stage process that is clearly documented and a report is produced for each module and made available to the Award Boards. The Code of Practice: Board of Examiners sets out the conduct of the Module Board and Progression and Award Board. External examiner reports and minutes of the boards demonstrate their effective operation. Staff met by the review team demonstrate a clear understanding of the assessment processes in place, including the operation of the Award Boards, the security of examinations, the recording of student outcomes and the award of credit and qualifications. Procedures for the recognition of certificated prior learning operate in line with the Code of Practice: Admissions and Recognition of Prior Learning.

2.56 Comprehensive processes and procedures are in place to ensure that examinations are conducted in a secure and appropriate manner at all stages. Students are provided with detailed guidance and supporting documentation to ensure their understanding of the examination process.

2.57 UCEM is currently undertaking a thematic review of assessment, exploring ways to provide feedback to students on examinations and the use of online marking of examinations to improve the timeliness of publishing results. Staff met by the review team confirmed the progress being made with these developments.

2.58 Overall, the review team considers that UCEM operates equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment that enable students to achieve their intended outcomes. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining

Findings

2.59 The Code of Practice: External Examining sets out the procedures for appointment, induction and development as well as stating the responsibilities of all parties involved. Two external examiners are appointed to each programme to facilitate representation from both academic and professional practice backgrounds. The External Examiner Appointments subcommittee of QSEC is responsible for reviewing and approving nominations and UCEM offers a training programme. External examiners are required to review and comment on draft assessment tasks, samples of completed student assessments and other relevant documents. External examiners also attend both the Module and the Progression and Award Boards (although only the latter in respect of legacy programmes where this is known as a Results Board) and submit an annual report to the institution. Systems are in place for receiving and responding to external examiner reports and for using these reports in annual monitoring. Students are given access to external examiner reports and the UCEM response.

2.60 The design of the external examining procedure allows the Expectation to be met in principle. To test the approach, the review team considered relevant documentation, including external examiner reports and evidence of actions taken in response. The team also discussed the approach with staff and students.

2.61 Robust processes and procedures are in place for the appointment of external examiners which include the use of clear criteria and specifications for the role together with a nomination process to confirm the proposal and ensure there are no conflicts of interest. The External Examiners Subcommittee acts on behalf of QSEC to approve and ensure the appointment of external examiners has been undertaken appropriately.

2.62 As set out in the Code of Practice, the Head of Assessment oversees the management of the external examining process. External examiner reports are reviewed by the relevant Programme Leader and Head of Faculty, and responded to through a standard pro forma with a covering letter. Reports from external examiners inform the annual monitoring process and the production of the Annual Programme Reports and Quality Enhancement Action Plan. A summary of all external examiner report findings is compiled for review by each Board of Studies. In addition, a clearly presented annual report is provided to Academic Board, which analyses external examiner feedback relating to the achievement of academic standards, the effectiveness of assessment processes, sector comparability of student performance, the management of Award Boards and the usefulness of support. The review team confirmed that responsibilities for the receipt, response to and use of feedback within UCEM are fully understood by staff involved in the process.

2.63 External examiners are provided with access to an area within the VLE which holds relevant information, including the External Examiner Handbook. A training programme is also available to support external examiners in their role and plans are in place to provide a compulsory online induction module as part of this support. Access to external examiner reports and the responses made is provided through the VLE although there was variable awareness among the students met by the team on the role of external examiners and the availability of reports.

2.64 External examiner reports reviewed by the team confirm the comparability of academic standards and the quality of student learning opportunities. In addition, external

examiners confirm that the management of the process and the organisation of boards are sound.

2.65 Overall, the review team considers that appropriate procedures are in place and that UCEM makes consistent and effective use of external examiners to maintain academic standards and the quality of student learning opportunities. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review

Findings

2.66 As outlined in section A3.3, the processes and procedures for monitoring and reviewing programmes are set out in the UCEM Academic Infrastructure Introductory Overview and detailed further in the Code of Practice: Programme Monitoring, Amendment, Review and Discontinuation. Under this approach, programmes are subject to annual monitoring processes and to periodic review on a five-yearly basis, the outcomes of which are reported to Boards of Studies and Academic Board.

2.67 The policies and procedures in these key documents allow the Expectation to be met in principle. The review team tested the approach through meetings with staff and students during the visit and by considering a range of programme monitoring and review documentation.

2.68 The Code of Practice clearly sets out systematic processes for the monitoring and review of programmes. The Academic Quality Unit arranges a programme of development events to ensure that staff maintain knowledge of the programme monitoring processes. Training and guidance documentation is provided to any external participants or students involved in programme reviews, with additional face-to-face support from professional staff as required. Staff met by the review team demonstrated a good understanding of the processes and their respective responsibilities for annual monitoring.

2.69 Annual Module Leader reports follow a standardised template and comment upon the review of modules against key performance indicators which also highlight any issues arising from the operation of the module, module evaluations, feedback from students and external examiners. Actions are incorporated into the Quality Enhancement Action Plan, the progress of which is monitored by the Board of Studies in accordance with its terms of reference for overseeing quality, standards and enhancement. Feedback from industry is also gathered formally via Professional Engagement Forums and used to inform monitoring reports and action plans.

2.70 An Annual Programme Report is produced by the programme leader and subject to scrutiny through Annual Programme Review meetings governed by appropriate terms of reference and membership. These meetings now consider all programmes across each level, to enable a broader review and dissemination of both issues and good practice. Staff met by the team confirmed that this new approach facilitates closer, more effective review of common issues affecting undergraduate or postgraduate provision. Legacy programmes continue to be subject to individual meetings with a final report produced for the University of Reading.

2.71 Strategic oversight of programme monitoring and review is maintained through a summary of overarching issues from annual monitoring reports submitted by Boards of Studies and through an annual Academic Quality and Standards Report, presented to the Academic Board and reviewed by the Academic Audit Committee. The Academic Audit Committee plays a significant institutional role in monitoring and reviewing programmes and the inclusion of external representation allows for alternative, critical perspectives. The presentation of data arising from monitoring reports will be a new feature for the

Committee to inform consideration of future UCEM priorities and the impact of strategic approaches.

2.72 Periodic Review and Revalidation (PRR) is due to be undertaken every five years although no post-2013 UCEM awards have yet reached this point. Annual monitoring informs PRR, together with feedback from industry, the academic community and external examiners. Events follow a similar process to validation events whereby programme documents are reviewed and discussed with the programme team by an external panel of specialists drawn from academia and professional practice. PRR may also be triggered where the cumulative effect of major/minor changes necessitates a fuller review.

2.73 Authority to discontinue programmes of study, either for a temporary period or permanently, rests with either the Academic Board in terms of the academic viability or the Principal, who can discontinue a programme on grounds of financial viability or resource availability. As part of annual monitoring for legacy programmes, a Quality Enhancement and Programme Closure Plan is completed, enabling activities to be effectively monitored and progressed by UCEM, with clearly identified lines of responsibility and deadlines.

2.74 The review team considers that UCEM operates effective, regular and systematic processes for the monitoring and review of programmes. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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

2.75 The Student Charter outlines UCEM's commitment to fair and transparent complaints and appeals procedures. The Code of Practice: Student Appeals and Complaints outlines the procedure and incorporates the Student Complaints Policy and Procedure, Complaints Form and Student Appeals Candidate Guidance Notes. In addition, an overview of the process is provided in the Academic and General Regulations for Students. The policy documents are subject to regular review and approved by Academic Board. Academic Board annually reviews and approves the terms of reference for the Appeals Board and receives an annual summary report of cases. Cases are also considered through the Quarterly Business Review meetings.

2.76 Following a common initial stage in which attempts are made towards an informal resolution, the complaints and appeals procedures diverge. For complaints, an Investigating Officer is appointed at stage two to gather evidence and if the complaint proceeds to stage three, an external reviewer is appointed to ensure that the complaints process has been fairly administered. No complaints have reached this stage to date. For appeals, stage two involves investigation by an Independent Appeals Board. As with the complaints procedures, if an appeal were to progress to stage three, an external would be appointed to audit the process.

2.77 The complaints and appeals policies and procedures outlined in the documents above enable the Expectation to be met in principle. To evaluate the effectiveness of implementation, the review team analysed relevant documentation, including anonymised cases, and met with staff and students to discuss their experience.

2.78 Appropriate information and advice about complaints and appeals is readily available to students and signposted at various stages of the learning journey. For example, the Academic and General Regulations for Students, which contains an overview, is available via the website and VLE and this document is also issued to students when they receive an offer to study. Likewise, the Student Complaints Policy and Procedure and complaints form are published online. Furthermore, the UCEM Student Handbook helpfully signposts students to relevant policies. Students met by the team demonstrate an awareness of the complaints and appeals procedures, but a minority were less clear about the distinction between the informal and formal approach, particularly in light of a case where marks were changed. UCEM staff confirmed that marks are only adjusted outside the appeals process as part of standard, defined moderation and assessment procedures.

2.79 Students can raise complaints via the Student Advice Team or through the Student Central online service. Concerns can also be raised through the 'Have your Say' section of the VLE, contact with Programme Leaders, tutors or student representatives. In particular, some informal complaints are made via the Student Representative Forum where these are dealt with by the Student Experience Team. Although most students seek advice primarily from their tutors, the Complaints Officer and Independent Appeals Board Secretary provide detailed advice about the processes, with the support of the Student Adviser. The Lead Student Representative also serves as an Independent Complaints Officer and therefore provides valuable student involvement in the quality assurance of these processes and their implementation.

2.80 UCEM investigates and responds to complaints and appeals in an effective and timely manner. UCEM takes a diligent approach to storing records of complaints and appeals with all correspondence, including potential appeals and complaints, logged centrally. The log of formal and informal complaints enables staff to effectively track individual complaints through to completion and monitor overall responsiveness and issues arising. The Senior Leadership Team monitor the number of complaints and appeals effectively at Quarterly Business Review meetings and annual figures are considered by Academic Board.

2.81 The review team considers that UCEM's procedures for complaints and appeals are well designed, freely available and effectively supported. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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

2.82 A Code of Practice: Collaborative Arrangements is in place to govern partnership arrangements which has been developed in line with relevant sections of the Quality Code. A Guidance on Work Based Learning document has also been produced to define the institutional approach to incorporating work experiences into programmes.

2.83 The design of these processes enables the Expectation to be met in principle. The review team explored this area through the review of documentation available and through discussions with staff.

2.84 UCEM currently delivers all aspects of its programmes and has no arrangements whereby delivery of learning opportunities is devolved to a partner. Some modules involve work-based learning whereby students draw on experiences from within industry to compile a portfolio for assessment, although involvement of employers in delivery is restricted and there are currently no defined periods of placement learning required within UCEM programmes. In some modules, students are encouraged to seek workplace mentors to guide their professional development, and guidance for students and employers, including a three-way learning agreement, is available, although such relationships are not required to fulfil the intended learning outcomes of the modules.

2.85 The team considers that appropriate procedures are in place to manage the delivery of learning opportunities with other organisations should such arrangements arise. The review team therefore considers that the Expectation is met and the 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

2.86 UCEM does not offer research degree awards.

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.87 In determining its judgement on the quality of student learning opportunities at UCEM, the review team considered the findings against the criteria as outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All Expectations in this area are met and the level of risk is considered low in all cases.

2.88 UCEM has a clear strategic framework and robust quality assurance mechanisms to monitor and enhance the quality of student learning opportunities. Overall, arrangements for the provision and monitoring of learning opportunities are sound and operate effectively. As recognised later in this report, academic and professional teams work effectively across the institution in the design, delivery and evaluation of student learning opportunities. Of particular note is the robust approach to assessment design, which incorporates the expertise of a range of internal and external staff in the iterative development and approval of assessment tasks.

2.89 The review team recognises the challenge that the mode of delivery places on student engagement with quality assurance processes. Student inputs, particularly through the representation system, have been limited to date, although the review team affirms the steps that the institution has taken to address this issue through training. The review team also notes some areas where action should be taken to strengthen processes, namely to formalise the peer review approach to allow for systematic engagement and enhancement of teaching and learning practices and also to adopt a strategic approach to ensure that opportunities to maximise student engagement in synchronous online learning are considered in programme planning and delivery. These changes do not require major structural or operational changes to procedures and the review team therefore considers these areas of development to be low risk.

2.90 Overall, the review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at UCEM **meets** UK expectations.

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Findings

3.1 The Code of Practice: Public Information outlines the institutional approach to managing information and has been developed to take account of the Quality Code and the requirements of the Competition and Markets Authority. A Management of Public Information document, approved by Academic Board, describes processes and responsibilities for programme and non-programme information. Programme information for prospective students is made available through the prospectus and website, which is reviewed annually following the review of programme specifications by the relevant Board of Studies. Information for current students is initially provided through a Student Handbook which is supplemented by programme-level information on the VLE. The VLE is also used to facilitate access to other documentation such as key student policies, procedures and regulations, quality assurance reports and the Student Charter.

3.2 The design of the processes allows the Expectation to be met in principle. The review team tested the approach through discussions with staff and students and scrutinised published information, including the website, VLE, handbooks and diploma supplements.

3.3 UCEM's mission, values and strategy are clearly outlined on its website. Information on the application and admissions process is guided by the Code of Practice: Admissions and comprehensive programme details for prospective students are available on the website and prospectus, including a web-based guide to the application process and recognition of prior learning. Key information set data is not currently required or provided, although UCEM intends to produce this from September 2017. All publicity material used by recruitment agents is produced and controlled by UCEM with oversight through QSEC. Feedback from students indicates clear satisfaction with the accuracy of pre-enrolment publicity materials.

3.4 Information for current students is comprehensive and readily made available through Student Handbooks and the VLE, which includes weekly breakdowns of key information. Student surveys and meetings with students indicate high levels of satisfaction with the range and accuracy of information provided online.

3.5 Responsibilities for the ownership and monitoring of information have been recently clarified through an information audit, which outlines those staff involved in both the production and approval of materials. Key quality assurance information, including the UCEM Code of Practice, is made available to all stakeholders through the website and is subject to a schedule of regular review and approval through Academic Board to ensure currency.

3.6 On completion of studies, students receive a transcript meeting European Diploma Supplement requirements. Currently, transcripts use the same format as the legacy programmes although UCEM notes that the format needs amending in line with the current FHEQ representation of academic levels.

3.7 The review team considers that UCEM provides information that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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 determining its judgement on the quality of information about learning opportunities at UCEM, the review team considered the findings against the criteria outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The Expectation in this section is met and the level of risk is considered low.

3.9 The review team considers that UCEM has a sound approach to the provision of information which takes account of the needs of various stakeholders. Responsibilities for producing and approving information are clear and checks are in place to ensure that information provided about its higher education offer is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

3.10 The review team concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at UCEM **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 UCEM's strategic approach to enhancement is led by its Mission and Strategic Vision that inform key strategies and which in turn guide the priorities of committees and individual objectives. The Strategic Plan is operationalised through the pursuit of six Foundational and Primary Goals. These inform a set of objectives against which both departmental and individual performance are monitored through deliberative committees as part of annual monitoring activity, through Quarterly Business Review meetings and through the staff Performance Development and Review process.

4.2 Key underpinning strategies to the Vision include the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy (TLAS) which outlines the pedagogical approach and the Research Strategy which sets out UCEM's approach to research and scholarship including the work of the Property and Construction Research Centre and the Online Research Centre.

4.3 A rationalisation of enhancement initiatives was recently undertaken which resulted in the identification of three main areas of strategic importance as the framework for enhancement activity: the No Student Left Behind (NSLB) initiative, Public Information and the Academic Infrastructure. Arising from this review, the Consolidated Enhancement Plan was approved by Academic Board in June 2016 which tracks progress against these three thematic activities at institutional level.

4.4 In addition to the above framework, the newly established Academic Audit Committee, reporting to the Board of Trustees, has an enhancement function in reviewing aspects of UCEM academic provision and institutional performance data to identify further development opportunities. In addition, the Operating Committee plays an executive role in tracking enhancement initiatives against strategic goals.

4.5 The approach to enhancement outlined above allows the Expectation to be met in principle. The review team tested the approach through discussion with staff and students and through the consideration of documents relating to the enhancement of learning opportunities.

4.6 Enhancement activities are clearly embedded within UCEM's quality assurance processes, including module reviews, annual programme monitoring and programme enhancement plans, which contribute directly to the institutional Consolidated Enhancement Plan. Reports from programme monitoring and departmental activities feed into a portfolio of annual reports that are considered routinely through Academic Board. The Academic Audit Committee has also been instrumental in identifying areas for enhancement, such as the thematic review of assessment undertaken through LTEC.

4.7 LTEC maintains oversight of the strategic approach to learning and teaching, with the Research Committee maintaining responsibility for the coordination of research and scholarly activities. The review team noted that work to revise the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy to reflect the strategic shift in online learning was still underway and due for approval in December 2016. While the new Research Strategy, newly established Research Centres and forthcoming revised Teaching Learning and Assessment Strategy had the potential to inform enhancement, it was too early to evaluate the impact on the enhancement of the students' learning experience.

4.8 The Strategic Vision to move to 100 per cent online delivery of courses, executed through the CEM Academic Offer project, provided an opportunity to strengthen course structures, invest in infrastructure and enhance the student experience. Through this initiative, all provision has been systematically reviewed and shaped both through curriculum design and through wider use of interactive e-learning and multi-media technology. An effective approach to module presentation, weekly planners, course maps and progress bars provides a level of consistency to the experience which students value.

4.9 Staff confirmed the continuous approach adopted by UCEM to review and respond to feedback from students. The proactive appointment in 2015 of a Lead Student Representative in the work of deliberative committees has prompted a step change in student engagement in quality assurance activities and ensured student input into the design of new initiatives. Demonstrable enhancements influenced by this role include changes to the e-library, the review of the mitigating circumstances policy and the development of the student hub on the VLE launched in May 2016. Outcomes from the thematic audit on assessment include a pilot for online assessment that is expected to make a positive impact on turnaround of work and the security of assessment papers.

4.10 The NSLB initiative provides an institution-wide focus to enhance student learning opportunities, the overall success of which is measured through core institutional metrics of student satisfaction and financial sustainability, with work ongoing to closely monitor retention on a cohort basis. This approach has enabled UCEM to track the impact of enhancement initiatives for each cohort of students and identify the need for further data analysis, such as location and entry qualifications. The actions within the Retention and Progression Report are monitored through regular meetings and reflect the focus of the Retention Strategy for 2016-17. The NSLB initiative has led to investment in new staff roles including the establishment of the RAS Team, a Data and Retention Officer and a student records team. These new roles explicitly support strategic priorities and encourage collaborative working with module teams to enable proactive interventions to take place within the student journey.

4.11 In addition to this initiative, staff met by the review team demonstrate a clear awareness of institutional goals and how these relate to specific objectives in their individual and departmental roles, particularly with regard to the student experience. The review team noted the high level of involvement of all staff to instigate and support institutional initiatives and activities which enable improvements to be made in student learning opportunities. Numerous examples were provided whereby staff expertise from across the institution was brought together to improve the student experience, including admissions, assessment design, pastoral support and academic support for learning. The review team therefore considers the use of integrated academic and support teams to take a strategic and collegiate approach to the design, delivery and support of student learning opportunities to be **good practice**.

4.12 Overall, the review team considers that UCEM takes deliberate and systematic steps to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.13 In determining its judgement on the enhancement of student learning opportunities at UCEM, the review team considered the findings against the criteria as outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The Expectation in this section is met and the level of risk is considered low.

4.14 The institutional approach to enhancement is clearly articulated and embedded within the quality assurance and review framework at the institution. The UCEM Vision and Strategic Plan provides a clear strategic framework for enhancement and devolves responsibilities at both collective and individual levels for enacting improvements to the student experience. The strategic framework is well defined, although with regard to the two key underpinning strategies, the Research Strategy is relatively new and the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy is still pending a revised update to reflect the strategic shift in pedagogic approach. Good examples of strategically led enhancements are available, many of which have been undertaken through close integration of staff from across and within academic and professional areas, and a highly collegiate approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities is in place. Some initiatives are relatively recent and the impact is not yet determined, but performance indicators are in place to evaluate strategies for enhancement. Student engagement in enhancement has been limited to date, although the appointment of a Lead Student Representative has been positive and plans are in place to strengthen the operation and effectiveness of student representation.

4.15 The review team therefore concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at UCEM **meets** UK expectations.

Glossary

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

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

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

Academic standards

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

Award

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

Awarding organisation

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

Blended learning

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

Credit(s)

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

Degree-awarding body

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

Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

Dual award or double award

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

e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning

Enhancement

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

Expectations

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

Flexible and distributed learning

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

See also **distance learning**.

Framework

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

Framework for higher education qualifications

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

Good practice

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

Learning opportunities

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

Learning outcomes

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

Multiple awards

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

Operational definition

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

Programme (of study)

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

Programme specifications

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

Quality Code

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

Reference points

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

Self-evaluation document

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

Subject Benchmark Statement

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

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)

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

Threshold academic standard

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

VLE (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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