



Higher Education Review of the University of Derby

April 2016

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About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at the University of Derby. The review took place from 11 to 13 April 2016 and was conducted by a team of six reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Sally Bentley
- Dr Ross Fergusson
- Mrs Jill Lyttle
- Professor Christopher Stevens
- Mrs Reggie Willis
- Mr Matthew Kitching (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by the University of Derby 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, the QAA review team:

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

A 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 4.

In reviewing the University of Derby the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland.

The [themes](#) for the academic year 2015-16 are Student Employability and Digital Literacy,² and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process. The theme for this review is Student Employability.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.³ A dedicated section explains the method for [Higher Education Review](#)⁴ and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents. For an explanation of terms see the [glossary](#) at the end of this report.

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

² Higher Education Review themes: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2859.

³ QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us.

⁴ Higher Education Review web pages: www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about the University of Derby

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

- The setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards **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 the University of Derby.

- The Undergraduate Research Scholarship Scheme, which enables participating students to strengthen their academic, personal and professional skills (Expectation B3).
- The support provided by the University to its partner college staff, which is well developed and embedded (Expectation B10).
- the distance-learning division, University of Derby Online Learning, which contributes to the enhancement of the learning opportunities of students in other modes of study (Enhancement).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to the University of Derby.

By September 2016:

- establish effective procedures for ensuring that all institutional regulations and procedures concerning membership of approval panels are consistently implemented (Expectation B1)
- ensure that all students are made aware of the three-week turnaround time for the return of assessed work, and all associated monitoring structures are effective (Expectation B6).

Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms** the following actions that the University of Derby is already taking to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to its students.

- The steps being taken in partnership with the University of Derby Students' Union to optimise engagement with the student voice (Expectation B5).
- The actions being taken to develop further the arrangements for managing joint honours programmes (Enhancement).

Theme: Student Employability

The University of Derby describes employability as being at the heart of its activities. The Careers and Employment Service operates in close liaison with academic staff, offers opportunities for short-term employment and internships, and works to strengthen the employability skills of students and recent graduates.

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

About the University of Derby

The University of Derby (the University) traces its origins back to the nineteenth century, and was awarded university status in 1992. It describes itself as committed to providing excellent learning and teaching, inspiring learners, innovating in curriculum and delivery, and impacting upon the region and the global economy. It supports its focus on student success, employability and diversity through measures that include staff recruitment, continual professional development, developing its information technology infrastructure, and providing state-of-the-art facilities on a high quality estate.

Since its QAA Institutional Review in 2009 the University has restructured its academic delivery units from four faculties into seven colleges, with an Online Development Department. The University Strategic Partnerships Unit and Research, Innovation and Academic Enterprise Unit also operate outside the college structure. Following an acquisition it also established Buxton and Leek College as its further education provision, with elements of higher education on both sites; the University also delivers programmes, primarily in health and nursing, in Chesterfield. Other changes include a move to online submission and assessment, a revised marking scale, a move from a 15 to 20-credit framework, and a greater embedding of personal development planning.

The 2009 QAA Institutional Review had positive outcomes, identifying six features of good practice and making seven recommendations, five of which were desirable (enhancement-oriented). Its progress in addressing these recommendations was reviewed in 2012 in a mid-cycle follow-up, which confirmed that they had all been met. The University was also subject to a collaborative provision audit in 2011: this too had positive outcomes, with five features of good practice and four recommendations, three of them desirable. Again, all recommendations have been satisfactorily addressed.

Explanation of the findings about the University of Derby

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 awards

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 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 Institutional regulations, which require programmes to be fully aligned to *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*, adopt an outcomes-based approach, drawing on level descriptors to position the qualification at the appropriate level. A suite of quality management handbooks describes how these requirements are built into procedures for programme design, approval and review, with particular reference to how Subject Benchmark Statements and qualification descriptors are used.

1.2 Validation and approval documentation, panel reports, and programme and module specifications provide evidence of appropriate engagement with relevant external reference points, including Subject Benchmark Statements, qualification descriptors, the Qualifications and Credit Framework and guidance on titling conventions. The staff development provided includes training for chairs of panels and guidance on preparing definitive documentation.

1.3 The review team confirms, from documentary study and meetings with staff responsible for the oversight of standards, that institutional systems, policies and procedures make appropriate use of all relevant reference points to secure threshold academic standards. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.4 The University's governance and management structure consists of: the Governing Council; the Executive Team and the Corporate Management Team, which together are responsible for directing its operational management; and the Academic Board, which has responsibility for the award of taught and research degrees; the approval, implementation and review of policies and procedures; and the promotion of enhancement. The Academic Board delegates detailed work to a suite of subcommittees, the responsibilities of which are clearly described in the Quality Management Handbook. This structure is transparent and comprehensive.

1.5 The Academic Regulations, published on the website, address all regulatory aspects relevant to the maintenance of academic standards. Variations and exemptions are recorded in the programme specification concerned and discussed at validation. The Regulatory Framework Committee monitors the academic and regulatory framework competently and effectively.

1.6 The review team found that institutional academic frameworks and regulations are effectively implemented through the deliberative and executive committee structures, all of which are supported by a series of quality management handbooks, with helpful support offered by the Department of Learning Enhancement, the Department of Business and Student Services, and the University Strategic Partnerships Unit.

1.7 The University has comprehensive and transparent academic frameworks and regulations to govern the award of academic credit and qualifications. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.8 The University holds a definitive record of programmes in the form of programme and module specifications, and a system of validation and approval panels ensures their currency and fitness for purpose. The review team found that the specifications, while they vary in their level of detail, contain the information necessary for external reporting requirements and institutional records, and meet the needs of applicants and students. Programme specifications can be accessed through the website, and module specifications through the virtual learning environment: students told the review team that they find both to be clear and helpful.

1.9 The definitive record, which is effectively managed by the Learning Enhancement team (for taught provision) and the Research Office (for research degrees), supports the operation of assessment boards and the issuing of certificates and transcripts. The procedures for modifying it are clear, and appear to be well understood.

1.10 The University maintains a definitive record of each programme and qualification, and this record is wholly fit for purpose. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.11 The Academic Board delegates responsibility for programme validation to the Academic Development and Quality Committee. The procedure involves validation panels with external membership (see paragraph 2.3) making recommendations to this Committee by way of its Quality Assurance and Enhancement Subcommittee: the recommendations may be for approval (with or without conditions), referral or rejection. The Subcommittee oversees and signs off any further work required of programme teams by the validation panel, including meeting conditions. Panels receive appropriate guidance and are required to benchmark proposals against all relevant external reference points. Collaborative proposals are also considered by the Collaborative Partnerships Subcommittee, and proposals for research degree programmes by the University Research Committee.

1.12 The review team examined extensive documentation, discussing the operationalisation of the validation procedure with a range of academic staff. In the course of doing so it noted three main points: the first, which relates to procedures for approving the membership of validation panels, is addressed elsewhere (see paragraph 2.3); the second, the lack of consistent student panel membership, which is acknowledged and being addressed by the University, relates to a later affirmation (see paragraph 2.19).

1.13 The third point relates to the manner in which the recommendations of validation panels are considered and recorded in the deliberative structure. The minutes of the discussion of validation outcomes at the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Subcommittee, and the Academic Development and Quality Committee, are frequently brief and sometimes limited to recording a decision. Senior college staff, acknowledging a degree of variability in minute-taking in some committees, provided assurance that work was in progress to standardise minutes across these committees, and senior institutional-level staff emphasised that the consideration afforded each validation recommendation might not always be reflected in the minutes. Nevertheless, the University may wish to consider whether consistently and transparently recording decision making would aid the work of stakeholders not present (and therefore reliant on the minutes).

1.14 Notwithstanding these points, the review team confirms that the procedures and practices described constitute effective mechanisms for ensuring that academic standards are set at appropriate levels for the purposes of approving taught programmes and research degrees. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.15 Institutional regulations ensure that credit and qualifications are awarded only when clearly defined learning outcomes have been demonstrated through assessment. The comprehensive credit scheme covers the assessment of the learning outcomes and the credit requirements for all programmes at all levels.

1.16 Programme validation procedures are as described (see paragraph 1.11), and include ensuring that programmes have appropriate learning outcomes and assessment arrangements, and that they are duly specified in programme specifications and module descriptors, and aligned with relevant external expectations. Annual programme monitoring and periodic review, which are buttressed by extensive internal data and external examiner reports, enable the University to assure itself that academic standards continue to meet threshold requirements.

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

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.18 The Academic Board delegates its responsibility for programme monitoring and review to the Academic Development and Quality Committee, on behalf of which the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Subcommittee exercises operational oversight, reporting in full to its parent committee. All programmes are subject to annual monitoring and quinquennial periodic review, although in the case of collaborative provision the latter is supplemented by a comprehensive partnership review taking as its starting point the current formal partnership agreement.

1.19 Annual monitoring, which is based on programme performance review reports for non-devolved provision and collaborative annual monitoring reports for devolved provision, draws on information sources that include student performance data, module evaluation questionnaires and external examiner reports. The outcome is a programme enhancement/action plan, subject to continuing monitoring.

1.20 Periodic review, which the University describes as enhancement-oriented, evaluates the academic currency of provision, reviews student performance, comments on programmes' effectiveness in enabling students to achieve the intended learning outcomes, and examines how programme teams take account of relevant external reference points. Written guidance is provided, and all panels include one or more specialist external advisers.

1.21 The review team undertook extensive documentary study of all these procedures, discussing them with academic staff of all levels of seniority, and with students. The team confirms their effectiveness in design and operation, and concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.22 Institutional procedures specify the use of external and independent expertise in key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards for all taught programmes and research awards. This includes programme validation and modification, setting and grading assessment, the operation of assessment boards, annual monitoring and periodic programme review.

1.23 All programmes and research degree awards have external examiners: policies relating to their eligibility are rigorously enforced; they are required to comment on alignment with threshold academic standards and the University's own standards, and to identify any issues that might compromise that alignment. The external examiner reports seen by the review team, taken together with institutional responses to them, confirm that standards meet threshold requirements, and that courses remain current and in line with all relevant external expectations.

1.24 Validation panels include at least one external adviser to confirm that the academic standards of the proposed award meet national standards and expectations. Periodic programme review panels include at least one external member with significant subject experience; arrangements are in place to ensure that external advice supports the consideration of applications for major programme modifications. The review team confirms that sufficient detailed external specialist knowledge is deployed, including, as appropriate, drawing on multiple sources of external advice. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards: Summary of findings

1.25 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.26 The University is assiduous in ensuring the alignment of its procedures for setting and maintaining the academic standards of its awards with all relevant external requirements and expectations; and it is well positioned to assure itself as to the security of the academic standards of its awards.

1.27 The review team concludes that the setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards at the University **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1 Institutional procedures, roles and responsibilities for programme design, development and approval are clearly designed, readily accessible, and supported by training and guidance. The deliberative, decision making and operational responsibilities for programme approval, monitoring and review are as described in Section 1 (see paragraph 1.11).

2.2 Validation panel membership, as outlined in paragraph 1.12, comprises an internal chair, an external subject specialist, a member of the Department of Learning Enhancement, an academic from the originating college, an independent academic from another college, and a student. Of the nine approval reports provided for the review team, two, all approved within the previous year, were non-compliant with procedures in respect of either or both of independent internal membership and student membership. The review team does accept, however, the University's undertaking that the omission of student members from some panels is being addressed (see also paragraph 2.19).

2.3 Authority for approving the composition of proposed validation panels lies ultimately with the Academic Development and Quality Committee. Operational responsibility for approving panel composition is not explicitly assigned in the Quality Management Handbook, but senior staff informed the review team that it is checked by the applicant college. It is, however, clear that the system in place needs to be strengthened to ensure operational consistency. The review team **recommends** that, by September 2016, the University establish effective procedures for ensuring that all institutional regulations and procedures concerning membership of approval panels are consistently implemented.

2.4 Notwithstanding this recommendation, the review team found that, taken as a whole, the University operates effective procedures for programme design, development and approval. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.5 The University's Admissions Policy prioritises recruitment of students from diverse backgrounds, and the institutional commitment to widening participation is manifested in targeted programmes, including the Progression Scheme and the Progress to Success Framework. This approach involves giving consideration to an applicant's whole profile, including extracurricular activity, but does not involve weighting such data heavily in admissions decisions, rather using them for monitoring and reporting purposes.

2.6 The University operates a range of events for prospective students, including open days, abridged versions of which are held mid-week, and applicant days, which target students with offers and involve such events as simulated teaching activities. The website is the primary vehicle for information giving, although the University also publishes mini-guides providing generic information about the institution and entry criteria, as well as undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses.

2.7 The central Admissions Team is responsible for home applications to taught programmes; research degree applications are overseen by the Research Office, and international applications by the International Office. In all cases, the Admissions Team sets requirements, provides training, undertakes an annual audit of admissions, and reviews individual cases as necessary. The University takes a particularly efficient and externally recognised approach to decision making during the clearing period.

2.8 The Complaints Procedure (see paragraph 2.34) extends to applicants, and the review team found the policy framework, the training for staff involved in admissions and the robust monitoring systems to be fit for purpose. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.9 The University's strategic approach to quality assurance is evident in its Corporate Plan and underpinned by its Learning and Teaching Strategy. The University assures itself of its effectiveness primarily through annual monitoring, where the detailed consideration of national and internal survey data contributes to all action plans, and the associated health checks (see paragraph 2.21). The Academic Board delegates responsibility for the oversight of learning and teaching to the Academic Development and Quality Committee; monitoring of the Learning and Teaching Strategy is delegated to the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Subcommittee. At the time of the review the Academic Board was discussing the future introduction of an overarching Student Experience Framework and, in partnership with the Students' Union, a Student Charter to complement its 'Fitness to Participate in University Life' policy.

2.10 The implementation of the Learning and Teaching Strategy is supported by the Department of Learning Enhancement, which is also responsible for the Undergraduate Research Scholarship Scheme, under which undergraduates work over the Easter break or summer period with academic staff on a live research project. This Scheme, which exemplifies the 'students as partners' concept and for which applications are increasing in number, offers students an opportunity to develop skills to enhance their employability, and potentially fosters aspirations to higher learning. The review team considers the Undergraduate Research Scholarship Scheme, which enables participating students to strengthen their academic, personal and professional skills, to be **good practice**.

2.11 The University takes steps to ensure that staff deliver teaching or professional services of the highest possible quality. To this end, its extensive staff development programme is structured around the outcomes of the annual development and performance reviews of individual staff. The programme runs throughout the year and is available to partner college staff, who also participate in an annual Learning and Teaching Conference and a Collaborative Conference.

2.12 A comprehensive peer observation scheme is designed to identify both good practice and development actions: the outcomes are summarised for senior committees, and contribute to planning the annual staff development programme. The review team learned of successful practices in a number of areas, although the University acknowledges that scope exists to achieve a greater understanding of the value of the process across the institution as a whole.

2.13 The University's commitment to employability is expressed in ways which include involving employers on programme advisory boards: for example, in one professional programme the University describes them as reviewing and informing the curriculum from development to delivery. The Study Skills Unit offers academic support through programme-related sessions, online resources and a Study Adviser Scheme, under which students work one-to-one to support other students. Online students are well served, and the student submission to this review highlighted the value of the Student Wellbeing Team, a central professional service providing support and guidance for all students, including international

students and those with disabilities. Students overall value their learning environment and the information that explains it. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement

Findings

2.14 The University gives high priority to enabling students to develop to their full potential, and regularly monitors and evaluates the contribution of its support services. These services operate on a hub and spoke principle, with central services linking to college-based, distance learning and partner college staff as appropriate, to ensure consistency of provision and the sharing of good practice.

2.15 The Careers and Employment Service (see also paragraph 4.2) aims to provide information relevant to students at different development points. Students are made aware of the importance of employability as early as induction, and this focus increases as the student journey continues. Placement and employability opportunities range from direct professional placements and year-long sandwich placements to short placements and work experience within individual programmes: in all cases, students and employers receive appropriate guidance and support. The Service also manages the University's Futures Award, which involves the recognition of such extracurricular activities as Students' Union involvement and volunteering. Students who met the review team confirmed the value of these opportunities.

2.16 The library serves all students, with induction available to those in a position to avail themselves of it and online access for those taking their degree online or in partner colleges: in the latter case, the approval process includes consideration of library facilities at the partner institution, to support which liaison with partner librarians operates on a continuing basis. The University understandably points to external and internal student surveys as evidence of increased student satisfaction, and such initiatives as Library Plus, which facilitates a one-search approach across many library resources, have been well received.

2.17 The benefits to students of institutional initiatives to improve their learning experience have been reflected in improved National Student Survey results and were confirmed in oral evidence supplied in the course of the review. Refinements of the current personal tutoring system, including a '7 Principles of Personal Tutoring' approach, specification of contact time and a new electronic record keeping system, have been recently introduced and will be evaluated at the end of the current academic year. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student Engagement

Findings

2.18 The University's commitment to student engagement derives in good part from its close working partnership with the Students' Union, its partnership agreement with which sets out the mutual commitments and obligations concerned. Both parties speak positively of this relationship, and Students' Union officers or elected students serve as representatives on all governance and quality management committees relevant to this review, as well as on validation and review panels.

2.19 These arrangements increasingly extend to part-time, distance learning and partner college students. Nevertheless, acknowledging that the active engagement of the student population as a whole in the representative structures has yet to be fully actualised, the University is providing further opportunities to promote engagement and participation. The review team **affirms** the steps being taken in partnership with the University of Derby Students' Union to optimise its engagement with the student voice.

2.20 The Students' Union's management and coordination of the representative system, which includes organising an annual conference, and both training and maintaining continuing liaison with the 455 elected representatives, is supported by the Student Experience Team and the Department of Learning Enhancement. The University acknowledges the contribution of diligent representatives in its Futures Award scheme, and representatives confirmed the review team's provisional view that they are well supported in the discharge of their responsibilities.

2.21 The University takes full account of the data deriving from relevant external national surveys. Internally, it operates separate student experience surveys for single and joint honours students and online students; it holds termly focus groups at its Buxton Campus; and it makes systematic use of social media platforms. Programme health checks and annual monitoring, both routine elements of quality management, also take account of the voice of on-campus, online and, where relevant, partner college students.

2.22 The University engages students, individually and collectively, as partners in assuring and enhancing their educational experience: these steps generally work effectively and, where challenges remain, notably with hard-to-reach students such as those studying online and in partner colleges, they have been identified and are being addressed. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.23 All assessment, including for the approval of articulation arrangements and the recognition of prior learning, operates within a single regulatory framework: this is kept under review, is modifiable only with the authority of the Academic Board, and is effectively communicated to students. Derogation is permitted where professional statutory or regulatory bodies have additional and more stringent requirements; and rules are in place to ensure that extenuating circumstances are handled consistently and without detriment to academic standards.

2.24 At programme design, teams are required to produce an assessment map, normally utilising a range of assessment styles, for consideration by validation panels. All assessed work is moderated or double-marked internally, with external examining in place for all modules contributing to an award classification. Training is provided for chairs and officers of assessment boards, the operation of which is governed by clear rules. The review team found these procedures robust and effective.

2.25 The responsibilities of external examiners include considering the evidence used in the assessment of claims for the recognition of prior learning and approving any assessments set by partner colleges. Marking criteria, to which students have ready access, specify the expected level of achievement at each level.

2.26 The University operates a three-week turnaround policy for assessed work other than where specific reasons for exceptions exist, and makes a commitment to providing high quality feedback. The review team was unable to locate any process for authorising departures from the norm, and noted that programme handbooks do not consistently state the policy correctly: one, for example, refers to a period of four to six weeks. Not all students who met the team were clear about their entitlement, and some reported that work was often not returned within a three-week period. The review team **recommends** that, by September 2016, the University ensure that all students are made aware of the three-week turnaround time for the return of assessed work, and all associated monitoring structures are effective.

2.27 Overall, however, the University effectively operates equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment, including for the recognition of prior learning. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining

Findings

2.28 The University regards external examiners as integral to ensuring sector comparability, maintaining programme currency, and strengthening students' learning opportunities. It operates a clearly defined and differentiated system of subject external examiners, programme/award external examiners and chief external examiners, all of which receive written guidance in the form of an information pack, a dedicated web page, and local supplementation normally involving meetings with academic staff and students. Students are informed of the names and details of their external examiner in programme handbooks; their reports and the responses are made available at programme committee meetings and through the virtual learning environment.

2.29 The appointment procedure is designed to ensure that external examiners are appropriately qualified and that no reciprocity or conflict of interest exists. The Academic Board delegates this responsibility to the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Subcommittee, which also maintains central oversight of the system as a whole, and contributes to an annual report for the Academic Development and Quality Committee.

2.30 A detailed external examiner report template prompts comment on learning and enhancement opportunities and confirmation that issues raised in the previous report have been addressed: these comments are consistently and constructively made. Arrangements are in place to support external examining where specific challenges exist (for example where teaching or assessment is in a language other than English). College-level mechanisms are designed to ensure that reports are monitored and responses made, and central procedures are in place to oversee them. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review

Findings

2.31 As explained in Section 1 of this report (see paragraph 1.11), institutional arrangements for programme monitoring and review are supplemented by associated or subordinate structures and procedures. For example, the Collaborative Partnerships Subcommittee annually reviews monitoring reports and enhancement or action plans in non-devolved collaborative provision, and annual programme health check meetings are led by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor. At college level, the sound work of programme committees and college quality enhancement committees has been strengthened by new data that measures student outcomes against targets. Programme enhancement plans constitute further evidence of the University's embedded commitment to enhancing students' learning opportunities.

2.32 Evidence of the effective operation of these structures and procedures was made available to the review team. The team particularly noted the triangulation of such key data sources as the National Student Survey and the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education Survey with internal qualitative data, including module evaluation questionnaires and external examiner reports. With the qualification expressed in Section 1 (see paragraph 1.13), the minutes of the Academic Development and Quality Committee and the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Subcommittee demonstrate the effective operation of the deliberative structure, not least in that they identify instances of procedures falling short of expectations being referred for further information and consideration.

2.33 The review team confirms that programme monitoring and review are appropriate in scope, regularly and appropriately undertaken, and constitute systematic and effective mechanisms for assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints

Findings

2.34 Institutional arrangements for academic appeals and complaints are specified in the Academic Regulations. Strategic responsibility rests with the Regulatory Framework Committee; the Complaints Procedure is accessible to applicants, staff and all current students through the University website, programme handbooks and leaflets. Relevant information is also provided at induction. Student awareness of complaints and appeals procedures is limited, however, and the level of detail regarding complaints and appeals in programme handbooks appears variable.

2.35 For on-campus students the University views complaints as a feedback continuum where early resolution of issues presented through student feedback is encouraged. Complaints emanating from partner colleges enter the system following an internal investigation based on the partner's approved complaints procedures. Dissatisfied students who have exhausted the University procedure are informed of their right to take their complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.

2.36 Feedback systems are monitored by the Student Experience Team, and further supported by the Student Centre and the Students' Union Advice and Guidance Centre. A resource pack is provided to staff investigating complaints with the aim of achieving a consistent and informed approach. An annual monitoring report prepared for the Academic Development and Quality Committee reviews complaints received over the year, how they were handled, and their outcomes, with any learning points disseminated in annual overview reports.

2.37 Training for staff involved in assessment boards, which includes information and guidance on academic appeals, is provided by the Assessment and Awards Unit, which is also responsible for the initial investigation of such appeals. Over the last three years all but a very small number were resolved: the few that have not were heard by an Academic Appeal Panel. Academic appeals are logged in a similar manner to complaints.

2.38 Notwithstanding the observations in paragraph 2.34, the review team found the University's policy framework to be clear, comprehensible and fit for purpose. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.39 The University's partnership portfolio is quite complex. In all cases, legal agreements are in place; procedures for ending partnerships are clear and appropriate; and the suite of work placements, study abroad and exchange arrangements is similarly supported by formal documentation. Deliberative responsibility for overseeing partnerships rests with the Academic Board, which discharges it primarily through a range of subordinate committees and groups. The balance of responsibilities among the University Strategic Partnerships Unit, the Learning Enhancement Team and the relevant colleges is clearly defined and operationally effective. These responsibilities are widely understood and professionally implemented. The arrangements are supported by comprehensive and accessible documentation. Certificate, diploma supplement and transcript templates are fit for purpose, as are the systems in place to address all issues relating to programmes where the language of study and/or assessment is other than English.

2.40 Partner approval addresses relevant business-related and academic matters, and, like review arrangements, is comprehensive and appropriate. Procedures are also in place to handle applications from partner colleges to vary or extend programme provision or change location. Validation and review arrangements largely reflect procedures for on-campus provision, with additional requirements built in as appropriate. Arrangements for receiving and addressing student feedback are clear, and institutional plans to optimise engagement with the student voice (see paragraph 2.19) include students taking a programme at a partner institution.

2.41 Responsibilities for providing and checking information to applicants and students are clearly articulated, and include quarterly checks by the University Strategic Partnerships Unit. While the review team noted minor discrepancies among the Collaborative Register, the University's website and those of partner colleges, these are easily rectifiable.

2.42 Staff of partner institutions are eligible for support and guidance from the University, and their needs are checked at approval, on visits and in annual monitoring. Support is provided through timely, structured visits by University staff, operational manuals, newsletters, opportunities to join committees (in person or virtually), and the annual Collaborative Conference and UK Partnership Forum. These are widely appreciated and take-up is satisfactory. The review team considers the support provided by the University to its partner college staff, which is well developed and embedded, is **good practice**.

2.43 The University's management of its arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with partner organisations is appropriate and effective. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Findings

2.44 The University aims to achieve consistency in the support and management of postgraduate research students through aligning the single set of regulations concerned with all relevant external expectations, and supplementing it with any additional regulations for professional or practice-based programmes. The relevant web pages are clearly set out and accessibly written. The Students' Union is working to strengthen its engagement with research degree students.

2.45 The Academic Board delegates the oversight of provision for research degree students to the University Research Committee, to which college research committees, which include postgraduate research student representation, report. Each college has a research ethics subcommittee, which does not include such representation.

2.46 Growth in postgraduate research student numbers (PhD and professional) is integral to institutional plans for research development, and has been buttressed by studentships and bursaries, investment in the estate and the academic and supporting infrastructure, and supervisor training and refreshing.

2.47 Applications are considered by two college supervisors. Induction is provided at University and local level for PhD and professional doctoral students respectively, and the detailed induction pack includes all necessary information. Academic English courses are provided for international students, and those who met the review team confirmed their value. Generic research skills modules are complemented by colleges' own specialised training.

2.48 Students spoke positively to the review team about their supervisory experience; their development needs are discussed in annual progress reports, and those seen by the review team were detailed and evaluative. Students organise their own conference, participate in regional conferences, and have access to funding for presentation expenses. Those with teaching responsibilities are required to complete a series of teaching workshops. They receive guidance on the permitted time commitment, are mentored, and are included in the peer observation of teaching scheme (see paragraph 2.12). The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.49 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

2.50 This judgement area contains two features of good practice (relating to the Undergraduate Research Scholarship Scheme and the University's support for partner college staff); an affirmation (of progress being made in optimising engagement with the student voice); and two recommendations (relating to the membership of validation panels and the timely return of assessed work). Of the 11 Expectations in this area all were met and assigned a low level of risk.

2.51 A core theme of this judgement area is the University's commitment to supporting and encouraging its students, not least in relation to employability. Students come from diverse backgrounds and not all have a strong record of prior academic achievement or confidence: the University is alert to, and largely meeting, the challenges associated with this. While most students are taking their degree or other qualification on the main campus, a significant minority are doing so in a partner college at home or abroad. This being so, the good practice relating to institutional support for partner college staff has the potential to improve the learning opportunities of its students studying at such colleges.

2.52 While a valuable and largely positive student submission to this review also highlighted areas where further work is required, senior managers expressed a strong willingness to address these and other issues, where possible in collaboration with the Students' Union. One area where this work is underway is reflected in the affirmation in paragraph 2.19. While the recommendations could from one perspective be considered procedural deviations from regulations, the University will doubtless also wish to review and address the aspects of institutional-level oversight that permitted them to occur.

2.53 The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the University **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 University produces information for staff, students and external stakeholders, including external examiners for whom information is housed on a dedicated section of the website. The website, maintained by the Marketing and Communications Department, is the primary information source. Policies and regulatory developments potentially affecting students are published at institutional level; the University's Communication Plan, which aims to ensure that information provided to students is accurate and timely, allows programme teams a degree of autonomy in tailoring information to the needs of their own students.

3.2 Students' views are sought on the University's approach to information, and those met by the review team were broadly satisfied with the accuracy and accessibility of the information made available to them. The University was also an early adopter of the Higher Education Achievement Report, and permits professional and accreditation bodies and employers to search archives in order to verify student achievements.

3.3 The University publishes a well-regarded triannual magazine for external stakeholders, and print versions of the undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses: the former is printed on demand and tailored to the programme interests of individual students. Programme and module handbooks are largely produced in electronic format and made available through the virtual learning environment. Programme leaders are responsible for their construction and are required to ensure they are consistent with guidelines and approved by the college concerned. The University acknowledges limitations in this area, including the presentation and consistency of some information provided for joint honours students, and is currently reviewing the handbook format.

3.4 Staff receive online information about quality assurance procedures, as well as data from the Strategic Performance and Intelligence Team. While the University is currently working to make this information more accessible, both campus-based and partner college staff are clear about their responsibilities in relation to the production and oversight of information: in both cases, firm and effective approval procedures are in place.

3.5 The review team found that, overall, the University is in a position to assure itself that the information it provides is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

3.6 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

3.7 The University operates robust procedures for ensuring the accuracy and trustworthiness of the information it publishes at both institutional and college level. This includes online information for the public and potential applicants, and internal information for students, whether produced online or as hard copy. The students whom the review team met spoke generally positively of it.

3.8 The University is aware of, and currently addressing, the need to develop such areas of information as the content of student handbooks and the information provided to joint honours students.

3.9 The review team concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the University **meets** UK Expectations.

4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1 The operational aspects of quality enhancement are overseen on behalf of the Academic Board by the Department of Learning Enhancement, the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Subcommittee and the Student Experience Subcommittee; the Student Experience Team works with the Students' Union to provide a focus for student support, liaison and communication. The review team found students extensively involved in decision making through committee membership and engagement in such enhancement-oriented projects as the Undergraduate Research Scholarship Scheme.

4.2 The quality assurance procedures used to inform strategic enhancement initiatives include student feedback (from internal and external sources) and the peer observation of teaching scheme, which informs development and performance review and facilitates the sharing of good practice. The results of external surveys are scrutinised carefully, with awards made to programmes with high overall National Student Survey satisfaction scores to fund local enhancement initiatives; programme teams attracting low scores receive help and advice from the Department of Learning Enhancement, and the review team was told that this had been demonstrably successful.

4.3 Examples of the student voice influencing quality enhancement include an Innovation Fund designed to create, trial and evaluate new types of learning spaces, and student involvement in academic staff appointments. The review team also noted that the University makes systematic use of student-related data to inform action plans: this includes a Student Attainment Project, which has led to quantifiable improvements in reducing the attainment gap adversely affecting the achievement of many black and minority ethnic students.

4.4 The review team found a range of initiatives developed by the University's distance-learning division, University of Derby Online Learning (UDOL), with the support of the Department of Learning Enhancement, making noteworthy contributions to improving the quality of student learning opportunities. While prepared initially to strengthen the online learning of UDOL students, these initiatives have been widely disseminated across the University, and are used both on campus and by partner colleges to improve the experience of students whose learning and teaching modality is primarily face to face. The review team considers the distance-learning division, University of Derby Online Learning, which contributes to the enhancement of the learning opportunities of students in other modes of study, is **good practice**.

4.5 The opportunities offered by the Department of Learning Enhancement, either solely or in collaboration with other parts of the University or the Students' Union, to support pedagogic practice include: workshops and seminars; the institution-wide Learning and Teaching Conference; the Vice-Chancellor's Awards for Excellence in Support for Students; the Ideas Factory (established to facilitate the sharing of pedagogic practice and innovations across the institution and between the University and its partner colleges); and a five-year project to refurbish learning spaces. The Department is also supporting and overseeing the University's target for all full-time, permanent members of academic staff to be fellows of the Higher Education Academy by the end of the current academic year (at the time of the review the figure was 81 per cent).

4.6 Following feedback from students and staff the University put in place administrative and support structures to ensure the equivalence of experience for joint honours students. A Joint Honours Scheme Board has been established, college-based student liaison officers have been given a joint honours remit, joint honours programmes are now included in programme health checks (see paragraph 2.21), and a dedicated careers event with relevant alumni has taken place. Nevertheless, while joint honours students are assigned a personal tutor from each subject area, the review team heard from students that this system is discipline sensitive and to date implementation has been variable. The review team **affirms** the actions being taken to develop further the arrangements for managing joint honours programmes.

4.7 The review team found that the University takes a planned and strategic approach to enhancing the quality of student learning opportunities, making good use of data in identifying and delivering evidence-based enhancements. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.8 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

4.9 The University's planned and systematic approach to quality enhancement is epitomised in the existence of a Department of Learning Enhancement, which initiates or oversees a wide range of supportive, developmental and innovative projects. The University is committed to partnership with students, and this commitment is expressed in a variety of collaborative projects both with the Students' Union and with representatives.

4.10 This judgement area contains one feature of good practice: the manner in which the innovative work of the distance-learning division, University of Derby Online Learning, has had an influence beyond the online community, by having a range of initiatives emulated in face-to-face teaching with on-campus and partner college students. It also affirms the actions being taken to develop further the arrangements for managing joint honours programmes, where students' experiences remain somewhat variable.

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

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1 The University describes employability as being at the heart of its activities. It marks student extra-curricular activities and engagement through means including an annual awards ceremony; it embeds the strengthening of student career prospects in programme design, development and review; and it monitors its key employability priorities annually at both senior and programme levels. Lead responsibility in this area rests with the Careers and Employment Service, which supports the transition from higher education to employment by, for example, offering one-on-one support, careers advice and practical skill development for both students and recent graduates, and by sponsoring a range of employment-related fairs to raise the profile of employment opportunities and employers' interest in recruiting the University's graduates. These opportunities were valued by students who met the review team.

5.2 The Careers and Employment Service supports both individual college employability targets and such cross-institutional priorities as the use of learning technology advisers to support students in developing technology-related employability skills. The Employable Student Framework, which the University describes as fundamental, focuses on the development of graduate employability skills and experiences, and has recently been underpinned by a Graduate Attributes Framework to help students evidence and articulate these attributes to prospective employers.

5.3 The Careers and Employment Service consists of three teams, each with defined links to colleges: careers consultants offer individual advice and guidance, and work with programme teams on the employability curriculum and personal development planning; employability advisers support recruitment and selection; and the Employer and Community Engagement Team develops and maintains external relationships. The Service also operates the Student Employment Agency and an internship programme.

5.4 The University provides a variety of opportunities, both internally and externally through its work with local employers, to enable students to earn while they learn. Work experience is available through the Derby Internship Programme, which offers students and graduates short term paid work experience, and students who met the review team confirmed the accessibility and encouraging uptake of these opportunities.

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 30 to 33 of the [Higher Education Review 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.

Blended learning

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

Credit(s)

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

Degree-awarding body

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

Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

Dual award or double award

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

e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning

Enhancement

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

Expectations

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

Flexible and distributed learning

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

See also **distance learning**.

Framework

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

Framework for higher education qualifications

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

Good practice

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

Learning opportunities

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

Learning outcomes

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

Multiple awards

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

Operational definition

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

Programme (of study)

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

Programme specifications

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

Public information

Information that is freely available to the public (sometimes referred to as being 'in the public domain').

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.

Subject Benchmark Statement

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

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)

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

Threshold academic standard

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

Virtual learning environment (VLE)

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

Widening participation

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

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