



Higher Education Review of the University of Essex

December 2014

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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 Essex. The review took place from 2 to 5 December 2014 and was conducted by a team of six reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Richard de Friend
- Dr Mark Atlay
- Professor Ann Holmes
- Mrs Sally Powell
- Dr Michael Byde
- Miss Sarah Crook (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by the University of Essex 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 5.

In reviewing the University of Essex 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 2014-15 are Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement and Student Employability,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 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/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code

² Higher Education Review themes: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106

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 Essex

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

- The setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities is **commended**.

Good practice

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

- The considered and structured approach to the development and implementation of the education strategy and the associated Curriculum Review process, including the engagement of students and staff (Expectation B3).
- The comprehensive Study Abroad arrangements, which provide enhanced learning opportunities for international study (Expectation B10).
- The effective arrangements for oversight of the taught programmes delivered by its UK partners and solely validated by the University of Essex (Expectation B10).
- The high quality research environment and the opportunities for personal and professional development provided for postgraduate research students (Expectation B11).
- The comprehensive and systematic approach to developing and implementing the Employability Strategy (Enhancement).
- The availability and use of management information to inform curriculum planning and development, and student support (Expectations B4, B6 and B8).

Recommendations

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

By September 2015:

- ensure that all Periodic Review reports explicitly confirm how UK threshold standards are achieved (Expectation A3.3)
- review its policy on the nature and extent of changes to programmes that can be approved without reference to external advice and the relevant committee (Expectations B1, A3.4 and A2.2)
- strengthen the committee structure for oversight of all its overseas partnerships (Expectation B10)
- ensure that there is effective institutional oversight of the approval, monitoring and review of postgraduate research degrees delivered at partners (Expectations B11 and B10).

Theme: Student Employability

Over recent years, employability has been a major concern for the University of Essex (the University). The University has taken a number of steps, some in collaboration with the Students' Union, in order to implement the adopted Employability Strategy and, more specifically, its commitment to embed employer-focused learning in the curriculum. These steps include: the requirements that all departments produce an employability action plan and deliver career-development learning; the reconfiguration of the Employability and Careers Centre; the appointment of employability-dedicated staff at department and faculty levels; the introduction of a range of programmes - Frontrunners, Essex Interns and paid mentoring - available under the Postgraduate Support Scheme, all of which offer work experience to undergraduate and/or postgraduate students. Overall, the review team found that the Employability Strategy is well devised, well understood and supported by the senior managers, academic leaders and student representatives. Significant progress is already noted in the implementation of the strategy.

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 Essex

The University of Essex was founded in 1964 and currently occupies three sites: the main Colchester campus, a campus in Southend-on-Sea, and the Loughton campus, which is occupied solely by East 15 Acting School. In 2013-14 there were approximately 12,000 full-time equivalent students studying at the University campuses.

The University has 17 academic schools or departments, two research institutes and a number of smaller teaching and research centres. The University also has a number of collaborative partners within the UK and a small number of international partnerships. The University's UK partners are: Colchester Institute; Edge Hotel School; Kaplan Open Learning (University of Essex Online); South Essex College of Further and Higher Education; Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust; University Campus Suffolk (UCS), delivering joint awards with the University of East Anglia; and Writtle College.

A new Strategic Plan was approved in July 2013, covering the period 2013-14 to 2018-19, setting out the University's mission 'to contribute to society through excellence in education and excellence in research'. The Strategic Plan focuses the University on its two key priorities, education and research; the implementation of these strategic priorities is set out in the supporting University Education Strategy and University Research Strategy. In 2012 the University's academic management structures were reviewed and its senior academic leadership roles reshaped to better support the delivery of the new Strategic Plan.

The University has responded effectively to the recommendations of the 2008 QAA review and the 2010 collaborative audit, and has built upon the features of good practice identified. The review team found that the University is implementing a more structured approach to enhancement by further developing the online submission feedback and the Employability Strategy, and by providing effective support for learning and teaching with a stronger focus on improving assessment.

Explanation of the findings about the University of Essex

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 The University's academic framework, which applies to all of its taught awards both internally and at its partner institutions, is aligned with *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). Through the course approval and Periodic Review processes, the University ensures that its qualifications are positioned appropriately. As part of the course approval process, external members are required to provide a report which considers alignment of new courses with the FHEQ, the positioning of learning outcomes at the appropriate level, and the award of credit and Subject Benchmark Statements where appropriate.

1.2 The Periodic Review process which takes place every five years also reviews alignment with the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements, and that learning outcomes continue to be positioned at the appropriate level. Externals are also an integral part of the process in ensuring that courses under review continue to meet the expectations of the framework. The University publishes guidance notes for validation panel members and Periodic Review panel members which state the areas to be considered by the panel members, including: alignment with the FHEQ; appropriateness of the curriculum in relation to national benchmarks; and any professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) requirements.

1.3 External examiners are requested to confirm in their annual reports that the FHEQ, PSRB requirements and other external reference points are being met. A report template is provided for completion by external examiners. The University reflects on external examiner comments on standards, including alignment with reference points, as part of the Annual Review of Courses (ARC).

1.4 The guidance provided for staff on the academic quality and standards website relating to the validation of courses covers curriculum design and learning outcomes, the assessment of learning outcomes and the appropriateness of the assessment.

1.5 The University has appropriate processes and procedures for ensuring that the requirements of the FHEQ are being met by positioning its qualifications at the appropriate level, and that its course learning outcomes are aligned with the relevant qualification descriptor. This is also the case for its collaborative partners.

1.6 The review team met a number of senior and academic staff, and considered a range of documentation as part of the evidence provided by the University. This documentation included procedures for validation, review and monitoring; templates for completion by external examiners and external reviewers; validation and review documentation; external examiner reports; minutes and reports arising from the various processes; and the University's calendar.

1.7 Academic staff have a broad understanding of the external reference points and were well supported by the Academic Standards and Partnerships Office (ASPO) which provided guidance through their officers and website. In discussions with the review team, academic staff demonstrated knowledge and understanding of the range of procedures and processes for ensuring the requirements of the FHEQ and other external reference points were being met. They were fully conversant with the importance of externality in the validation and review process, and the role of external examiners in confirming that courses were aligned with the FHEQ.

1.8 Partner staff whom the review team met also confirmed their understanding of how University procedures and processes operated in respect of the validation, review and monitoring of their courses by the University and their responsibility in ensuring that the FHEQ and external reference points were being met.

1.9 The review team heard that academic staff made use of a range of external reference points in the design and validation of courses, including the Quality Code, FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements and PSRB requirements. Any changes to these reference points are disseminated through the Director of Education based in each department or school. Externality in the validation, review and external examining process ensures the external reference points are being met.

1.10 Completed external examiner reports confirm that the standards set for the awards are appropriate for qualifications at the relevant level (and against the FHEQ and other external reference points) in both home and collaborative provision. They also confirm that assessment strategies are appropriate and aligned with the intended learning outcomes. However, while it is made clear to external advisers and external examiners in the guidance and templates provided that they should comment on the alignment with the FHEQ and alignment of the learning outcomes, the review team noted that, on occasions, there are inconsistencies in approach.

1.11 Changes to the Quality Code, the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements are disseminated by the ASPO through the Directors of Education, and discussed at the Faculty Education Committee and with the external examiner.

1.12 Comprehensive guidance on processes and procedures can be found on the ASPO website, which is a clear reference point for academic staff at the University and partner institutions. Titling of awards is clearly laid out in the University's calendar.

1.13 The Senate approves principles and processes for Curriculum Review to align the undergraduate and postgraduate taught curriculum with the University's strategy to focus on the research informed curriculum. As part of this review, departments are expected to consider their courses in the context of the FHEQ, relevant Subject Benchmark Statements and other appropriate external PSRB requirements, as well as consulting with external examiners and advisory boards. A toolkit to support curriculum design has also been developed on the virtual learning environment (VLE).

1.14 The review team concludes that the policies and procedures in place at the University ensure alignment with the FHEQ, and other external reference points. Therefore, 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

1.15 The University makes use of a credit framework for its undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes, including those offered by its partners. Credit is awarded for the achievement of learning outcomes. The Rules of Assessment contain the academic framework for the award of credit, progression and achievement of the final award. Variations to the Rules of Assessment are listed by course; there is a link on the VLE to the rules for partner colleges and institutions.

1.16 The Rules of Assessment explaining the framework and regulations for the award of credit are published annually for the University's undergraduate and postgraduate taught provision, including an updated list of variations by course; these are available on the University website.

1.17 As part of the validation process, variation to the Rules of Assessment may be requested. Such variations usually relate to PSRB requirements. All changes to the Rules of Assessment, both course specific and overarching, are considered by the Faculty Education Committee and recommended to the Senate for approval. A summary of academic policy decisions report is produced termly. At the end of the academic year all changes are captured and a revised version of the Rules of Assessment is published for the next academic year.

1.18 Regulations relating to higher degrees, including postgraduate taught and research degrees, provide details of the admission requirements, period of study, and dissertation requirements. There is also a separate Code of Practice for postgraduate research degrees, which includes criteria for the award of research degrees.

1.19 The University's assessment policies for undergraduate and taught postgraduate awards, which are updated at least annually, include guidance on methods of assessment, marking, new Rules of Assessment and the role of external examiners within the assessment process.

1.20 The University maintains oversight of quality and standards of its provision through its committee structure. Although the Senate has ultimate responsibility for ensuring that the academic frameworks are appropriate, a number of committees have delegated authority from the Senate, including the Education Committee and the Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC). Each committee has terms of reference and prescribed membership.

1.21 The University has in place appropriate regulations and frameworks to govern how academic credit and qualifications are awarded.

1.22 The review team met academic staff and students, and considered a range of evidence provided by the University, as well as looking at the information available on the University's website, including the Rules of Assessment, minutes of committees, external examiner reports, committee structures and guidance for staff.

1.23 The Rules of Assessment for undergraduate, and postgraduate taught and research awards, are available to staff and students on the University website. Changes to these rules are also communicated via the website. While students who met the review team were unfamiliar with the term 'Rules of Assessment', they were aware of the academic regulations for their courses and how they could be accessed. They referred the review team to student handbooks which contained links to the website. The review team heard that academic staff also refer students to the regulations.

1.24 Credit is awarded where the pass mark has been obtained, as determined by the Rules of Assessment. Credit is not awarded where the failure of a module results in condonement.

1.25 The Rules of Assessment are reviewed and published annually. Changes to the Rules of Assessment are approved by the Education Committee with recommendations to the Senate for final approval. Changes are communicated via the summary of academic policy decisions which are published termly. Awards at partner institutions are subject to the University's academic regulations and framework, but partners may request variations using the variation process.

1.26 External examiners attend award boards and, as part of the external examining process, are required to confirm that the regulations have been met, and that academic standards are appropriate and comparable to similar courses offered at other institutions with which they are familiar. External examiner reports are reviewed by course leaders and considered at Department Education Committees, and any issues relating to standards or the regulations responded to by the course leader. External examiner reports are considered by the Faculty Education Committees and Staff Student Liaison Committees, and a summary report is presented to the Education Committee.

1.27 External examiners are appointed to partner programmes through the University's approval process following nomination by the partner. Partner external examiners complete the University external examiner template, confirming that the regulations have been adhered to in awarding credit. The reports are submitted to the University and disseminated to staff at the partner institution. The Associate Dean of Academic Partnerships reads all the external examiner reports for partner institutions.

1.28 A review of the effectiveness of the Senate has been undertaken which also reviewed membership and terms of reference of its committees; it is intended to enhance the effectiveness of the committee structure by streamlining responsibilities and its academic decision making. The University's website provides clear, accessible information on its committee structure. The University calendar, published annually, provides details of all committee meetings, including terms of reference, membership, and schedule of meetings.

1.29 Staff whom the review team met were conversant with the Rules of Assessment and academic frameworks in which they operate, many being members of the key committees with responsibility for working within the framework. Partners whom the review team met provided a coherent explanation of the committee structure and its operation in ensuring oversight of quality and standards.

1.30 The review team concludes that the University has in place a comprehensive academic framework and regulations for its undergraduate, postgraduate taught and postgraduate research degrees provision. These are kept under review and are accessible to and understood by staff and students. Consequently, 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

1.31 As part of the course approval process all courses are required to produce a programme specification and module map which act as the definitive record of each course. The programme specification template provides details of the level of the award, relevant Subject Benchmark Statements, intended learning outcomes, course structure and Rules of Assessment, including any variations from the Rules of Assessment. The module map template provides details of how each module maps onto the key outcomes and skills at each level of study. There is also a module outline template which is completed as part of the course approval process; this contains information on formal contact hours.

1.32 The University maintains an online programme specifications catalogue as well as an online module directory. Programme specification templates and guidance are made available to staff. The online catalogue is updated annually. The University calendar also lists all approved programmes.

1.33 Changes to the programme specification resulting from modifications are implemented through a course records management system. A guidance manual details the annual update process.

1.34 The departmental handbook checklist contains guidance for staff on the contents of the handbook, including the programme specification or a link to the online catalogue and a hard copy of the module map.

1.35 The University has procedures in place for maintaining a definitive record of each programme. The programme specification and module map act as the reference points for the delivery and assessment of courses both internally and at partners.

1.36 The review team spoke to staff who had been involved in course approval and review, and students. The review team viewed evidence provided by the University including programme specifications, module maps and departmental handbooks.

1.37 Staff whom the review team met were fully conversant with the role of the programme specification as the definitive document and its key role in the course validation process. The review team noted that departmental handbooks either embed the requirements of the programme specification or contain reference to the programme specification catalogue, which can then be accessed via the online catalogue. However, module maps are not available online and are either provided in the handbook or as a separate document.

1.38 Although the students whom the review team met were not overly familiar with the term 'programme specification', they were aware that the information provided in the programme specification could be found in the departmental handbooks. They were also familiar with the module descriptor and the online module directory.

1.39 In meeting with partner staff it was confirmed that at partner institutions the programme specification is embedded in the course handbook.

1.40 The review team noted that the extent of proposed changes to courses which should trigger additional external scrutiny is not formally articulated, but left to the discretion of the Deputy Dean (Education). There is no clear mechanism for monitoring the cumulative effect of successive changes (see recommendation relating to Expectation B1, paragraph 2.3).

1.41 Modifications to courses delivered by partners are approved by the Dean or Associate Dean (Academic Partnerships); a course variation form has to be submitted which includes reference to the external examiner or adviser.

1.42 Academic staff whom the review team met were confident that courses were being delivered in line with the programme specification and that this was achieved through a range of mechanisms, including: external examiner reports; Staff Student Liaison Committees; mapping of learning outcomes when setting assessment; and peer observation. The review team were also advised that external examiners received programme specifications as part of the information provided each year. Faculty Education Managers are responsible for maintaining definitive records.

1.43 Programme specifications seen by the review team confirm that the intended learning outcomes are consistent with qualification descriptors in the FHEQ at all levels of learning, as well as linking learning outcomes to assessment and teaching methods, and learning hours by lecture and seminar. The departmental handbooks contain detailed information in line with the guidance on the contents of the handbook.

1.44 The review team concludes that there are processes in place to ensure that definitive records of courses and qualifications are being maintained, and that these are accessible to staff and students. Therefore 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

1.45 Programme design at the University is guided by regulations which are intended to meet the expectations of the FHEQ and other external reference points. The approval process for new programmes includes external input in which validation panels or external advisers are required to consider alignment with the FHEQ and other benchmarks. Where external advice is provided in written form, a template is provided which asks explicitly about national benchmarks.

1.46 Undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes at the University are modular; each programme specification is required to include a module map explaining how the programme-level learning outcomes are reflected in the individual modules studied. At the module level, proposals must align with the *Higher Education Credit Framework for England*.

1.47 The principles of programme design and the approval processes articulated in the University's documentation provide clear points of reference to the University's own academic framework and to UK threshold standards, allowing the Expectation to be met.

1.48 The review team reviewed the information on programme approval, considered the guidance for validation panels and reviewed the documentation requirements for programme approval. The team also read a number of case studies of programme and module approval, and met staff involved in the approval process at various levels.

1.49 Staff involved in overseeing the approval process were able to articulate clearly the relevant external reference points. Many of the case studies reviewed demonstrated explicit engagement with national benchmarks. There is inconsistency, however, in the length and breadth of external reports on new programme approval, but the review team is reassured that external advisers involved in the process are provided with role descriptions and guidance that explicitly describe their role in assessing proposals against national benchmarks.

1.50 The review team concludes that the principles of programme design and their application at the University have clear cross-reference to UK threshold standards. Therefore 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

1.51 The Senate has overall responsibility for the maintenance of academic standards and awards, delegating authority for the exercise of necessary powers to the Education Committee and AQSC. The University's Rules of Assessment contain the academic framework for the award of credit, progression and achievement of final awards. Procedures for the examination and assessment of research degrees are set out in the Higher Degree Regulations and Code of Practice for postgraduate research degrees. These regulations, including those for the Boards of Examiners, and all assessment policies and guidance, are reviewed and reissued annually by the University Registry. Programme validation processes include scrutiny of assessment strategies, and their consideration by external panel members and external examiners (see Expectations A3.1 and A3.4). The relationship of assessment to relevant learning outcomes is set out in module and programme documentation.

1.52 The University has a clear and well established academic framework for the award of credit and qualifications. Regulations and policies are subject to regular review. Staff are provided with clear written guidance and training as necessary for their roles in assessment; support is also available from the ASPO and the Registry. There is therefore a suitable infrastructure for the Expectation to be met.

1.53 The review team examined documentation relating to the University's regulatory framework, its policy and practice in respect of assessment, how assessment issues are included in the design and approval of programmes, and how students are informed of assessment issues. In meetings with staff and students, the review team discussed their preparation for involvement in assessment and how this related to learning and teaching activity. The review team explored the processes for review of assessment, including the Curriculum Review currently in progress and steps taken to maintain and improve assessment.

1.54 The University's regulations and policies for assessment are clearly documented and readily available to staff and students. For staff, the main source of guidance is via the ASPO and its website, which provides a central point of advice and oversight for both the University and its collaborative partners. For students, the primary source of information is the departmental student handbook; information is also made available via the VLE.

1.55 Boards of Examiners are held for both module and programme awards, with external examiner involvement in each board. Appropriate staff from each area under scrutiny at the Board are required to be in attendance. Chairs of Examination Boards and other staff involved, including secretaries and those from partner institutions, are offered training and support in their roles in addition to the written guidance available.

1.56 External examiners are appointed to all programmes and modules, specialist input to modules being arranged where required. Reports of external examiners sampled by the review team include favourable comments concerning the effectiveness of the assessment of learning outcomes and the comparability of academic standards with those across all higher education providers (see Expectation A3.4).

1.57 The University has a proactive approach to the maintenance of academic standards through assessment practice. The implementation of the recommendations of the 2011 Task and Finish Group on Academic Standards included improvements to a number of areas, including diversification of assessment methods, study skills and feedback on plagiarism. New awards classification criteria were introduced in July 2012 to further ensure comparability within the sector. A review of marking practice in 2012-13 led to a policy revision to ensure that, where individual items of coursework contribute more than 40 per cent of an individual module, a moderation process is in place.

1.58 As part of the rollout of the Education Strategy, a Curriculum Review is currently taking place across the University's provision. The review has particularly sought to address issues of achievement and retention using data and information provided by the Planning department. This is accessible to staff using the online PIP, which provides a range of benchmarking references and illustrative trends. Staff informed the review team that they found this useful and that it was well used by departments and fed into review processes (see also Expectations B6, B8 and C). They further explained that they were able to demonstrate how improvements in assessment were effectively targeting areas of identified need.

1.59 The review team concludes that the University has in place suitable frameworks to ensure that credit and qualifications are awarded appropriately and in accordance with internal and UK threshold academic standards. The Expectation is met and, because of the well established arrangements and measured approach to review and change, the level of associated 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

1.60 The University has in place a number of review processes which contribute towards maintenance of academic standards.

1.61 The ARC process includes among its aims demonstration of 'the currency, security and validity' of University awards. Student achievement data is considered as part of the process. External examiner reports (which include specific commentary on the FHEQ among other national benchmarks) feed into the process and a checklist is provided to ensure any issues raised by external examiners have been addressed. The University provides external examiners with role descriptions and guidance to ensure that their role in checking alignment with UK threshold standards is understood. The same annual review process applies to awards delivered by partners.

1.62 The University also has a periodic (quinquennial) review process. Panels include external members who are directed to consider alignment of courses with Subject Benchmark Statements. The University provides external examiners, external advisers and external members of Periodic Review panels with role descriptions and guidance to ensure that their role in checking alignment with UK threshold standards is understood. The Periodic Review process explicitly includes reapproval of programmes. Programme specifications form part of the documentation for Periodic Review panels, allowing panels to check that programmes are delivered in accordance with them. Programmes delivered by partners are subject to the same process.

1.63 The processes for the monitoring and review of programmes articulated by the University support the meeting of the Expectation, as annual and Periodic Review process have clear references to UK threshold academic standards, and because partners follow the same processes with oversight by the University.

1.64 The review team reviewed the guidance documentation for ARC and Periodic Review processes, and a number of exemplar reports for both processes. The review team met staff who oversee the review processes and with staff involved in day-to-day management of reviews.

1.65 Staff involved in overseeing reviews are able to articulate clearly the relevant external reference points. ARC reports include reference to queries raised by external examiners about standards; the reports also include action plans to address issues raised. Some Periodic Review reports (or their coversheets) confirm that programmes are assessed against national benchmarks. However, some reports for Periodic Review do not explicitly explain that UK threshold standards are being considered. The review team found there is a degree of inconsistency in reporting which creates a potential risk that some checks on UK threshold standards are implicit rather than explicit. This can leave the University without a secure record that UK threshold standards are being considered in periodic review. The review team **recommends** that the University ensure that all Periodic Review reports explicitly confirm how UK threshold standards are achieved.

1.66 The review team concludes that monitoring and review processes at the University address UK threshold academic standards, and that the Expectation is met. However, the references to UK threshold standards are sometimes implicit rather than explicit in Periodic Review reporting, creating a potential risk that threshold standards could be overlooked. As the review team did not find current evidence of this risk manifesting in practice the level of associated 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

1.67 Processes for design and approval of programmes include the involvement of external academic advisers: the degree of input being determined by the extent to which the provision under scrutiny is new to the University. Periodic Review panels are also expected to include external independent advice. External examiners are appointed to all programmes and modules, with their comments being fed into the ARC process (see Expectation B7). Employers are involved in programme development mainly in professional and vocational areas, and within partnership arrangements. The University intends to extend employer involvement in other areas in connection with measures already taken to support student employability (see Theme and Enhancement).

1.68 The University's requirements for external involvement in programme development, approval and Periodic Review are clearly set out in guidance documentation provided by the ASPO. This, together with the well established external examiner scheme and the strategy to enhance employer engagement, provides systems whereby the Expectation may be fulfilled.

1.69 The review team examined guidance documentation for programme design and approval, and for Periodic Review, and looked at sample records of planning and validation events and reviews. The team also considered the use of external examiners and their comments through review of ARC reports and reports to Examination Boards. In meetings with staff, the review team discussed the criteria and methods for seeking and utilising external independent advice across a variety of areas in the University and its collaborative provision.

1.70 The review team found that guidance provided by the ASPO relating to the use of external advice was clear and helpful, describing the external examiner's role in assessing the provision under scrutiny against national threshold standards and benchmarks, and providing a template for completion of written advice. Staff whom the review team met were able to describe the processes in place and showed a good understanding of external reference points, particularly appreciating the importance of the external input to professional and regulatory accreditation. However, in considering examples provided of approval and review documentation, the review team noted inconsistent approaches to the use of the external view.

1.71 With regard to processes for minor modifications to programmes, the review team noted that, under current arrangements, it is possible for cumulative changes to be made to a programme without reference to external advice. Although the Deputy Deans (Education) in each faculty are appropriately exercising the authority delegated to them for approving minor modifications, current guidance which describes the degree of external input being determined by the extent to which the provision under scrutiny is new to the University does not take into account the possible impact of multiple or sequential changes to a single

programme (see also Expectations A2.2 and B1). The review team concludes that this area requires strengthening to ensure that appropriate externality is applied in all situations (see the recommendation under Expectation B1, page 21).

1.72 The external examiner process is clearly set out on the ASPO website and operates effectively across all provision (see Expectation B7, page 34). External examiner reports sampled by the review team confirm that the standards set are comparable with the rest of the sector, and conform to the FHEQ and other external reference points. They also confirm that there is an outcomes-based approach with appropriate and effective learning, teaching and assessment strategies. These findings are fed into the ARC and Periodic Review processes. Although guidance for panel composition specifies that the current external examiner should not normally be used as a panel member, ensuring that there is an independent view, comments from recent external examiner reports contribute usefully to the deliberations of approval panels, and external examiners normally provide their views on proposed assessment strategies.

1.73 Professional or employer representatives are included in approval panels for professional or vocational programmes, with particularly positive examples of synergy in programme development in the health science and performing arts areas. Although at an early stage, the University is committed to developing its employer engagement throughout the provision to complement the significant work already undertaken regarding student employability. One aspect of this is the establishment of Employer/Industry Advisory Boards such as that in Computer Science and Electronic Engineering. The review team was also informed by employers of a variety of other involvements they have with the University (see Theme).

1.74 The review team concludes that appropriate systems are in place for the provision of external and independent expertise at key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards. This provides assurance that both the University's own academic standards and UK threshold academic standards are set, delivered, achieved and maintained. The review team refers to the recommendation to strengthen procedures concerning externality and minor modifications of programmes; however, this does not considerably affect the rigour of associated processes for this area and the capacity of the University to respond effectively. Therefore 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

1.75 In reaching its positive judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published University handbook. All of the Expectations for this judgement area are met and the associated levels of risk are low. Expectation A3.3 contains a recommendation regarding the need to slightly amend the format of Periodic Review reports. Expectations A2.2 and A3.4 are cross-referenced to the recommendation formulated under Expectation B1 regarding the University's policy on the nature and extent of changes to programmes. These recommendations do not entail any major structural, operational or procedural change. The review team identified no features of good practice and no affirmations for this judgement area.

1.76 The review team concludes that the setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered at the University of Essex **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 Decisions on development and approval of new programmes are informed by the University's Education Strategy and by financial sustainability requirements. New programmes undergo an approval process that is explained in detail in the online quality guide. The process keeps approval of the business case separate from final academic approval. The AQSC has responsibility for the approval, review and discontinuation of programmes of study, with delegated authority from the Education Committee and, in turn, the Senate. Students are represented on the relevant committees. A range of internal sources of advice are available.

2.2 The process for amending a programme after validation or re-validation allows for the Deputy Dean (Education) to approve proposals, including changes to course structure or changes of programme title. Proposals are subject to department-level scrutiny before being forwarded to the relevant Deputy Dean (Education). Internal and, where appropriate, external advice and consultation that informs the decision is recorded in the documentation presented for approval.

2.3 The University does not prescribe any formal limit to the number and extent of changes to programmes that can be approved by the Deputy Dean (Education), instead allowing these individuals to exercise discretion about when proposals should be referred to the full meeting of the Faculty Education Committee. Similarly, the extent of proposed changes which should trigger additional external scrutiny is not formally articulated, but left to the discretion of the Deputy Dean (Education). There is no clear mechanism for monitoring the cumulative effect of successive changes. The review team concludes that this represents a potential risk that decisions might be taken without reference to expertise from outside the programme where the proposals, either individually or as a result of successive individual changes, could result in significant changes to programmes. The review team **recommends** that the University review its policy on the nature and extent of changes to programmes that can be approved without reference to external advice and the relevant committee.

2.4 The review team reviewed the guidance on programme approval and for validation panels, and met staff involved in the approval process at different levels.

2.5 The processes are working effectively in practice. In particular, the review team were reassured to see that department-level scrutiny, including external advice, is included in case study approval documentation.

2.6 In relation to the process of amending a programme after validation or revalidation, the review team found no evidence, in practice, of decisions having been made without reference to appropriate expertise from outside the relevant programme. 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

2.7 The University has an undergraduate admissions policy that articulates the values of equality of opportunity, transparency and consistency. This is overseen by the Education Committee. This policy is approved by the Senate, and responsibility for its implementation lies with the Deputy Director (Admissions, Communications and External Relations). It is monitored and reviewed by the Senate and its subcommittees, including the AQSC, on an annual basis. The University draws on the rules and guidelines set out by external bodies, such as UCAS and Supporting Professionalism in Admissions. The University's partner institutions follow procedures approved by the University but maintain responsibility for their admissions process. The University markets itself through both printed and online materials as well as hosting open days and education exhibitions. The University also has an outreach programme. The University sets out regulations relating to admission online, however, entry requirements are set at course level, although this is subject to monitoring and approval by the Education Committee prior to each recruitment and admissions cycle. The University has a centralised admissions system for undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes. These policies constitute an approach in alignment with the Expectation.

2.8 The review team examined the operation of the University's admissions procedure in meetings with students, admissions staff, professional staff and academic staff. It scrutinised the documentation relating to admissions policies and procedures, and to the monitoring of these policies.

2.9 Professional staff are trained in the workings of the application and admissions process. Senior admissions advisers attend graduate directors briefings held in January annually. The Notes for New Admission Selectors document, seen by the review team, is thorough and gives an overview of the process as experienced by an applicant, as well as pointing to information provided by external bodies, such as UCAS. It also highlights the importance of the University's equality and diversity codes of practice. The University provides ongoing training and briefings for the senior admissions advisers and departmental admissions selectors, and claims that this is a mechanism for sharing good practice. The review team examined the minutes and sample agendas from undergraduate admissions team meetings and found that these provided a robust mechanism for sharing updates processes and statistics relating to admissions throughout the cycle. These meetings ensure that staff are up to date with internal and external deadlines.

2.10 Information for prospective students is managed through a customer relationship management system. The University also provides advice and guidance for prospective students on writing personal statements. The University refers students who declare a disability upon application to the University's Student Support Team. The review team heard from professional staff that academic staff can refer students for support, but that the University also encourages self-referral.

2.11 Undergraduate applicants seek admission through UCAS; if the University decides to make the applicant an offer this is communicated through UCAS and also through a letter from the University. In cases where it is considered unlikely that the applicant will meet the

entry requirements set out, the applicant may be offered an alternative course. Admissions selectors are required to record the reasons for the application decision in each case. The University has an accreditation of prior (experiential) learning policy, and this is available on the University's website.

2.12 The University website contains comprehensive information about courses, including information regarding course structure and content, application requirements, and tuition fees. Students whom the review team met reported that they used the website for information about their application and found it to be trustworthy and useful.

2.13 The University has a graduate admissions policy approved by the Senate; the implementation of this policy is the responsibility of the Deputy Director (Admissions, Communications and External Relations). This policy takes account of the guidance set out in external benchmarks such as the Quality Code. The University's centralised graduate admissions oversees all direct applications. Applications are processed in the Graduate Admissions Office by senior admissions advisers, although selection is the responsibility of the heads of department for taught students and the Dean of Postgraduate Research and Education for those applying for research student positions. In practice it is delegated to academic staff or members of the Graduate Admissions team, supported by the graduate administrator. Entry requirements are set out in the Graduate Prospectus, although the University amends the entry requirements on the website if these are changed. Although not a part of the normal application process, in some cases applicants can be invited to interview. Research degree admissions procedures are reviewed at the Education Committee during the Annual Review of Admissions Policy, to be reviewed and recommended to the Senate. The University hosts a Doctoral Welcome Week at the beginning of the academic year and then a series of smaller events later in the academic calendar for research students starting at different points.

2.14 The University's admissions policy does not give applicants the right of appeal. However, complaints can be directed, within 14 days, to the Director of Communications and External Relations. This is outlined in the admissions policy. The office of the Director of Communications and External Relations records admissions complaints; in the two years preceding the review visit the University had received one complaint.

2.15 The University arranges an induction for incoming students. Students are given a programme of events for this first week. This Welcome Week is discussed at the Student Experience Committee, the results of which are considered by the Welcome Planning Group and, with regards to registration, incorporated into the registration review. The review team heard from professional staff that the University's management information and data systems had been used to identify and target groups of students at risk, and to provide greater steps at induction to help them adjust to university life. One example was of this the provision of 'housewarming' days for mature students and commuting students. These 'housewarming' days introduce mature and commuting students to, among other areas: the University's online systems, including the VLE; extracurricular activities available; and networking opportunities. A welcome conference is held for postgraduate researchers.

2.16 Admissions for partner institutions are overseen by the partner institution, but the University maintains a dialogue through the Admissions Office. The admissions policy for prospective students at partner institutions is overseen through the individual course validation and Periodic Review process. To ensure consistency in marketing practice, the University holds an annual Marketing Practitioners' Forum, at which marketing and recruitment is discussed at an operational level. Partner institutions follow the University policy and procedure for Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL); approval of APL is overseen by the Dean and Associate Dean of Academic Partnerships.

2.17 The review team concludes that the University's policies and procedures in meeting this Expectation are effective. The University has appropriate levels of transparency and support for students applying across study areas, undergraduate and postgraduate levels, and student needs are considered throughout the application and enrolment procedures. As such the Expectation is met with low risk.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.18 Oversight of teaching and learning matters is the responsibility of the Education Committee, a committee of the Senate. Executive responsibility resides with the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education), who chairs the Education Committee. Faculty Education Committees, chaired by Executive Deans, report to the Education Committee and oversee teaching and learning matters at the faculty level.

2.19 The University's approach to learning and teaching is set out in a recently approved Education Strategy which places an emphasis on research-led teaching. Implementation across the University is being undertaken through a Curriculum Review process. Oversight of the development and implementation of the Education Strategy is the responsibility of the Education Committee, with Faculty Education Committees monitoring the local implementation and confirming to the Education Committee when the process has been satisfactorily completed in each department. An annual education action plan indicates the priorities for the year

2.20 Academic staff have access to a range of materials and workshops to support them in developing their teaching and learning practices. The proportion of staff with teaching qualifications is one of the institutional Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and routes to Higher Education Academy recognition are provided through a Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education Practice (PGCHEP) and a continuous professional development route known as CADENZA.

2.21 The University has in place appropriate structures, strategies and policies to articulate, and systematically review and enhance, the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices.

2.22 The review team spoke to senior staff, students, academic staff and professional support staff, as well as graduate teaching assistants. The team viewed evidence provided by the University that included strategies, action plans, committee minutes and policies, and viewed online resources.

2.23 The University has engaged in extensive discussions with its academic, professional and student community, and with partners, when developing its Education Strategy. In discussions with the review team, staff were supportive of the strategy, understood its purpose and key features, and were aware of the support and processes that would enable it to be translated into teaching and learning practice through the Curriculum Review process and other activities. Implementation of the Curriculum Review is supported by an online toolkit and workshops. The considered and structured approach to the development and implementation of the Education Strategy, and the associated Curriculum Review process including the engagement with students and staff, is **good practice**.

2.24 The University, through its VLE and other means, provides students with access to a range of technologies to support their learning. The review team heard that different departments were at significantly different stages of utilising technology to enhance learning.

While lecture capture processes had been rolled out across the University as part of a Listen Again initiative, and the VLE was used effectively to support online learning, some departments were utilising a different digital repository to provide access to learning materials. The review team concludes that there is a degree of inconsistency in making full and effective use of technology, but noted initiatives such as the introduction of TALIS Aspire and the FASer project on assessment feedback, and that the Education Strategy incorporates a step change in institutional capacity for technology enhanced learning.

2.25 The University has in place effective structures, processes and activities to support those involved in teaching. Staff find the opportunities to develop their teaching practices through the formal qualifications, the CADENZA process and workshops helpful. They are involved in peer observation of teaching processes within departments and there is institutional funding for teaching related projects. Research students involved in teaching are required to undertake a programme as part of CADENZA to gain Associate Fellowship recognition by the Higher Education Academy, and receive mentoring and support including observation of their teaching.

2.26 The processes for monitoring the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices are effective. Student satisfaction is one of the University's KPIs and is routinely monitored. The University has recently revised its process for the student assessment of modules and teaching, and departments are required to set and monitor goals through the ARC process. Although the student submission suggested that further work is required in some areas to ensure that lectures are more engaging, feedback from students on teaching practices through the University's own processes, and through the National Student Survey (NSS), indicate generally high levels of satisfaction, and this was confirmed by the students whom the review team met. The impact of teaching on student performance is monitored through the ARC process and through consideration by the Education Committee of performance against the protected characteristics for which data is available.

2.27 The review team concludes that the University has in place effective arrangements for reviewing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities; consequently, 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

2.28 The University has in place appropriate structures, strategies and policies to monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.

2.29 The University's commitment to student development and achievement is set out in its Strategic Plan and supported by its Education Strategy. Oversight is the responsibility of the Education Committee. A Student Experience Committee, reporting to the Education Committee, was established at the start of 2013-14. Membership of the Student Experience Committee includes the Students' Union and Directors of central services. Faculty Education Committees have a responsibility to ensure the effective implementation within the faculty of the policies and procedures for enhancing academic quality and the student experience.

2.30 The review team spoke to senior staff, students, academic staff and professional support staff involved in the delivery of core services and in student support. The review team viewed evidence provided by the University that included strategies, action plans, committee minutes and policies.

2.31 Access to student support is covered in student inductions, and supported by course handbooks and web-based information. Essex101, a suite of online resources, has been developed by departments with professional services staff to support recruitment and transition activities. In discussion with the team, students confirmed that they are aware of the resources available to support their studies and that, where they had accessed them, they were accurate and useful. The NSS, internal student surveys and annual reviews of key service areas confirm that students are satisfied with the experience and support they receive.

2.32 Undergraduate and postgraduate taught students have an allocated personal tutor who supports their learning; a peer mentoring scheme operates in most departments. Students confirmed that these arrangements are in place and worked effectively.

2.33 Management information is used to inform decision making processes in relation to the allocation of resources, and to target the work of study skills officers and others who support student development. The University is making management information readily available and this is being effectively used to support students' academic, personal and professional development (see good practice in Enhancement, paragraph 4.12).

2.34 Students stated that they had access to the necessary learning resources to support their studies and the review team heard that the University was planning to introduce TALIS Aspire software from September 2015 to further ensure access to appropriate resources. The University Librarian is a member of the Senate, enabling him to ensure that his team are aware of planned curriculum developments at an early stage.

2.35 The University has a range of initiatives, well developed or underway, to broaden the student experience in line with the elements of the Education Strategy. These include the Frontrunners programme, which provides on-campus employment for students; the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Programme; and Challenge Essex, which promotes interdisciplinary research projects. In addition, the University is developing the Essex Experience, designed to promote a culture of belonging, build communities, promote

enquiry, and develop future leaders. Significant emphasis has been placed on employability (see Theme).

2.36 The review team concludes that the University has in place, monitors and evaluates arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. Students value co and extracurricular activities which are implemented. Consequently, 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

2.37 The University's current Strategic Plan commits it to a partnership with its students, and more specifically, to working with the Students' Union to ensure that 'at all organisational levels the university's processes for the governance and management of education incorporate and respond to the student voice'.

2.38 The University's current Student Representation Policy was adopted by the Senate in 2012-13, following a review which had taken account of, among other things, the introduction of the Quality Code, *Chapter B5*. The policy is reviewed annually and is published on the Academic Standards and Quality webpages. This offers clear, accessible guidance on: the policy's aims and objectives; the responsibilities of departments; the roles and responsibilities of, and the selection processes for, representatives; and how the Staff Student Liaison Committee system operates. It also offers similarly comprehensible information on the opportunities for students to participate in the Periodic Review process; this is supplemented by more detailed guidance for students who will either be serving on or be meeting review panels.

2.39 Students are represented on the Senate, the Senate's Education Committee and on all the committees which report to it: the AQSC; the Partnership Education Committee (PEC); each Faculty Education Committee; and the Student Experience Committee. Departments/schools formally engage with their students via a network of course representatives and Student Staff Liaison Committees.

2.40 Student representatives on university and faculty level committees attend because they hold a Students' Union sabbatical position, or, like the faculty convenors on the Faculty Education Committees, a Students' Union staff post; or are nominated by the Union. Following a review conducted in 2013-14, course representatives, from whom the year representatives are selected to sit on the department/school Student Staff Liaison Committees, were recruited by the Student's Union.

2.41 Students from the University's collaborative partners are represented, not only on the PEC, but also on the Curriculum and Quality Groups (CQGs), which oversee the quality of the programmes offered by the partner concerned

2.42 Until the start of 2013-14, a Doctoral Strategy Committee had provided university-level representation for postgraduate research students. However, the Doctoral Strategy Committee was abolished at the end of 2012-13 following a review of the Senate Committee structure. Representation for postgraduate students is now via: the Senate; the Senate's Education Committee, whose terms of reference provide for one postgraduate representative; and an informal Postgraduate Network, which held its first meeting in November 2014.

2.43 In addition to these various opportunities for formal representation, the University offers students a number of other ways in which they can engage with quality assurance and enhancement. These include membership of working Task and Finish Groups, serving as panel members, or inputting to the University's Periodic Review process. They can also participate in the annual internal Student Satisfaction Survey and the NSS, the results from

both of which have to be considered as part of the ARC process, which was introduced in 2013-14.

2.44 The review team spoke to students; senior, academic and professional support staff; and graduate teaching assistants. The team viewed evidence provided by the University including strategies, action plans, committee minutes and policies, and viewed online resources.

2.45 The University has taken a number of positive steps to ensure that its arrangements for formal representation work effectively. These include: its response to concerns about the level and consistency of representation at course and department levels; the resulting transfer, from departments/schools to the Students' Union, of primary responsibility for the recruitment of course and year representatives; the expansion of the Student Experience Committee's remit to include consideration of the outcome of student satisfaction surveys; the University's collaboration with the Students' Union in the training provided for aspirant course-representatives; and the guidance and briefing which it makes available to prospective and serving student representatives.

2.46 From the minutes of the Student Experience Committee's first three meetings, it is apparent that it is providing a forum for students to discuss with the University, in a systematic, comprehensive, and informed manner, the quality and enhancement of extracurricular and support service provision. For example, in its 2013-14 meetings, the Student Experience Committee considered: the departmental adviser/personal tutor service; the development of university-level support and professional services; and employability-focused communications.

2.47 Student representatives can initiate discussion on matters of concern to them, under Student Business or the Faculty Student Voice Report, both of which are standing items on all Faculty Education Committee agendas.

2.48 Although the network of Student Staff Liaison Committees is working satisfactorily across all three faculties, the University is introducing methods, in collaboration with the Students' Union, to monitor their effectiveness more systematically. Student representatives expressed appreciation for the efforts which the University makes to prepare for and support them in carrying out their responsibilities.

2.49 Through their participation in Task and Finish Groups, students are able to contribute actively to the development of the University's consideration of its Education Strategy, the effectiveness of the Senate, the future of the Graduate School, the development of the Student Charter, and how to improve student assessment of modules and teaching.

2.50 Their membership of committees and Task and Finish Groups affords students access to a wide range of information related to quality assurance and enhancement. In 2013-14, for example, this included: external examiners' reports; the evidence in the ARC and Periodic Review reports; the data which was considered for purposes of the reviews of assessment strategies; postgraduate retention; the discussion papers on equality and diversity; the analyses of 2013 NSS results; and student performance by cohort. In addition, students have access to the full range of evidence considered by the various Task and Finish Groups, on which they are represented. The Student Experience Committee affords student representatives opportunities to engage in evidence-based discussions with the university on a wide range of extracurricular and support/professional service provision.

2.51 More generally, students told the review team that they had ready access to all parts and levels of, and enjoyed a close collaborative relationship with, the University; and that they are confident that the University takes their voice seriously.

2.52 In view of the range of channels, both formal and informal, that the University makes available, and the efforts it makes to ensure that all of them operate effectively, the review team concludes that the University is taking deliberate steps to engage all students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. Consequently, 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

2.53 The University has comprehensive regulations and assessment policies for undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes, and for research degrees. These are accessible to both staff and students via the ASPO website and through module and programme handbooks. Assessment regulations and policies are regularly reviewed and the University has a proactive approach to assessment design (see Expectation A3.2).

2.54 The standardised arrangements for preparing for and conducting assessment across the University provide a suitable framework for students to be equitably and fairly assessed. The established processes for review and development of assessment within curriculum planning ensure that there is an appropriate range of opportunities for students to demonstrate their achievement of learning outcomes.

2.55 Through their review of documentation and meetings with staff and students, the review team examined assessment policies and practice, including the availability of regulations and guidance, and how assessment is developed within the curriculum. The team explored steps to make greater use of technology in assessment and how the University had responded to student feedback concerning this issue.

2.56 In discussions with staff and students, the review team found that there was appropriate awareness of assessment policies, including arrangements for marking and moderation, feedback on assessment, advice and management of academic offences, and of complaints and appeals.

2.57 In response to student views, the University has, since 2011, been working to improve assessment and feedback on assessment. A Task and Finish group was established in 2011-12 and a formal review of assessment and feedback reported in December 2013. Moderation practice was reviewed in 2012-13. The Curriculum Review process, which forms part of the Education Strategy, includes attention to the effectiveness of assessment strategies and, in particular, the impact on student retention. Management information provided by the online Planning Information Portal (PIP) system has played a helpful role in this work, and staff met by the review team noted its usefulness to overall curriculum development (see good practice in Enhancement, paragraph 4.12). An example of improvement following review is that in Computing and Electronic Engineering, where the teaching and assessment of core first year topics, which students found particularly challenging, was modified to take place over a longer period, allowing additional time for formative development.

2.58 As part of its work in developing assessment and feedback, the University engaged with the Higher Education Academy Change Programme TESTA (Transforming the Experience of Students Through Assessment), initially led by the Science and Health Faculty. The methodology from this project is now being used to review assessment strategies within ongoing Curriculum Review, and is included in the online toolkit for this purpose.

2.59 Through the Changing the Learning Landscape project, the University is intending to deliver an integrated approach to online assessment submission and feedback. Work in this area includes facilitating electronic submission and return of feedback using the VLE and a purpose-built system called FASer. FASer is linked to an online submission tool for detecting plagiarism. The University is in the process of reviewing its procedures in this area. Although a number of steps are being taken to develop and encourage the use of technology in assessment and feedback, none of the above approaches are used across all the University's provision (see also Expectation B4).

2.60 Students met by the review team reported that academic staff provided good support in preparing for assessment, were accessible and provided swift responses to queries. There had been a student-led project on avoiding plagiarism, and students were satisfied with the guidance and advice available to them in this area. Students also reported improvements to the online availability of administrative materials relating to their studies, including those relating to assessment, such as the submission of extenuating circumstances requests.

2.61 On the basis of the comprehensive and regularly reviewed policies and practice, the review team concludes that arrangements for assessment of students' achievement of intended learning outcomes are appropriate and effective. The Expectation is therefore met. The University's continuing work to improve the quality of assessment practice and the general level of student satisfaction with assessment makes the associated level of risk low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining

Findings

2.62 Centralised systems are in place for the nomination, appointment and reporting of external examiners. These processes are set out on the ASPO website and include an advisory document entitled Roles and Responsibilities of External Examiners, which is sent to new external examiners. A training video is available online. These materials are used for induction in conjunction with support from individual departments, instead of an onsite training programme.

2.63 External examiners for taught programmes are nominated by departments and appointed by Executive Deans of Faculty. External examiners are appointed at programme level with additional module external examiners where specialist input is required.

2.64 External examiners formally report to the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education), as nominated by the Vice-Chancellor. Reports are received by the ASPO and distributed to Deans and departments. Heads of Department are responsible for formulating responses to external examiner reports, copies of which are also received by the ASPO.

2.65 External examiner reports are considered within departments, at Faculty (or partnership) Education Committees, and at the AQSC. Issues raised are also covered in the ARC process. The Education Committee receives reports from the AQSC and also receives an annual summary of issues raised by external examiners.

2.66 Arrangements for external examiners for partnership programmes are the same as those for other University taught programmes regarding appointments, receiving reports and making responses. The Dean of Academic Partnerships is responsible for maintaining oversight of these arrangements.

2.67 The University's arrangements, as coordinated by the ASPO, and exercised through the departments and faculties, are clear and comprehensive, allowing scrupulous use of external examiners and for this Expectation to be met.

2.68 The review team reviewed policy documentation in relation to external examining, together with a range of external examiner reports and the minutes of meetings at which issues raised by external examiners were discussed and actioned. In meetings with staff the team sought to clarify processes and engagement with the external examiner system. Students met by the review team were asked about their access to external examiners' reports.

2.69 The external examiner system is well established throughout the University home and collaborative provision. Procedures for the use of external examiners are updated in line with the revised version of the Quality Code, *Chapter B7*.

2.70 Staff whom the review team met showed a good understanding of the external examiner system and its contribution to externality in the maintenance of academic standards in the University. Programme staff are well engaged with external examiners and value the contributions made to programme development through discussion of reports and responses to actions identified. They are able to clearly articulate their response should serious concerns be raised, which includes prompt addressing of the issue and the involvement of senior staff.

2.71 The review team were able to trail the discussion of external examiner reports through departmental and faculty committees, including through the ARC reporting, and noted that action points are clearly identified and followed through.

2.72 External examiners contribute to the review of assessment strategies at approval and review events through their ongoing involvement with programme teams.

2.73 Students' access to external examiner reports is primarily via their distribution and discussion at Student Staff Liaison Committee meetings, where student representatives meet with programme staff. At present, there is no routine access to external examiners' reports for individual University students, other than on request. Collaborative partner institutions, however, post external examiner reports on their intranets with access for all students. University-based students met by the review team indicated their reliance on student representatives to disseminate external examiners' views; student representatives noted their role in sharing issues raised with their fellow students. Senior University staff stated that training for student representatives included an emphasis on the importance of communicating external examiners' reports with their groups.

2.74 The review team concludes that, as systems for external examining are clearly set out, well established, and effectively coordinated by the ASPO, the Expectation is met. Due to the systematic consideration of external examiner reports and response to identified action points, 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

2.75 The University undertakes an Annual Review of Courses (ARC) which covers all taught programmes (including those delivered by partners) and requires reflection on a range of evidence. Departments generate an action plan to address any identified issues and enhance the programme. This is informed by a standard set of performance indicators including comparisons of performance against other departments and the sector. The management information for ARC includes progression and attainment statistics, among other elements. The reporting template is comprehensive and requires reflection on student feedback and external examiner comments. There are similar annual review arrangements for doctoral programmes.

2.76 There is also a quinquennial Periodic Review process. Students are represented on Periodic Review panels and on the committees that consider the outcomes of the process. For programmes delivered through partners, there is an additional Institutional Review Process for each partner every five years. Doctoral training centres/partnerships undergo Periodic Reviews under the auspices of the relevant Research Councils.

2.77 The AQSC has responsibility for overseeing the outcomes of review processes. It operates with delegated authority from the Education Committee and the Senate.

2.78 When a programme is to be closed, the University requires approval of this decision based on evidence including the strategy for managing the discontinuation. Periodic Reviews explore (among other matters) the student experience where programmes are being taught out.

2.79 The review team read a number of exemplar reports for ARC and Periodic Review, and the equivalents for partnership provision and doctoral awards.

2.80 The processes in place are both regular and systematic (see also Expectation B1). In particular, ARC is informed by management information that is comprehensive and readily accessible, and which facilitates academic planning (see good practice in Enhancement, paragraph 4.12). The review processes cross reference the FHEQ and other national benchmarks, although reporting on this in Periodic Review exhibits inconsistencies (see also Expectation A3.3). The supporting documentation for review processes is comprehensive.

2.81 The review team concludes that the processes are working effectively in practice. 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

2.82 The University has a recently established Student Appeals, Complaints and Conduct Office to oversee the management of student complaints and academic appeals. This Office takes responsibility for aspects relating to non-academic misconduct as outlined in the Student Code of Conduct and reports to the Deputy Academic Registrar (Systems Administration). The University has mapped its procedures against the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education's Good Practice Framework and the Quality Code, *Chapter B9*, and made revisions to the complaints procedure accordingly. The Code of Student Conduct is available online. Students can receive information and support through a variety of sources, including the Students' Union Advice Centre, through the Student Appeals, Complaints and Conducts Office, the University website and the Student Support Office. The University's approach to complaints is to attempt to resolve them satisfactorily as early as possible at an informal level. The review team reviewed the evidence and finds that the University's procedures meet this Expectation.

2.83 The review team investigated the workings of the University's complaints and appeals procedures against the relevant chapter in the Quality Code in meetings with students, and academic and professional staff. They also looked at documentation and a paper trail following a non-academic complaint and an academic appeal.

2.84 The complaints procedure is available through the University website, and in student handbooks, including those for undergraduate, taught postgraduate, and research students. The review team examined the document trail of evidence relating to a non-academic complaint and found that the University followed their internal regulations, and dealt with the matter in a timely and appropriate manner. The University referred the student to the relevant guidelines and places that they could seek further information and support; at the conclusion of the review of the complaint the student was informed of their right to pursue it further with an external body, should it fall within their guidelines.

2.85 The University's complaints procedure is that the student should first resolve the complaint at an informal level before taking formal steps. The student is then encouraged to make the complaint through the completion of the Complaints Form, available online; this requires the student to outline the informal steps towards resolution that had been taken. Complaints forms are also available from the Student Support Office, Registry Research Team, Accommodation Office, departmental offices and through the Students' Union. The Academic Registrar maintains a record of complaints and reports termly to the Vice-Chancellor. The University then has a robust internal mechanism in place for students who seek a review of the handling of a complaint, the details and procedures for which are available to students through the website. As a final recourse, the University directs the student to the information regarding the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education for external review: this information is included in the Completion of Procedures letter.

2.86 The AQSC considers complaints data and the report from the Office of the Independent Adjudicator, annually. This report is produced by the Student Appeals, Complaints and Conduct team. The review team examined the documentation relating to the AQSC's consideration of the student appeals and complaints, and academic offences data,

and found that appeals were broken down by appropriate detail, including by faculty, department, partner institution, year of study, and by undergraduate and postgraduate study, as well as by outcome. In meetings with senior staff, the review team found that the University used a variety of mechanisms to capture debates resolved at the local level or issues that did not make it to the formal stage - including supporting the Student Union Advice Service and tracking comments on social media - and that they made use of complaints data. The University Senate receives through the Student Experience Committee an annual report on complaints, and this is used to develop any action to be taken by the Education Committee. It monitors complaints and uses this to identify areas for improvement. The University received an annual letter from the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education and this was reviewed by the team: it shows that the University has a strong institutional record in dealing with complaints.

2.87 The University gives research degree students the opportunity to appeal against progress and examination decisions. These are available through the University's governance section on the website. The website details the primary legitimate grounds for appeal against a progress decision or an examination decision, including for those studying for professional doctorates. This procedure is that students seeking to appeal the recommendation of the Research Students' Progress Committee do so on a Form of Appeal within two weeks, available online and through the Registry Research Team.

2.88 The student submission stated that most students are aware of sources of information regarding how to make a complaint. The Students' Union has now embedded issues regarding awareness of complaint mechanisms into the student representative training. The review team examined information regarding the training and found that appeals processes are discussed, ensuring that the Students' Union can play an active role in supporting student achievement. The student submission also suggests that the newly established Student Appeals, Complaints and Conduct office has had a positive effect and is seen to be a useful facility. Similarly, the newly drafted complaints and appeals policy is considered to have aided transparency and understanding on the students' part. Students the review team met reported that they were confident they could access information about complaints, appeal policies and procedures through the Students' Union advice service. Students from partner institutions following an online course were confident that they would be able to raise concerns through accessible channels. Student representatives reported that they had confidence in the University's complaints procedures.

2.89 The review team scrutinised the documentation relating to an academic appeal, which was upheld, and found that it was handled in a timely and effective manner in line with the University's internal procedures. The student was notified of the appeals process throughout and informed of all relevant steps, including how it might be referred to an external body.

2.90 Information regarding academic misconduct is contained in student handbooks. Students the review team met reported that they had adequate information and support in how to avoid committing academic misconduct. They also reported that a variety of citation methods were used by different departments but that they were supported in using these. Academic staff the review team met directed the review team to the information available to students through the University's internet pages, and to ways that students could self-check their understanding of plagiarism.

2.91 The University appeals procedure is accessible online through the University Regulations page. The University's appeals procedures are differentiated by appeal type. The University has held a workshop covering the complaints and appeals process, including information about the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education and partner

procedures. Complaints data regarding nature, outcome, and follow up actions - including those made at partner institutions - is discussed at the Student Experience Committee. At partner institutions internal appeals procedures are exhausted before they are referred to the University.

2.92 The review team concludes that the policies that underpin the procedures are adequate, and the University has effective systems in place for making students aware of the routes for resolution available to them. Having scrutinised workings of these policies as applied to a recent complaint and appeal, the review team is satisfied that the University is implementing these procedures and making use of the data arising from them; therefore 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

2.93 The University maintains a list of partners and definitions of its partnership arrangements on its website. It has well established arrangements with regional colleges with which it has a range of validated courses. A review of international partnerships has led to a number of withdrawals from overseas partnership arrangements. As a result, the University currently has a small number of overseas partners, including well established partnerships with whom it offers dual awards. The University also has a number of international link agreements which allow progression (non-guaranteed) to University of Essex courses. The Admissions office maintains a register of link agreements.

2.94 Approval of partners is a two stage process, with the first stage focusing on due diligence and strategic fit, and stage two focusing on academic programmes and quality assurance arrangements. Once a partner has been approved, the University enters into a formal partnership collaboration agreement signed by the respective parties.

2.95 Course handbooks are produced for each award delivered at partner institutions. The programme specification is embedded within the course handbooks. Partners use the University's Rules of Assessment but may seek variation if appropriate through due process. Scheme variations are updated annually. The course handbook captures any changes. If the course is online, an online feedback form is used to notify students of the change.

2.96 The quality assurance of programmes delivered by partners takes place through the annual review process. This applies to all partners, including Kaplan online. Partners submit ARC reports by course, followed by an overarching institutional report. The Dean of Academic Partnerships plays a key role in the scrutiny of the annual review reports which are submitted to the PEC for consideration. External examiner reports and module evaluations feed into the annual review process.

2.97 The University has recently introduced Partnership Performance monitoring for UK partners based on a number of Partnership Performance Indicators (PPIs) which are aligned to five of the University's KPIs. These performance indicators are addressed as part of academic review. Key Information Set data to enable partners to respond to the PPIs are provided by the University. Partners with significant breadth of academic provision are also subject to an Institutional Annual Review. Similarly, the Dean of Academic Partnerships receives the reports and the action plan. Outcomes are monitored by the PEC.

2.98 The Dean and Associate Dean of Academic Partnerships are responsible for oversight of the quality assurance and enhancement of the University's collaborative provision. Both have role descriptors. They are the key point of contact with the partner institutions.

2.99 Committee oversight of partnership arrangements is undertaken by the PEC. The PEC makes recommendations to the AQSC on a range of matters, including proposals to establish, revalidate and discontinue programmes at partners, except UCS which has its own Joint Academic Committee. Each of the UK partners has a Partnership Management Board and some partners also have a CQG, which has responsibility for operational matters.

2.100 External examiner reports are reviewed by the Associate Dean of Academic Partnerships who produces an overview report for each partner. Partners publish external examiner reports on their intranet, which can be accessed by staff and students. The review team was informed that external examiner reports are also considered at course committees.

2.101 Partners' courses are subject to Periodic Review every five years. The ASPO website provides guidance for partners about the process, including the writing of a self-evaluation document. There is also guidance for review panel members. Following the review process, a report is produced followed by an action plan produced by the course team.

2.102 The University's online programmes developed, managed and delivered by Kaplan online are subject to the same quality assurance policies and procedures as those for its UK partners. Students studying on online courses are supported by a student adviser and an online user module.

2.103 The University has developed a significant number of agreements which provide increased opportunities for students to study abroad. The Essex Abroad office has responsibility for the management of study abroad arrangements. Each department has Study Abroad Officers who are responsible for advising students. The University has an agreement template for Study Abroad arrangements which is held by the Essex Abroad office. There is also a handbook, updated annually, which provides details of all aspects of the Study Abroad arrangements, including approval, review and evaluation. The University maintains a record of all incoming and outgoing Study Abroad arrangements.

2.104 A number of courses offer placements. There is a placement approval process for courses offering placements. Where a course offers a placement there is a course specific placement handbook. The University also publishes guides for students, providers and supervisors. The student experience of their placement is evaluated and placement supervisors undertake monitoring visits.

2.105 The University has appropriate frameworks, policies and procedures to ensure that it has ultimate responsibility for academic standards and quality, and those arrangements for delivering learning opportunities are implemented securely and managed effectively.

2.106 The review team spoke with senior and junior staff, and the partners involved in supporting the delivery of partnerships and online learning and students. The team considered a range of evidence provided by the University, including partner and course approval procedures and documentation, external examiner reports, partner review documentation and committee minutes.

2.107 The review team viewed a range of partner approval and course approval documentation which confirmed implementation of the two stage process, including due diligence, externality in course approval and the completion of the partnership collaboration agreement. The review team heard that partners are also subject to the Curriculum Review initiative which is being rolled out across the University, and that it has been discussed widely at the PEC, Partnership Management Board and CQG. Colleges have been informed of the proposals for Curriculum Review via the committee structure involving the PEC, Partnership Management Board and CQG.

2.108 The review team heard that all Colleges are planning how they will engage with the review, and staff in the Colleges have access to the Curriculum Review toolkit. In addition, there are online discussions and sessions. Colleges are also preparing for the integration of the Capstone research project into their programmes. The review team was informed that

as most courses already required students to produce a dissertation, this was not perceived as problematic.

2.109 Partner staff the review team met are fully engaged with the new indicators and are party to discussions about them through the PEC.

2.110 The University committee structure, which supports its oversight of quality and standards at its UK partner institutions, is well embedded, and partners are not only well represented but are also fully engaged with the committees on which they and their students are members. The review team heard that partners feel that their voice is heard, that they are party to discussions on a range of initiatives affecting Partners and that through the Dean and Associate Dean of Academic Partnerships there are robust lines of communication. The effective arrangements for oversight of the taught courses delivered by its UK partners and solely validated by the University of Essex is **good practice**.

2.111 The University indicates that overseas partners are not overseen by a similar committee structure to its UK partners. However, the University provided evidence that in relation to the recent development of the partnership with Kaplan Singapore it is in the process of establishing a Partnership Management Board, and that it has appointed a link tutor with clear roles and responsibilities. The effectiveness of these arrangements is yet to be tested. The review team **recommends** that the University strengthens the committee structure for oversight of all its overseas partnerships, especially in light of its planned growth.

2.112 The review team heard that responsibility for dual awards is embedded within the schools or department in which the course is based, and is subject to the University's standard quality assurance procedures for partner and course approval, and annual and Periodic Review.

2.113 The Dean of Academic Partnerships has delegated authority on behalf of the PEC to approve minor course modifications as well as the discontinuation of courses at partner institutions. Partners are required to submit a course variation form to the Dean of Academic Partnerships, who will decide whether it is a minor or major modification. Where the discontinuation of a programme is approved, the course team must provide an exit strategy for the students, and the course will only be withdrawn formally once the students have completed the course. Modifications to courses are subject to external examiner approval, following discussion at programme boards, and submitted to the Associate Dean of Academic Partnerships for approval on the course variation template.

2.114 Following the review of international partners and the decision of the Senate to withdraw from a number of international partnerships, the University has put in place a number of exit arrangements which ensure that students on the University's awards at these partners are supported to completion.

2.115 The appointment of external examiners at partners is the responsibility of the University. However, nominations are made by the partner and submitted to the PEC for approval. External examiners receive a local induction at the partner college. External examiner reports are discussed at the PEC, Partnership Management Board and CQG, and are made available to all partner students. The Associate Dean of Academic Partnerships provides a summary report of all external examiner reports for the PEC.

2.116 The review team was informed that the University offers a range of staff development activities for partner institutions organised by the ASPO. This includes examination board training dealing with complaints and appeals, and preparing data returns. Partner staff can also attend workshops organised by the University's Learning and Development team.

2.117 The University provides guidelines for work based and placement learning which includes the approval process, responsibilities, course design and agreement with providers. Courses wishing to introduce work based learning are required to complete a template for approval. Each course with a placement/work based element produces a handbook for the students. External examiners are expected to provide separate comments in their reports on study abroad, placements and work based learning.

2.118 Appeals and complaints are primarily the responsibility of the partner institution. Details of the respective procedures can be found on the respective college's websites. It is expected that students will exhaust the college's own appeals and complaints procedure before being referred to the University.

2.119 Partners have authority to make decisions relating to admissions. However, this is subject to admissions criteria being approved by the University. The review team heard that the admissions criteria is reviewed annually and discussed with the University for approval.

2.120 The University has recently enhanced its Study Abroad arrangements to encourage greater participation by its students. Study Abroad Officers have been appointed in each department to provide support and guidance for students. A detailed approval process for Study Abroad arrangements has established a coherent framework for the oversight of such arrangements. While the increased popularity of studying abroad has meant that students cannot always be assured of their first choice destination, they are generally assured of their second choice. Study Abroad arrangements are evaluated by students participating in the scheme and responses reviewed by the Essex Abroad office.

2.121 There are published conversion scales approved by the Senate for assessment marks received by students while on their study abroad. The Study Abroad Handbook provides comprehensive information on how to seek approval for study abroad, how to apply and how it will be managed. In order to encourage more students to study abroad, the University has changed its Rules of Assessment to ensure that students who take up the opportunity are not disadvantaged when assessment marks gained abroad are converted. The review team noted that the changes to the Rules of Assessment had undergone due process. A mark conversion review group has been constituted that meets annually to review conversion scales. The comprehensive arrangements for Study Abroad which provide enhanced learning opportunities for international study is **good practice**.

2.122 Where a partner has Postgraduate Research students, the partner is subject to the University's monitoring and reporting process. However, the review team noted that annual monitoring reports completed by partners had not been considered by any University Committee, including the PEC which has responsibility for the approval, monitoring and review of research degrees offered by partner institutions (see Expectation B11).

2.123 The review team heard that the student representatives at partners are recruited, supported and trained by the colleges. They can access information produced by the University, such as minutes of committee meetings, are members of the PEC and CQG, as well as committees internal to the college. A range of mechanisms are in place to capture the student voice, including module evaluations, college surveys, HE Board of Study, a well-developed course representative system, NSS, the Staff Student Liaison Committee and Periodic Review. The review team was informed that a range of enhancements had arisen from the various processes.

2.124 The University has developed for approval by the Education Committee a new strategic framework for the development of collaborative educational partnerships, which aligns with the Strategic Plan with a focus on education and research partnerships. A revised partner approval process is outlined in the framework.

2.125 The review team, through the meetings with staff and students, and reading of the range of evidence provided, concludes that the University has policies and procedures in place that secure their ultimate responsibility for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities for awards delivered by partners, and that such arrangements are implemented securely and effectively. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Findings

2.126 The University has explicit regulations, policies and guidance for research degrees, supplemented by Codes of Practice, departmental student handbooks and guidance produced by the Registry Research Team and other relevant professional services and academic departments. The management, monitoring and oversight of postgraduate research matters are the responsibility of the Education Committee and Faculty Education Committees.

2.127 After a review of the arrangements for postgraduate research provision and support, the University has recently replaced its Graduate School with a new structure that operates through the faculty executive Deans and Deputy Deans (Education). A new post of Dean of Postgraduate Research and Education represents the University at a strategic level in relation to the admission, training and funding of both doctoral research and postgraduate taught students. This role is supported by a Director of Research Training and an Associate Dean of Postgraduate Research and Education. The administrative team supporting these activities remains within the Registry Research Team.

2.128 Arrangements for the appointment of supervisors are the responsibility of a Graduate Director appointed by the Head of Department. Academic staff with limited supervisory experience are paired with a more experienced colleague as part of the supervisory team until they have supervised a student through to completion. Frequency of meetings between supervisors and students varies depending on the nature of the research undertaken. Supervisory boards involving the supervisor(s) and at least one member of staff who is not the student's supervisor are held at least twice a year for full-time students and once a year for part-time students. Appointment of examiners is the responsibility of the relevant Executive Dean.

2.129 Students are introduced to the research environment through central and departmental induction activities. The University has an Economic and Social Research Council funded Doctoral Training Centre and is a member of a number of Doctoral Training Partnerships. Proficio, an Advanced Skills Programme, provides further opportunities for students to develop skills and knowledge, and access expert support and guidance from academic colleagues.

2.130 Departmental Research Student Progress Committees (RSPC) review students' progress twice per year and make recommendations to the Executive Dean about whether the student can progress to the next year. The annual Research Degree Programme Review (RDPR) process has been recently modified into the Research Degree Programme Annual Review (RDPAR) in order to align it more closely with the ARC process for under and postgraduate provision, and to include more explicit focus on completion and withdrawal rates.

2.131 Postgraduate research students are part of the Student Staff Liaison Committees, and a Postgraduate Network has been established to ensure pan-university working and understanding to support postgraduate research provision.

2.132 The University has in place appropriate structures, strategies and policies to ensure that Research degrees are awarded in a research environment that provides secure academic standards and quality of opportunities, and support for personal and professional development.

2.133 The review team spoke to senior staff, research students, academic staff and professional support staff. The team viewed evidence provided by the University that included strategies, action plans, committee minutes and policies, and viewed online resources.

2.134 The revised arrangements for the oversight and monitoring of on campus research degree provision are relatively new and the review team is not able to make a judgement about the effectiveness of their operation. However, they are broadly evolutionary in nature and staff are able to articulate clearly how they operated. The review team concludes that a considered and planned approach was in place which will be further strengthened by the RDPAR process.

2.135 The University has a number of research students studying with its partners. The arrangements undergo Periodic Review in a similar manner to taught provision and operational matters are discussed as part of the CQG process. The review team considered this to be effective practice enabling the University to be secure about the arrangements for research students studying with partners. However, the annual monitoring reports completed by partners and sent to the Registry Research Team had not been considered by any University committee. The team noted that from 2014-15 the PEC has within its terms of reference responsibility for the approval, monitoring and review of research degrees offered by partner institutions. However, it had not considered any such degrees in the 14 months since its inception. The review team **recommends** that the University ensure there is effective institutional oversight of the approval, monitoring and review of postgraduate research provision with partners.

2.136 The arrangements for the assessment, support and supervision of postgraduate research students are secure. Research students talked positively about the importance attached to meetings with their supervisors and to supervisory boards. They are aware of processes by which they could raise issues in relation to supervision if necessary, as well as where to find details of the complaints and appeals process. Students consider they are effectively prepared for presenting and defending their thesis.

2.137 In discussions with the team, students from across the University talked very positively about the research culture in which they studied. Many departments run their own postgraduate journals and offer doctoral research seminars and conferences, and encourage students to present at such events. Through Proficio, PhD students have access to allocated funding to support their personal development. The University is considering being more flexible about the way in which this resource is allocated and extending it to other postgraduate research students. Students valued the opportunities to meet and share research experiences with other students including those outside of their discipline areas. Postgraduate research students are encouraged, and may be required, to attend postgraduate taught classes when and where appropriate. Employability activities extend to postgraduate research students and employment rates are monitored. Overall, the review team considers the high quality research environment, and the opportunities for personal and professional development provided for postgraduate research students, is **good practice**.

2.138 The review team concludes that 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, and that this environment offers

students quality of opportunities and the support they need to achieve successful academic, personal and professional outcomes from their research degrees. Thus, 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

2.139 In reaching its positive judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook. All of the Expectations for this judgement area are met and the associated levels of risk are low. Features of good practice are associated with Expectations B3, B10 and B11 and relate specifically to: the Education Strategy and Curriculum Review currently under implementation; the effective arrangements for Study Abroad and for oversight of taught programmes delivered by some UK partners; as well as the high quality of the research environment. Recommendations are formulated under Expectations B1, B10 and B11 and urge the University to: review its policy on the nature and extent of changes to programmes that can be approved without reference to external advice and the relevant committee; to strengthen the committee structure for oversight of overseas partnerships; and to ensure effective institutional oversight of the approval, monitoring and review of postgraduate research degrees delivered at partners. These recommendations do not entail any major structural, operational or procedural change, and in specific circumstances the University has acknowledged the need for development in the particular areas. The review team formulated no affirmations for this judgement area. The review team therefore concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the University of Essex **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 has a centralised department, the Communications and External Relations Section, responsible for the management of communications, including printed publications and the University website. Information for current and prospective students regarding student services and support is available online, and in printed materials. The University's Strategic Planning processes are informed by planning information and are measured against the University's KPIs. Planning information is used to inform decisions at University and at Departmental level.

3.2 The review team, while investigating this area against the Quality Code, met students, academic and learning support staff, and staff involved in the production, use and monitoring of university information. The review team analysed the systems developed by the University regarding information, and tested that these procedures are fit for purpose. To this aim, the review team examined the student submission, the University Self-Evaluation Document, and the information produced for both public and internal audiences. The review team also looked at the role of management and planning information in the University's strategic processes.

3.3 The review team examined the University's external website and the platforms used by the students, and found that they contained useful information regarding deadlines, timetables and lecture recordings. The University is in the process of developing a Student Services Hub, which will be integral to the University's project of ensuring that its website content is accessible, intuitive and student facing.

3.4 The University's mission statement and statement on higher education provision is in the University's Strategic Plan, which, like the Education Strategy, is available to the public via the website. Information about partner institutions and programmes validated by the University are also available to the public through the website; this includes information about the type of arrangement.

3.5 Information aimed at prospective students is thorough and readily available through the website. These prospectuses lay out what can be expected of the institution, as well as providing information about fees and student support. Information for research students is accessible through the academic section of the website. Students, both taught and research, whom the review team met were very positive about the information they received prior to application and upon admission. Information for new students is provided through a website page that acts as a hub for links to areas of interest to them. Students the review team met reflected positive experiences of the information provided, suggesting that information was trustworthy and accurate and prepared them for study at the University.

3.6 The University recognises the importance of maintaining consistency in student handbooks, as well as ensuring that they are up to date and reliable; the handbook checklist is maintained by the ASPO. This checklist ensures that, among other requirements, the details of methods of assessment, the marking scale, the details of postgraduate and career

opportunities, and staff information is included. Handbooks are available through the public-facing university website; these handbooks contain information about student support, resources, module information, exam dates, and dates of department and Student Staff Liaison Committee meetings. The review team examined research student handbooks, taught postgraduate course handbooks and undergraduate handbooks, and found that the information was consistent and accessible. Students can access online course administration and update their personal information via a webpage that acts as a hub for links to key sites. The review team heard in meetings with students and through the student written submission that students found that information provided about their courses and modules in handbooks and online to be reliable, accessible, and fit for purpose. University staff at educational leadership level confirmed the importance of handbooks as definitive sources of information for students.

3.7 Students the review team met, and who also contributed to the student submission, are aware of the availability of information resources. In particular, the website is considered a useful resource. The University has a VLE which students feel contains reliable information and is a useful means of communication.

3.8 The review team scrutinised guidance produced by the University to ensure that learning outcomes are expressed clearly and reliably. Programme specifications are available online, and the role of the specification is expressed clearly and in a way that an interested party would understand. Although students the review team met were not familiar with the terminology associated with programme specifications, they were familiar with the information programme specifications contain and found this to be readily accessible. Students used handbooks and the VLE to access information about modules and examinations.

3.9 The University uses data to support the development of its policies. The University uses a PIP, and information about this is published by the Planning Office in order to ensure that strategic information is used at Departmental and University level. The review team scrutinised the PIP, and found that this offered excellent opportunities for the University and Departments to track live data against the internal KPIs. Information about the University's KPIs is published by the Planning Office. Data on the PIP can be accessed and displayed at Departmental and University level. This PIP informs the ARC and is used by leadership, professional, academic and department level staff to inform their practice and Strategic Plans for their areas. The PIP plays a key role in identifying moments of the student journey at which students are at increased likelihood of leaving their studies; the data derived from this is discussed at the Education Committee and used to develop strategies to support student progression. The University has a Retention Officer who prepares reports on the data and trends in retention for the Senate and updated information about student retention, progression and success is discussed at the University's Education Committee. In the meeting notes seen by the review team, the Senate robustly recognised the importance of providing relevant and trustworthy information to students at the key moments of their journey through the University, including during Freshers' Week and prior to assessment. Both internal PIP and external (Higher Education Statistics Agency) data was used to support their recommendations and conclusions (see good practice in Enhancement, paragraph 4.12).

3.10 The University maintains up to date information regarding composition of the student body, including information regarding overseas and EU students. It monitors information about equality and diversity at the Education Committee. The Committee receives and considers information regarding the level of degree attainment as broken down by gender, race, disability and age. The AQSC receives an annual report on equality and diversity with regards to complaints, in order to identify any issues that may result in

recommended action to the Education Committee, to protect academic quality and standards.

3.11 Staff access information about quality assurance procedures, including validation, Periodic Review and external examiners through the Academic Standards and Quality website. There is also information for students and staff at UK partner institutions.

3.12 Information relating to programmes which contain a study abroad or a placement year component is produced and maintained by the University. The review team examined documentation about the relationship between the University's Department of Economics and the University of Konstanz, noting that the partner describes the award as a 'Double Degree' on its website and that internal handbooks describe this as a 'dual award'. This arrangement does not feature in the University's Register of Collaborative Provision or in its list of progression arrangements. However, as the University clarified, the arrangement is an admissions arrangement without recognition of credit and hence need not be included in the various lists and approval mechanisms that would be required if credit from the University of Konstanz were contributing to the University of Essex Award.

3.13 The Graduation Team issues transcripts upon completion of the students' studies; partner institutions may produce transcripts to an approved template, although the University retains responsibility for this. Collaborative agreements articulate the University's responsibility for publicity and prospectuses, and the University checks materials produced at these partner institutions. Students are supported upon completion of their studies by the Employability and Careers centre.

3.14 The review team concludes that the University's information systems are appropriately robust for checking the accuracy of internal and external documents, and information is consistently and readily available to the appropriate audiences. The Expectation is met and the level of associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

3.15 In reaching its positive judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook. The Expectation for this judgement area is met and the associated level of risk is low. Good practice is cross-referenced from Enhancement and relates to the availability and use of management information systems. The review team formulated no recommendations and no affirmations for this judgement area. The review team considers the University's information systems are appropriately robust for checking the accuracy of internal and external documents, and information is consistently and readily available to the appropriate audiences. The review team therefore concludes that the quality of the provider's information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1 The University's priorities for the development of its educational provision are based upon its Strategic Plan 2013-19 and its Education Strategy.

4.2 The Strategic Plan commits the University to delivering excellent education, and explains, in terms of a number of broad principles and aims, what this will require. The Education Strategy, which was approved by the Senate in April 2014 following extensive consultation: sets the objectives which the University intends to pursue in order to achieve those aims; allocates to the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education) primary executive responsibility for the implementation of the Education Strategy; and provides that the Education Committee will monitor progress annually, against the specified objectives. The Education Committee does this primarily through the Education Action plans.

4.3 The action required to implement the Strategic Plan and Education Strategy is specified in the annually updated Education Action Plan (EAP). This takes into account not only the EAPs produced by each Department/School and Faculty, but also the Curriculum Review and Employability Strategy, both of which are closely related to some of the Strategic Plan and Education Strategy key objectives.

4.4 The Curriculum Review is intended to ensure that the Education Strategy is implemented systematically across all taught programmes. The Senate approved the Review's principles, process, and scope in July 2014. Each department or partner will have to complete its Review before the end of 2016-17. However, all departments were required to consider the Review as part of their November 2014 planning meetings, and to produce, for their Faculty Education Committee's autumn meetings, outlines of the steps they intend to take, and of key milestones, over the review period. The Faculty Education Committees will, in turn, produce for the May 2015 Education Committee meeting reports on the progress made by their Departments. The Review will be comprehensive and cover many aspects of curriculum design and delivery, including assessment strategies and the use of the VLE. However, it will have to focus in particular on how each programme will meet the Education Committee's commitment to research-led education. To assist departments and partners to conduct the review, the University provides: a toolkit, which is available as a VLE course; a range of guidance and templates; and briefing sessions.

4.5 The Employability Strategy is discussed in the Commentary on the Theme. Suffice to note here, however, it is a major priority for the enhancement of students' learning opportunities, not only because it relates to some of the Strategy's key objectives but also because: it encompasses both curricular and extracurricular provision; requires dedicated staff and other resources; and will therefore have to be reflected in departments' EAPs.

4.6 Other steps which the University has taken to enable effective implementation of the Education Strategy include: a significant overhaul of its annual planning process; the introduction the ARC process, in order to align academic and resource planning more closely with one another; the provision of guidance notes, templates and model agendas to support annual planning; the adoption of a set of KPIs related to the Strategy's objectives; and the creation of the PIP which, among other information, provides data related to each department's performance against these KPIs. The University is thus taking deliberate steps to improve the quality of its students' learning opportunities.

4.7 The review team spoke to senior staff, students, academic staff, professional support staff and graduate teaching assistants. The review team viewed evidence provided by the University that included strategies, action plans, committee minutes and policies, and viewed online resources.

4.8 This framework is enabling the University to enhance its programmes, and the resources which are required to deliver them, in a deliberate and carefully planned manner. The review team noted, in particular, the considered and structured manner in which the University had devised the Education Strategy and the Curriculum Review (see good practice in Expectation B3, paragraph 2.23). Taken together, these comprehensively set out the principles and key objectives, and the range of action which will be entailed in the development of the University's taught programmes over the period covered by the Strategic Plan. The review team noted the extent to which the departments/schools, faculties, partners and students had been engaged in the discussions which preceded the finalisation of the Education Strategy, the Curriculum Review, and the Employability Strategy.

4.9 The review team considers that the University has made considerable efforts to ensure that implementation of the Education Strategy progresses on schedule, and does so systematically across all departments and partners, and is embedded within routine planning and quality assurance processes. Thus, it redesigned and streamlined both its academic management and Senate committee structures, so as, in the case of the former, to allocate more clearly strategic responsibilities at university and faculty levels; and of the latter, to enable key stakeholders (including students and partners) to engage with and support the implementation of these plans. It also introduced the ARC process to align more closely annual monitoring and annual planning.

4.10 The University makes available a wide variety of resources to support the implementation of the Education Strategy, Curriculum Review, Employability Strategy, and the annual planning and monitoring processes. These include: dedicated professional service staff; guidance notes; templates; briefings; and, through the online PIP, a large body of accessible, relevant, clearly presented and easily navigable management information. This enables each department, faculty and partner to readily determine its progress against the University's KPIs, many of which are closely related to the enhancement of learning opportunities.

4.11 Based on the EAPs which it considered and the testimony received, the review team noted that the planning, consultation and engagement processes are operating as intended; senior managers in both the University and its collaborative partners' are committed to the Education Strategy; and staff and students both support and are engaged with it.

4.12 The review team acknowledges the progress that has been made in the implementation of the Employability Strategy (see Theme). The review team noted, in particular, the efforts which the University has made to reorganise and focus the management and administration of its employability-related provision; to expand the staffing and other resources it devotes to supporting employability; and to ensure that employability will be embedded in the curriculum of each taught programme. The comprehensive and systematic approach which the University has taken to developing and implementing the Employability Strategy is **good practice**.

4.13 The review team noted that the University's deliberate approach to the improvement of its students' learning opportunities is also evident in the way in which it has responded to areas of potential concern such as student undergraduate retention and success rates. This focused, in particular, on provision of the various services which would be required to enhance the University's transition support and has included: induction and preparation of

new students; the department adviser/personal tutor system; peer mentoring; and the development of study skills.

4.14 The review team also acknowledges the ways in which the University is using its staff development provision and performance management arrangements to promote an ethos which is committed to educational enhancement. This is evident, for example, in the objectives set for the University's two key academic staff development programmes: PGCHEP and CADENZA. It also reflects, more generally, in: the scope, objectives and content of the university's leadership programme; the curriculum for the PGCHEP, and especially Module 1; and the opportunities for partners' staff to participate in the university's development events. It is similarly demonstrated in the criteria for annual performance appraisal; the provision of the Teaching and Learning Innovation Fund; the Excellence in Teaching Award; the content of the first edition of the online journal *In Practice*; and the programme of the Joining the Practitioner Network seminar in September 2014.

4.15 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the risk is low, and bases its conclusion on the considered and structured approach that the University has taken to the development of its Education Strategy; the systematic and comprehensive manner in which it is seeking to implement it; the opportunities which its staff, students and partners have had to engage with the development and implementation of the Strategy; and the resources which it has made available to support the Strategy and its implementation.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.16 In reaching its commended judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook. The Expectation for this judgement area is met and the associated level of risk is low. Good practice is identified in relation to the Employability Strategy and the University's management information systems. The review team formulated no recommendations and no affirmations for this judgement area. The University has plans to enhance the area further and has appropriately demonstrated this, especially in relation to its Education Strategy. Student engagement in the management of this area is widespread and supported, and the student needs are in clear focus of the strategies and policies the University proposes for this area. The review team therefore concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities is **commended** based on evidence collected which indicates that actions are deliberate, systematic, consistent across the provision and inclusive of all stakeholders.

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1 Over recent years, employability has been a major concern for the University. This is because its graduate employment rate has been falling below its own KPI employability target of 70 per cent. A paper, produced by the Director of Employability in 2012, suggested that this resulted from three main factors: uncoordinated provision of employability related extracurricular provision; an inadequate employability related curricular base; and a low level of employer engagement. The Employability Strategy, which the University adopted in the same year, and which covers both taught and research students, is intended to rectify these weaknesses, and more specifically to enable the University to reach its KPI target. To do so, it specifies 14 measures, grouped into four broad areas: cross-cutting components (essentially a series of measures to strengthen the delivery, management and leadership of employability provision across the whole university); extracurricular provision; embedding employability in departments/schools; and employers, enterprise and alumni.

5.2 The University has taken a number of steps, some in collaboration with the Students' Union, in order to implement the Strategy, and, more specifically, its commitment to embed employability oriented learning in the curriculum.

5.3 These steps include: the requirements that all departments produce an employability action plan and deliver career development learning (though allowing them some discretion over how they do so); the reconfiguration of the Employability and Careers Centre to create three dedicated Faculty Employability teams, each led by a senior specialist; the appointment of Employability Directors in each department/school, and of Employability Coordinators and Advisers in each Faculty; the provision of special employability related coaching offered to Widening Participation graduates; the introduction of a range of programmes - Frontrunners, Essex Interns and the paid mentoring which is available under the Postgraduate Support Scheme - all of which offer work experience to undergraduate and/or postgraduate students.

5.4 The review team regards the Employability Strategy as a well devised response to address the priorities to which it is addressed. The University's commitment to the Strategy is clearly evident from the organisational and management changes that it has introduced, and the staffing and other resources which it is making available to enable the Strategy's implementation. The review team noted that the Strategy is well understood and supported by the senior managers, academic leaders and student representatives. The review team also learned from employers of the variety of ways in which they are able to engage with the University and its students. These include: placement and internship schemes; University or department/school level Advisory Boards; curricular innovation; funding joint appointments; and the provision of careers advice. They expressed considerable satisfaction with the way in which the University supported and managed its relationships with them.

5.5 In a paper for Council in November 2012, the Director of Employability reported a number of actions which had, by then, been taken to implement the Strategy. It suggested that there had been significant progress in each of the broad areas noted above. In his report to the Student Experience Committee a year later, he recorded the further projects which had been initiated during 2012-13. The review team noted that the University's Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education outcome for 2013 was better than it had been for 2012, and, especially, in relation to those who had acquired access to graduate-level work or further study.

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 27-29 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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