



Higher Education Review of the University of Northampton

October 2015

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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 Northampton. The review took place from 19 to 22 October 2015 and was conducted by a team of four reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Terence Clifford-Amos
- Dr Victoria Korzeniowska
- Professor Ian Robinson
- Dr Axel Palmer.

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by the University of Northampton 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 Northampton the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland.

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

The 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=2859.

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

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

Key findings

QAA's judgements about the University of Northampton

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

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

Good practice

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

- The programme design workshops, which include comprehensive engagement with a wide range of stakeholders and support innovation in curriculum design (Expectation B1).
- The wide range of, and integrated approach to, development and support for academic staff, including those at delivery organisations (Expectations B3 and B10).
- The extensive range of extra and co-curricular initiatives to enhance students' employability and social entrepreneurship skills (Expectation B4 and Enhancement).

Recommendations

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

By June 2016:

- ensure learning outcomes for intermediate awards are positively defined (Expectation A1)
- establish University-level oversight of, and address, progression rates at delivery organisations (Expectation B10).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The steps being taken to provide training for all postgraduate research students engaged in teaching activities (Expectations B3 and B11).

Theme: Student Employability

Student employability is a strategic priority for the University of Northampton, realised through an extensive range of activities and opportunities geared towards enhancing students' employability and social entrepreneurship skills. Many of these opportunities

are aligned to the University's agenda for social impact. Students are encouraged to develop their employability skills, both through learning and skill development embedded within the curriculum, and by accessing tailored advice through central support services. The employability offer at the University is well-coordinated, extensive and demonstrates substantial engagement with employers. Staff show a high level of commitment to the University's strategy for employability, and students that have engaged in employability related activities report positive experiences.

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

About the University of Northampton

The University of Northampton (the University) traces its origins to the 20th century, having developed through the amalgamation and expansion of a number of local colleges. Its predecessor institution, University College Northampton, obtained taught degree awarding powers as Nene College in 1993, and then official university title and research degree awarding powers in 2005 to become the University of Northampton. The University's vision is, by 2020, to be 'positioned at the heart of Northamptonshire, intellectually, culturally and economically'. Its mission, articulated through its Strategic Plan 2015-20 is 'Transforming Lives + Inspiring Change'. The University intends to achieve this mission through an ambitious project of digital transformation, which includes relocation to the new, purpose-built Waterside Campus in 2018.

At the time of the review, the University had some 13,000 students, the large majority of whom were studying at undergraduate level. This includes approximately 1,300 students studying through Education with Others (EWO) arrangements delivered through a small number of UK and international delivery organisations. The University currently has two campuses, one located in the town centre and the other situated slightly further out. It remains the only University provider of higher education in Northamptonshire.

The University has experienced a number of changes since the last QAA review in 2009. A new Vice-Chancellor was appointed in 2010, following which a number of changes have been made to both the deliberative and management structures. The University's most senior academic body, the Senate, is now supported by three standing committees, each with a separate and clear remit to manage delegated authorities from the Senate. Similarly, the Board of Governors is also supported by a number of standing committees to support it in fulfilling its role.

The University's provision continues to be organised into six academic schools. To support the implementation of the previous Strategic Plan (2010-15), each school was headed by either a Dean or an Executive Dean. Deans are responsible for the academic leadership for their respective school, whereas Executive Deans also have additional institution-wide responsibilities to support the implementation of University strategy. Due to the recent departure of four Executive Deans, a number of Deputy Deans are currently acting up as Deans. The University considers this an interim position, which will be reviewed in the light of the new Strategic Plan 2015-20. The Chief Operating Officer provides strategic oversight of professional services, supported by four Directors.

In 2013 the University became a member of Ashoka U, an American-based global network of institutions committed to encouraging social innovation and entrepreneurship through higher education. As part of this initiative the University is a designated 'Changemaker' campus; this is intended to support the University's strategic goal 'to be Britain's leading University for social enterprise'. Through Changemaker initiatives, the University aims to provide a high-quality student experience, developing students' competence in social

enterprise; encourage, support and develop entrepreneurial skills and enterprising attitudes; and to deliver a fairer and more inclusive society. The University considers the further embedding of opportunities for social impact within the student experience a key priority for the future.

The review visit took place against a backdrop of further planned change, which is likely to have a significant impact on the operation of the University. Planning for the move to the new single site Waterside Campus is underway, and this involves significant change to both the physical infrastructure of the University and the way in which its provision is delivered. The University has secured support from Her Majesty's Treasury in the form of a loan guarantee to support this development. The move to Waterside coincides with plans to 'digitally transform' the curriculum through greater reliance on blended learning with a view to enhancing the student learning experience. These developments present both risks and opportunities to the quality of learning. While the review team is unable to comment on the success with which these plans will be executed, there is evidence that the University is taking a considered and planned approach. The move to the new campus is being managed through a dedicated project, with close oversight from the Board of Governors.

Other key challenges acknowledged by the University include improving student outcomes through an enhanced focus on student progression and graduate employability. The University also recognises the need to ensure the ongoing quality and oversight of its collaborative arrangements (Education with Others) in the context of its intention to expand this type of provision.

The University's previous review resulted in a judgement of confidence in the management of the academic standards of its awards, and in the management of the quality of the learning opportunities available to students for on-campus provision. There was a judgement of limited confidence in the University's management of the quality of learning opportunities for its taught collaborative provision. The previous review team made nine recommendations and identified four features of good practice.

In response to the outcome of the previous review, the University developed and implemented a comprehensive action plan to address the areas requiring improvement, overseen by its Academic Quality and Standards Committee, with regular reporting to Senate. The action plan was monitored through a mid-cycle follow up by QAA in 2012, which found that good progress was being made in addressing the recommendations. As a result of the previous review, a number of changes have been made, in particular to the quality assurance arrangements for EWO partners. These changes include a clear policy for producing and reviewing a central register of all such arrangements. The University has also made improvements to its annual and periodic review processes, which now require clearer and more explicit consideration of provision delivered by partner organisations. Other recommendations have also been addressed through improvements and revisions to University processes, which are dealt with in the appropriate sections of this report. The present review team is satisfied that the University has responded appropriately to the outcome of the last review and that all recommendations have now been addressed in full.

Explanation of the findings about the University of Northampton

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 secures academic standards through comprehensive academic regulations, and prescribed quality assurance processes for validation, periodic subject review and modifications to programmes. The Academic and Student Regulations require programmes to be aligned with the relevant level of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), and articulate the range of approved award titles, the level at which they are delivered, and the credit values for different qualifications. These Regulations apply to all of the University's awards, including those that are delivered through Education with Others arrangements.

1.2 The Northampton Quality Assurance Framework comprises a set of handbooks, including the Validation Handbook, the Change of Approval Handbook (for modifications to programmes) and the Periodic Subject Review Handbook, which incorporate the University's expectations regarding the use of external reference points. There is also a separate framework for professional doctorate programmes. It is an expectation that the alignment of programme learning outcomes with the relevant qualification descriptor (for taught programmes) is considered at validation and subsequently at periodic subject review. Guidance on qualification characteristics and Subject Benchmark Statements is also taken into account during the approval, review and modification of programmes.

1.3 The review team explored the operation and effectiveness of processes for aligning qualifications to external reference points by scrutinising the Academic and Student

Regulations, University handbooks that comprise the quality assurance framework, and sample documentation for validation, periodic subject review and programme modifications. The team also reviewed relevant minutes and papers of the committees that oversee these processes. The team tested its findings in meetings with a range of senior and academic staff.

1.4 The University has sound processes for ensuring programmes are appropriately aligned to the FHEQ; it also takes account of relevant external guidance, including qualifications characteristics and Subject Benchmark Statements. Documentation from validation and periodic subject review confirms that the consideration of external reference points is an integral part of these processes.

1.5 For programmes that require professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) accreditation, the relevant body's requirements are addressed through the University's validation process, and final approval is usually through a joint event with the PSRB. The Academic Quality and Standards Committee maintains institutional oversight of the programme of external accreditation and recognition activities, while school quality, standards and enhancement committees monitor the outcomes.

1.6 The FHEQ level, QAA Benchmarking Group and intended learning outcomes are clearly identified in programme specifications. Each specification is accompanied by an award map, which stipulates the volume and level of credit required to achieve the programme. Award maps also specify the modules and volume of credit required to achieve intermediate exit awards, but learning outcomes for these awards are not defined at programme level. The review team **recommends** that, by June 2016, the University ensure learning outcomes for intermediate awards are positively defined.

1.7 The review team found that the University makes appropriate use of the FHEQ and other external reference points in the setting and maintenance of academic standards. While further work is required to ensure learning outcomes for intermediate awards are positively defined, this does not impact on the security of the standards of awards. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.8 The University's Senate is the ultimate authority for academic standards. These are managed through a quality assurance framework and supporting handbooks governing how programmes are designed, approved, monitored and reviewed. The definitive statement of the regulatory structure is in the Academic and Student Regulations. These include the credit framework and the rules governing progression. Research Degree Regulations sit within the academic regulations and greater detail is given within the Research Degrees Handbook. The Senate approves all new, and changes to existing, regulations.

1.9 The University's Modular Framework governs the majority of the University's programmes of study from level 4 to level 8. It sets out the University's approach to programme and assessment design, the regulations by which awards are governed, and information to support the development of programmes. The Modular Framework determines matters such as module size, credit structure, approaches to assessment, learning outcomes and skills. Programmes that sit outside of the Framework must be carefully scrutinised at approval, and exemptions and oversight arrangements agreed.

1.10 The Senate committee structure and schemes of delegation were revisited as a result of the previous QAA review and considerably simplified. There are now only three committees of the Senate: the Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC); the Student Experience Committee; and the Research and Enterprise Committee (REC). This structure is replicated within schools, with each school-level committee reporting to the relevant University-level committee. The detailed management of quality assurance is devolved to the AQSC for all taught provision, and to the Research Degrees Committee, a subcommittee of the REC, for postgraduate research provision and professional doctorate programmes.

1.11 The review team explored the operation and effectiveness of the processes for managing academic standards by scrutinising regulations, handbooks and frameworks, minutes of committees, and validation and periodic subject review reports. The team tested its findings in meetings with a range of senior and academic staff.

1.12 The University has detailed frameworks and regulations to govern the award of academic credit and qualifications. The University has thoroughly codified its approaches to quality management for staff and students in the Northampton Quality Assurance Framework. This is implemented and supported by the Quality and Academic Partnerships Team, led by the Head of Quality, who also provide bespoke staff development as required. The various handbooks that underpin the implementation of the University's quality assurance framework are thorough and accessible, and provide useful support and guidance to staff. Academic staff whom the team met were familiar with the University's arrangements for securing academic standards and confirmed that appropriate support is available for them to fulfil their role effectively.

1.13 The University's Academic Governance Assurance Framework clearly identifies the appropriate committees responsible for the various academic quality processes. A review of a sample of minutes from different committees confirms that they are effective in fulfilling

their remit. The standing committees of the Senate produce annual reflective reports on their business, which provide assurance to the Senate on the security of academic standards and also identify opportunities for enhancement.

1.14 There is evidence that the University reviews and maintains its frameworks and regulations on a regular basis to ensure their ongoing appropriateness for managing academic standards. An Academic Policies and Regulations Task Group was established in 2013-14 to clarify the review schedule and standardise templates for academic policies. These policies are now available to staff and students via a single web page. A review of the University Modular Framework, planned for 2014-15, was not considered necessary by the University, as the individual elements of the Framework had been reviewed as part of separate review processes and most programmes now sit within the Modular Framework. The Research Degrees Handbook, which sets out the processes governing research students, including examination, assessment and awards, was also reviewed and modified into a set of policies that were approved by Senate in July 2015.

1.15 The review team found that the University has clear and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations in place to secure academic standards and the award of credit and qualifications. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.16 Programme specifications constitute the definitive record for each taught programme and qualification. Specifications for taught programmes, including professional doctorates, are formally approved during validation and then reviewed through periodic subject review. Changes to specifications are managed through the change of approval process, overseen by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee.

1.17 The University's academic regulations constitute the record of the structure of postgraduate research programmes. Individual MPhil and PhD programmes are approved by the Research Degrees Committee following consideration by the relevant school's Research Degrees Board. Approval takes into account supervision requirements and resources, and confirms that an appropriate training plan is in place.

1.18 The review team explored the production, oversight and availability of the University's definitive records by scrutinising a wide range of programme and module specifications, associated award maps, validation and periodic subject review documentation, completed rolling action plans (RAPs), the Change of Approval Handbook, and minutes of the Academic Audit and Review Committee. The team also met academic and senior staff involved in the production and approval of specifications.

1.19 Programme and module specifications conform to standard University templates and confirm alignment with relevant internal and external reference points. The review team noted that, while the FHEQ level is specified in programme and module specifications, this is not always in a consistent location within specifications nor referenced using the same terminology. Each programme specification includes an award map, which summarises the programme structure and also includes sites of delivery for programmes delivered through Education with Others partners. Programme and module specifications, including award maps, are readily available to current and prospective students through the University's website.

1.20 Programme and subject teams consider the ongoing currency of specifications, and any revisions are formally recorded and monitored through the programme monitoring process, which requires these changes to be documented in RAPs and summarised in the end of year Final Rolling Action Plan.

1.21 Appropriate processes exist for managing changes to programmes, and the associated specification. There are three categories of change that are considered using a risk-based and proportionate process. Where a change of approval panel considers the extent of proposed changes to a programme to be substantial, the programme is required to undergo revalidation.

1.22 The review team found that the University has appropriate arrangements for the approval and updating of definitive records for programmes and qualifications. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.23 The University's Validation Handbook sets out in detail the process governing the approval of new programmes. For taught degrees this process requires thorough preparatory phases, which subsequently lead to validation, and the scrutiny of all aspects of programmes, including external reference points; threshold academic standards; internal standards, including the alignment of learning outcomes; and recommendations made by external sources such as PSRBs, relevant stakeholders and external examiners. Concerning research programmes, the research degree boards consider all individual proposals, potential supervisors, resourcing, examination and other necessary matters pertaining to postgraduate research.

1.24 The process of validation has involved iterative virtual dialogue between the programme team and validation panel, and a physical event is only convened in certain circumstances, for example where it is a PSRB requirement or the validation involves an Education with Others (EWO) partner. The relatively new online process has temporarily been suspended due to IT technical difficulties. The problems encountered concerned the sophisticated nature of the live and interactive process, which the University is endeavouring to improve. Suspension of the online validation process will not adversely affect the current validation schedule for 2015-16, as most validations for this academic year involve either EWO or PSRBs, where an event is required anyway.

1.25 The Academic Audit and Review Committee (AARC) considers all programme validation reports, including those delivered through EWO arrangements, to check adherence to University expectations and external reference points. The AARC makes recommendations to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee for the final approval of new programmes.

1.26 In its scrutiny of the University's process for the approval of new programmes, the review team considered a range of documentation dealing with programme approval, for taught and research degrees, and procedures for EWO, and also relevant minutes on recent decisions concerning the online validation process. The team also reviewed module and programme specifications, validation and periodic subject review reports, and external examiners' reports. During the visit, the team tested its findings through meetings with quality personnel, programme leaders, Executive Deans/Deans, teaching staff and students.

1.27 The apparatus for programme approval allows for wide consultation, advisory processes, regulatory scrutiny, and internal and external referencing. Programme proposals are developed through the process of creating aligned interactive educational resource opportunities (CAIeRO), which supports reflection on best practice in programme design in a holistic manner. The CAIeRO process, now fully integrated into the University's Learning and Teaching Plan, and embedded in programme redesign, staff development and enhancement, has proved helpful to external referencing, in that it has ensured that modules and programmes align to QAA and subject-specific sector expectations (see also Expectation B1).

1.28 The review team found the Validation Handbook, which outlines all the necessary requirements, including criteria for external reference points and the composition of the validation panel, to be robust and comprehensive. Concerning the assessment of learning outcomes, among other documents, the Staff Handbook offers clear and copious guidance on alignment in assessments, marking, moderation and grade criteria. The sample of external examiners' reports reviewed by the team confirmed the maintenance of threshold academic standards. Reports of programme validation provide evidence that the process gives due consideration to the setting of academic standards at the appropriate level and in accordance with the University's own regulatory frameworks.

1.29 The Research Degrees Handbook fully illustrates the criteria set out for an intending research student's programme approval. Minutes of Research Degrees Boards provide evidence of the detailed consideration of individual proposals against University criteria. In addition to traditional routes, MPhil and PhD, the University has developed programme approvals in respect of professional doctorates, practice-based PhDs and PhDs by means of published work. For professional doctorate programmes, the review team found the preparatory and advisory documents to reflect study appropriately at FHEQ level 8.

1.30 The review team found that the processes for programme approval are appropriate and thorough. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.31 The University's Academic and Student Regulations, and the University Assessment and Feedback Policy, require that assessment strategies are directly and explicitly linked to specific learning outcomes. When a programme is approved, modified or undergoes a periodic subject review, during which programmes are reapproved, it is a requirement that the ability to achieve the learning outcomes is considered. Procedures for programme approval anticipate that assessment activities will be mapped onto learning outcomes, and articulated in module specifications and student module guides.

1.32 Achievement of learning outcomes is confirmed through initial grading, followed by internal moderation and external examination processes. External examiners are required to approve assessment instruments before students take the assessment, and to sample assessed work, confirming that assessment is appropriate for the programme and module outcomes. Students' written work and examination scripts are internally moderated by the programme team before scrutiny by external examiners. Moderation procedures are defined within the Assessment and Feedback Policy. Assessment boards, both at module and programme level, confirm the granting of module credit or the award when all credit requirements have been met.

1.33 The review team tested the University's processes by sampling programme and module specifications, reviewing staff and student handbooks, records of programme validation events and periodic subject reviews, and external examiner reports. The team also held meetings with a range of staff to explore the extent of development and support opportunities for those involved in assessment design and delivery.

1.34 Learning outcomes are clearly defined for both target awards and contributing modules (see also Expectation A1). Reports of validation events and periodic subject reviews invariably include detailed discussion of the appropriateness of learning outcomes and the associated assessment regime.

1.35 Guidelines and training for staff are clear on the need for constructive alignment between learning outcomes, learning and teaching approaches, assessment criteria, assessment strategies and feedback. The Staff Handbook emphasises that assessment must address the programme or module learning outcomes. Staff undertaking the University's development programme for new appointees (C@N-DO) are encouraged to focus in-depth on learning outcomes and assessment.

1.36 External examiner reports and associated institutional-level analysis confirm that learning outcomes are properly assessed and credit is awarded on demonstration that required academic standards are satisfied.

1.37 In discussions with staff the review team was able to confirm the positive impact the University's agenda for social impact (Changemaker values) is having on the alignment of learning outcomes with programme aims, and how the University's Learning and Teaching Plan, and associated staff development, has brought a particular focus upon the alignment of learning outcomes and assessment. Staff confirmed the positive impact of their induction, during which there was a particular focus upon the relationship between assessment criteria and moderation processes.

1.38 The review team found that the University's regulatory and assessment frameworks, and their clear linkage between learning outcomes and assessment, ensure alignment with this Expectation. The University operates transparent processes to ensure both the appropriateness of assessment, achievement of outcomes and award of credit. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.39 Threshold standards are systematically safeguarded and maintained through the University's processes for annual review and periodic subject review. Annual review takes the form of a continuous programme monitoring process, which requires the completion and updating of a rolling action plans (RAP) at regular intervals throughout the academic year. This culminates in a final end-of-year summative review of the individual programme, or group of programmes in a cognate subject area, documented through a Final Rolling Action Plan (FRAP). This process is intended to act as a check on the ongoing maintenance of academic standards through the consideration and review of definitive programme documentation, student attainment and feedback from external examiners. RAPs are discussed at meetings attended by staff involved in the delivery of the programme, and once a term include attendance by student representatives. Actions arising from the continuous programme monitoring process feed into school-level reviews and associated action plans.

1.40 The University's periodic subject review process operates on a five-yearly cycle and is intended to ensure the continuing currency and relevance of its awards. This wider review of the programme is required to give explicit consideration to the academic standards of the programme, including alignment to external reference points in the setting of threshold standards. Programme teams prepare a reflective self-evaluation document for the programme undergoing review, and this, along with programme and module specifications, is considered by a panel comprising both internal and external representatives.

1.41 The Academic Audit and Review Committee, on behalf of the Academic Quality and Standards Committee, audits and monitors the outcomes of both annual and periodic reviews to ensure adherence to University processes.

1.42 The review team tested the Expectation through the scrutiny of a sample of RAPs, FRAPs, documentation presented to panels as part of periodic subject review, and reports from review events. The team also considered the minutes of meetings and committees involved in the oversight of annual and periodic review processes, and held meetings with a range of academic and senior staff.

1.43 The University operates rigorous procedures for the annual and periodic review of its awards, which give due consideration to the achievement and maintenance of academic standards.

1.44 The scrutiny of all initial proposals takes account of appropriate FHEQ levels, ensuring that proposals adhere to minimum credit allocation and attainment. These details are publicly recorded on programme specifications and module specifications, which also take account of the relationship between curricular matters, the relevant Subject Benchmark Statements and exit qualifications.

1.45 RAPs are reflective in terms of an operational monitoring process of threshold academic standards. They draw on a range of qualitative and quantitative management information to support the review of academic standards. Programme specifications are

functional in the monitoring and review process as checking points for external referencing and internal standards. Appropriate use is also made of comments from external examiners in ensuring the maintenance of standards.

1.46 Periodic subject reviews now comprise two key stages: the first being the iterative review and redevelopment of the provision, including preparation of the appropriate documentation; the second being formal approval by a panel through either virtual or physical means. The two-stage process has recently been successfully reviewed. Documents for the periodic review process contain a full and thorough account of the setting of academic standards, including alignment to the FHEQ and subject-specific sector guidance. Detailed briefing notes are provided to review panels, which make clear the requirement to give explicit consideration to the validity of learning outcomes and alignment to external reference points. Reports of periodic subject review events provide evidence of the detailed scrutiny and analysis by the panel of academic standards, which, where appropriate, includes PSRB criteria. The entire process functions in the form of a critical appraisal of the programme and learning outcomes, which includes an examination of definitive programme documentation.

1.47 The review team found that the University regularly monitors and reviews the academic standards of its awards, with appropriate reference to internal standards and expectations, external reference points and feedback from external examiners. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3.4): 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

1.48 Arrangements for the quality assurance of University programmes are established within the Northampton Quality Assurance Framework, and articulated in more detail within the various handbooks for validation, annual review, periodic subject review and Education with Others (EWO) partners.

1.49 During programme validation there is an expectation for there to be at least two external academics to act as advisers (during planning) and reviewers (during validation), and one external professional adviser/reviewer. Similarly, during periodic subject review, the University requires the participation of external professional, academic and recent programme graduate members. In cases where joint University approval and professional accreditation or recognition is taking place, external representatives from the professional body may be invited to contribute or to attend the event. When delivery organisations are first approved or thereafter reviewed, one of the external panel members must have experience of EWO. The Academic Audit and Review Committee (AARC) scrutinises reports of all validation and periodic subject review events to confirm that procedures and processes have been properly followed.

1.50 The University's wide network of external examiners provides ongoing externality during each delivery of a programme, their annual reports contributing to the annual review process. Every module is scrutinised by a subject level external examiner, and every programme assessment board is overseen by an award external examiner.

1.51 Postgraduate research programmes are approved and supervisory teams appointed primarily by the relevant subject area Research Degrees Board, with institutional oversight by the Research Degrees Committee (RDC). The RDC has external members, as did Research Degrees Boards until recently. Research Degrees Boards now appoint visiting professors to bring externality to subject areas. Where very specific subject expertise is required in a research student's supervision team, an appropriately qualified external supervisor may be appointed in addition to the internal supervisors. Research Degrees Boards are responsible for the detailed annual monitoring of the progress of each research student, and the RDC reflects formally each year upon progress at an institutional level. External examiners are appointed to each team examining a research degree.

1.52 In order to ensure objectivity, the associated handbooks all contain detailed criteria for the selection of external panel members or examiners. The externals' contributions are clearly articulated in the handbooks and detailed process briefings are provided.

1.53 The review team explored the operation and effectiveness of the processes for externality by scrutinising handbooks for, and reports of, external examiner, validation and periodic subject review activities, and the reports and minutes of the AARC. The team tested its findings in meetings with a range of staff and students.

1.54 The review team found that the principle of externality is well embedded in the University's key academic quality processes. External advice is routinely taken during programme design; external professional and academic panel contributions are invariably taken during validation and periodic subject review activities, and external examiner reports are drawn upon during the annual monitoring process.

1.55 A review of Research Degrees Board minutes confirms that an appropriate level of scrutiny is applied to the timely appointment of research degree external examiners. The RDC, in its annual report to the Research and Enterprise Committee, analyses feedback from external examiners in detail in order to ensure alignment with UK expectations for the award of research degrees. Students whom the review team met confirmed that where external supervisors are appointed they meet with them regularly.

1.56 The AARC's audits of validation and periodic subject review events routinely confirm appropriate engagement by external panel members. The annual oversight reports, produced by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee for taught provision, and the RDC for postgraduate research provision, both reflect critically on the contribution from externals.

1.57 The review team found that the University has comprehensive processes to identify and make use of peer external representation in the approval, monitoring and review of its awards. Criteria for the selection of externals are detailed and appropriate. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

1.58 In reaching its judgement about academic standards, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.59 All Expectations in this area are met and the level of risk is low in each case. There is one recommendation under Expectation A1 and this relates to the need to ensure learning outcomes for intermediate awards are positively defined. This recommendation relates to a small part of the University's provision and, in the view of the review team, does not pose a risk to the setting or maintenance of standards but rather will enable the University to meet this Expectation more fully.

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

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1 The University's processes for the approval of new programmes are set out under Expectation A3.1. Programme design and redesign precedes programme approval and periodic subject review respectively, and principally occurs through the process of creating aligned interactive educational resource opportunities (CAIeRO). The latter involves a workshop approach, which includes engagement with various stakeholders, and is intended to support the development of institutional capability in online learning design and the University's aspirations for digital transformation of the curriculum.

2.2 The University Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC) has delegated authority from the Senate to oversee the design and approval of all taught provision. However, the Senate retains final approval for provision delivered through Education with Others (EWO), which is considered higher risk. Similarly, the Research Degrees Committee (RDC) has delegated authority for the development of all postgraduate research provision.

2.3 The review team examined handbooks governing the processes for programme design and approval, sample documentation relating to these processes and minutes from the AQSC and RDC. The team also met academic staff involved in designing programmes with experience of CAIeRO, senior staff who have chaired validation panels, and students who have been involved in the development of programmes.

2.4 Proposals for new academic collaborations must first undergo developmental approval by the University Management Team. This initial due diligence check ensures new programmes align with the University's overarching strategy and mission; that new proposals are financially viable; and that risks are identified and there is appropriate mitigation in place. Following initial approval to proceed, staff work in teams to develop detailed proposals for the programme to proceed to validation.

2.5 CAIeRO is instrumental in the development of a variety of new programme proposals. During workshops centred on programme design, particular emphasis is given to outline design, constructive alignment of learning outcomes and action planning. The mission, aims and the translation of subject expectations into learning outcomes, as well as alignment with external reference points, are considered in detail during these intense two-day workshops. Workshops take a holistic approach to programme design and involve participation from professional services, an academic librarian, a learning technologist and external subject or industry experts. Where possible, current or past students familiar with the programme or module are also invited. Staff whom the team met elaborated on the benefits of the CAIeRO workshops, which include a more structured approach to programme design, the effective use of technology in learning, greater interaction, reflection and sophistication in the curriculum. While the team did not meet any students who had taken part in a workshop, students commented on their involvement in programme design through other means, such as informal focus groups led by academic staff. The review team considers the programme design workshops, which include comprehensive engagement

with a wide range of stakeholders and support innovation in curriculum design, to be **good practice**.

2.6 Processes for the final approval of new programmes vary in format according to the type of programme being validated and any associated PSRB requirements. For example, a physical event is always required for the approval of any new EWO arrangement. Low-risk proposals were, until recently, approved using an online validation process, but this has temporarily been suspended while the University addresses technical issues. The review team found that processes for both online and physical validation are equally robust, address the University's requirements in detail, and draw on external expertise. Reports of validations confirm that appropriate account is taken of a wide range of quality-related issues, such as the student experience, learning resources, staffing, admissions arrangements, and equality and diversity.

2.7 There is thorough oversight of the development and approval of new programmes at both school and University level. Consistency in the implementation of procedures is ensured through the allocation of a member of staff from the central Quality and Academic Partnerships Team to coordinate the process. Progress with the addressing of conditions and recommendations arising from validation events is monitored by the relevant school Quality Enhancement and Standards Committee. Minutes of the Academic Audit and Review Committee confirm its role in the monitoring of all new proposals to ensure that conditions set have been met, and in making recommendations to the AQSC for final approval. The Senate ensures that approvals and reviews operate according to timetable, and the annual reports on academic standards and quality of learning opportunities provide assurance that the mechanism of programme design, development and approval is operating effectively.

2.8 The University has well-established processes for programme design and approval, which are continually reviewed and refined for the purpose of enhancement. The review team found good evidence to support the effective operation of these processes in practice. In particular, the use of CAleRO workshops has a positive impact on the curriculum. 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

2.9 The University has detailed processes for admissions, including for complaints and appeals, which are set out in the Admissions Policy and available on the University website. The Policy aligns to the Schwartz Principles published by Supporting Professionalism in Admissions. The Admissions Policy is accompanied by additional procedures governing, for example, the admission of students with disabilities and the accreditation of prior learning.

2.10 All applications for admission are managed centrally by the Admissions Office, located within Student and Academic Services, but with close liaison with the relevant academic school, and with the Graduate School for postgraduate research programmes. The implementation of the Admissions Policy is the responsibility of the Head of Student Admissions, with appropriate oversight from the Deputy Director of Student and Academic Services. The University's Student Experience Committee, reporting to the Senate, oversees recruitment practices including credit transfer, accreditation of prior learning and English language requirements.

2.11 The review team tested the operation and effectiveness of the University's processes for the admission, recruitment and selection of students through a review of its policies and procedures in this area. The team also met academic and support staff involved in admissions, those with oversight of admissions, and with a range of students from the University and two Education with Others (EWO) partners.

2.12 The University's website, which is the principal mechanism for communicating with prospective students, contains comprehensive information about the programmes on offer, including information on entry criteria, programme structure, content and assessment, and opportunities for work experience and placements. Students whom the review team met confirmed that the information available to them prior to joining the University was clear and informative. The University also hosts regular recruitment and selection events, which are advertised on the website and intended to support students in making an informed choice.

2.13 There are clear processes for the approval of entry criteria for individual programmes and this occurs at the point of validation, followed by regular annual review through the continuous programme monitoring process. Changes to entry criteria are formally recorded and monitored through the rolling action plan for the affected programme. There are also comprehensive processes governing the accreditation of prior learning for the purpose of gaining entry to a programme, including regulations for the maximum credit that can be awarded through this route.

2.14 The Admissions Office ensures that all applications meet the University's stipulated entry criteria and requirements, and that there is the full involvement of staff in schools during the selection process. Decisions that require additional selection methods, such as interviews, are undertaken by designated admissions tutors in the relevant subject area for whom regular training is provided. Staff also have an important role in supporting prospective students through the application stage, especially where there are additional requirements, such as the need for the use of adapted technology or support for dyslexia.

Most students whom the review team met were satisfied with the timeliness of the process, although some postgraduate students reported delays with their applications. This temporary issue appears to have been due to the recent reorganisation of student support services; the University has addressed this through the allocation of appropriate resources to support admissions across all areas.

2.15 The University provides compulsory and ongoing training and briefings for all those involved in admissions, including overseas recruitment agents. This includes training on equality and diversity, and handling applications from students with additional learning needs. EWO partners are responsible for training their own staff but may receive assistance from the University. Both administrative and academic staff whom the review team met were fully aware of their responsibilities for admissions and confirmed that they had access to appropriate training and support in fulfilling their role.

2.16 Responsibilities for admitting students through EWO partners vary according to the nature of the partnership, but entry criteria are always agreed by the University, and arrangements for managing admissions are stipulated in the contract governing the partnership. In cases where admissions is devolved to delivery organisations, the University conducts regular checks to ensure adherence to its policy and processes.

2.17 The review team found that the University's policies and procedures for managing admissions and recruitment are fair, transparent and operate effectively. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.18 The Strategic Plan 2015-20 and its predecessor focus strongly upon ensuring a high quality student experience and on both developing and making best use of the intellectual capital of its staff. The overarching metric of success for the University is making a difference and achieving social impact. There is an expectation that programmes designed to enhance the social impact of its graduates will improve student outcomes, specifically improving on student progression, graduate employability and enhancing student success by diversity.

2.19 The Student Experience Committee (SEC) oversees reports to the Senate on matters concerning the student experience and learning and teaching. The Academic Quality and Standards Committee, and the Research Degrees Committee, similarly oversee and report on academic quality and standards, and research degree matters respectively. The University has adopted the use of standard data sets and, in 2015-16, will use a balanced scorecard approach, in order to enable objective reflection on teaching and learning matters.

2.20 The University's Institute of Learning and Teaching (ILT) was established in 2012 in order to provide centralised support and innovative learning and teaching practices across the University. The ILT is the custodian of the University's comprehensive Learning and Teaching Plan, which provides an overarching strategic approach to achieving excellence in teaching and learning, and is being refreshed in 2015-16 in order to better align with the University's new Strategic Plan. The ILT also hosts the University's annual Learning and Teaching Conference to celebrate success and innovation, and the Students' Union operates a University-wide Teaching Award Scheme.

2.21 In addition to the student experience aspects of the Learning and Teaching Plan, the SEC coordinates and leads work to enhance the student learning experience. Examples of supportive and successful development interventions include: the new First Year Experience Project, which aims to make significant improvements in student progression; the ILT suite of assessment workshops; the introduction of an internal publication identifying good practice in assessment; and the introduction of the C@N-DO professional development programme for staff.

2.22 Individual schools develop their own learning and teaching plans, aligned with the University Learning and Teaching Plan, championed by school learning and teaching coordinators, and monitored through school SECs and the school annual reviews. The learning and teaching coordinators work together at institutional level through the Learning and Teaching Excellence Forum.

2.23 The new campus development is clearly a major investment for the University. It is clear that a different learning model, and thus learning environment, is envisaged. It is anticipated that significant aspects of programmes will be supported and delivered in a digital environment. The use of the virtual learning environment (VLE) will be a central feature of the development.

2.24 The review team tested this Expectation by examining reports, policies, procedures and the records of relevant committees involved in learning and teaching, and reviewed the various websites describing the support available to staff. The team also spoke with academic staff, students and key support staff.

2.25 At a strategic level it is evident that the University has developed and is refining metrics to support the evaluation of student satisfaction, student achievement, and its various initiatives in both learning and teaching and enhancing the student experience. The comprehensive Learning and Teaching Plan focuses particularly on approaches to developing and making better use of the intellectual capital of its staff, improving the student experience, and innovation and enhancement in approaches to learning and teaching.

2.26 The University's annual monitoring and periodic review processes make systematic use of student feedback, together with centrally-provided, user-friendly data (quality dashboards) to inform the analysis of student satisfaction, the appropriateness of programmes' approaches to learning and teaching, and the provision of staff development, both at school and University levels.

2.27 The ILT offers direct support for staff in three 'pillars': professional development; development of teaching practice; and the development of pedagogic research. The ILT leads the University's Higher Education Academy (HEA) accredited professional development scheme (C@N-DO), which provides a wide range of development opportunities, and is fully mapped to the UK Professional Standards Framework at all levels. Academic staff are expected to be, or to be working towards becoming, Fellows of the HEA. The direct support for staff wishing to develop their teaching skills includes designing and developing new programmes and modules, supporting moves to online teaching, developing assessment and feedback practice, facilitating reflection on teaching practice through peer observation, embedding education for social innovation and social impact (Changemaker values), developing as a personal academic tutor, and developing as a programme leader. The ILT is also instrumental in taking a number of the wide-ranging and imaginative first year experience initiatives forward. In discussions with staff, both at the University and from delivery organisations, the review team heard that development opportunities, both for individuals, and bespoke for schools and programme teams, were widely available and extremely useful. A particular feature attracting positive comment was the preparatory creating aligned interactive educational resource opportunities (CAIeRO) workshops for programme teams, students and associated service staff who were about to take new programmes through validation or periodic subject review (see also Expectation B1). These were instrumental in introducing and embedding aspects of the University's vision and values into the curriculum. The review team considers the wide range of, and integrated approach to, development and support for academic staff, including those at delivery organisations, to be **good practice**.

2.28 Postgraduate research students are also involved in teaching and assessment on University programmes. Students whom the review team met reported varied experiences in the formal training and support received to undertake this role. The University has recently taken a decision to make formal training a requirement for postgraduate research students who are engaged in teaching duties. Students who have not received training are to be identified and training opportunities made available to them. This has been welcomed by both research students and staff. The review team **affirms** the action being taken to provide training for all postgraduate research students engaged in teaching activities.

2.29 With respect to resourcing, the validation, annual and periodic review processes address the initial and ongoing appropriateness of resources. The University is investing significantly in a capital programme of 'digital transformation', both in preparation for the move to its new campus and to address student concerns regarding existing shortcomings.

There has been significant investment both in building staff capacity to develop and support blended learning and also in improving the necessary IT infrastructure. A wide range of staff development opportunities has been made available, and a number of master's programmes have been redeveloped as 'blended' pilots. A range of large undergraduate programmes is currently undergoing similar re-planning, and the University now expects programmes to be validated for multi-mode delivery in order to prepare for the transition.

2.30 The VLE has matured considerably since the 2009 QAA review, and become an integral part of the learning environment. There is a set of minimum expectations with which staff are expected to comply, and which are tested by regular audit. Students are expected to submit all assessments electronically through the VLE, and staff likewise to provide feedback electronically. The VLE now provides resource centres to provide partner institutions with direct access to University resources associated with their programmes. The University has appointed a number of learning technologists to assist with the work.

2.31 Overall, the review team gained a powerful and positive message regarding learning and teaching at the University. There is a strong central ILT, supported by networks in each school. Development programmes operate at both school and University level, and there are a number of positive indicators of success, including the number of staff HEA Fellows, and the engagement with the University's agenda for social impact.

2.32 The re-planning of the entire University curriculum in order to embrace both the social agenda, and to move into the digital environment is a significant undertaking. While early indicators suggest some success, the University's ambitions for its new campus rely heavily upon carrying the entire staff and student community with it. Risks associated with this project will need to continue to be monitored closely. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement

Findings

2.33 The University Student Experience Committee (SEC) takes institutional oversight of the entire student experience, including for Education with Others partners and the various initiatives surrounding the learning experience described in the Learning and Teaching Plan. The SEC routinely reports to the Senate, and also produces a synoptic annual review of the quality of learning opportunities, embedding University-level and individual service area annual action plans. The SEC brings an institutional focus upon matters pertaining to equality and diversity through its Inclusive Student Experience Group. The latter develops and coordinates the University's student Equality and Diversity Plan.

2.34 Schools have delegated responsibility from the SEC to conduct their responsibilities for the quality of the student experience through their own school-level SECs. They receive a comprehensive data set to enable this work, which is informed by student feedback, both with respect to their academic experience and in service area user-feedback exercises.

2.35 The University, aiming to enhance its student-facing support services, has recently restructured its various individual specialist support services, bringing them together into a single coherent service. Within the restructured Student and Academic Services Directorate there are teams focusing upon learning services, placements and work-based learning, admissions, academic advice and student administration.

2.36 The University's Additional Student Support and Inclusion Services Team undertakes needs assessments for students applying for the disabled student allowance; makes learning and teaching recommendations to teaching staff; and provides non-medical support for students with special learning needs. Each school has a disability coordinator, and extra support is available for students with special needs in other areas.

2.37 The Library and Learning Services Team includes the Centre for Achievement and Performance (CfAP) and the Learning Technology Team, which together provide a wide range of training and support for students.

2.38 The University Centre for Employability and Engagement (UCEE) provides a single point for advice, guidance and opportunity for recognition of students' work experience.

2.39 The University has recently updated its personal academic tutor (PAT) policy, and launched a PAT enhancement project in 2014-15 aiming to raise awareness of the system among students, and to build staff capacity to deliver. Academic tutors have core responsibilities for pastoral care, for monitoring academic progress, for developing the employability (and other) skills in their students, and for providing feedback loops within the quality assurance processes.

2.40 The review team tested the effectiveness of the University's arrangements for meeting this Expectation by examining reports, policies, procedures, the records of relevant committees, and the various websites describing the support available to students. The team also spoke with academic and professional services staff, and a wide range of students.

2.41 The review team found that both the University SEC and school SECs are well-attended, and that business is detailed and takes significant contributions from students, both in developing proposals, and in discussion. Matters considered by school SECs are

appropriate, for example, including procedures for work-based and placement learning, outcomes from student surveys, the use of the VLE and effectiveness of student engagement mechanisms. The new format for annual reporting to the Senate is comprehensive in highlighting matters of institutional importance. The University cites improvements to the library service, improved IT resources, and increased support through staff development, among improvements arising from such consultations, leading to improved satisfaction measured in the National Student Survey (NSS).

2.42 The University has appropriate and detailed induction programmes for new students. Students are supported in their transition to university life through the Welcome Weekend (for residential students), followed by the Welcome Week. The latter includes introductions to all service support areas as well as introductory programme-related activities. The CfAP supports students in the early development of study skills through pre-enrolment activities. Of particular note is the one day 'Flying Start' programme offered to new students before Welcome Week. International students are provided with additional information by the admissions team prior to arrival and are able to access assistance with orientation via links from the new arrivals web pages to the International Student Support Services information. Students whom the review team met, including international students and those studying at delivery organisations, reported that induction had been a positive and helpful experience. They also explained that students progressing to University programmes at Northampton through articulation arrangements had been well prepared by staff in the partner institution. Research degree students in a partner college described how the University had been fully involved in their induction from an early stage.

2.43 The UCEE facilitates matching students, graduates and employers together for work-experience opportunities, and oversees the health, safety and well-being of students on work experience. There are UCEE advisers appointed in each school to assist the development of plans for embedding employability into the curriculum. Students welcomed the range of employability opportunities and initiatives offered by the University. They praised the continuing broadening of opportunities to develop skills and experience, both embedded in their programmes and accessed through the UCEE. In particular, both students and staff cited volunteering opportunities, work placement and experience, access to Changemaker credit-bearing units, Employability Plus, opportunities for part-time employment, as well as general careers support as important features of the University's employability drive. Senior school staff whom the review team met commented on the benefits of being a Changemaker campus, which encourages student involvement in employability initiatives that have a positive social impact. The Destination of Leavers from Higher Education survey 2013-14 shows an improving trend and confirms the University's continuing positive performance, with the maintenance of 96 per cent employability across the past four years. The review team considers the University's extensive range of extra and co-curricular initiatives to enhance students' employability and social entrepreneurship skills to be **good practice**.

2.44 Students expressed positive views on the various initiatives to support their academic skill development, the personal support available from the CfAP and their personal academic tutor. The online materials in the Skills Hub attracted particular praise. Staff whom the review team met reinforced the fact that increasingly CfAP material was being embedded in the normal curriculum. While some part-time students whom the team met would prefer wider access to these resources outside of the normal working week, the Skills Hub material is available online at all times and the CfAP is accessible at the weekends. Students studying on programmes at delivery organisations indicated that they were able to access University online support, and those able to travel could access the campus-based support services.

2.45 While there has been some considerable success in improving student progression rates, the University acknowledges that efforts must continue in order to maximise students' ability to realise their full potential. The recent Partners for Progression Programme, the University's Cause for Concern process, and enhancements to the personal tutorial system are examples of institutionally-led initiatives in this area. The University's new First Year Experience Project is intended to bring a number of additional initiatives to bear in order to make further improvements in retention, although these are yet to be extended to delivery organisations (see also Expectation B10).

2.46 Support for students pervades much of the University's work. There is a strong network of student-facing support services, both in academic skill development and in the welfare and employability area. The personal tutor system has been re-energised, and wide use is made of student surveys to solicit feedback. Alignment with Changemaker values has facilitated the introduction of a wide range of initiatives targeted upon the student experience. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student Engagement

Findings

2.47 The University's expectations for student engagement are set out in the Student Partnership Agreement, which outlines the commitment and values of the University, students, staff and the Students' Union. The Agreement is inclusive of all staff and students, including those at Education with Others (EWO) partners.

2.48 The University identifies a range of mechanisms through which it seeks to engage the student body and these are clearly documented and promoted to students through the Student Engagement Matrix. Formal opportunities for engagement include: feedback surveys; participation in quality assurance processes such as programme validation and review; representation at programme, school and University-level meetings; and involvement in other University-wide or school-specific initiatives and projects. Individual students are also able to provide informal feedback through their personal academic tutor or a member of the programme team.

2.49 The Student Experience Committee (SEC) maintains strategic oversight of the student learning experience and this includes monitoring the effectiveness of student engagement mechanisms. At an institutional level, the SEC has a role in considering and responding to the outcomes of student surveys, including the NSS. The SEC also reviews the Student Partnership Agreement on an annual basis, for approval by the Senate.

2.50 In testing the University's approach to meeting this Expectation, the review team reviewed policies and procedures relating to student engagement, minutes of committees attended by student representatives, and documentation from quality assurance processes in which students are involved. The team also met a range of staff and students from different schools, including those at EWO partners.

2.51 Information to students on the range of opportunities available for student engagement is made available through handbooks, verbal briefings and events organised by the Students' Union. Students whom the review team met demonstrated a good level of awareness of the opportunities available to them.

2.52 There is a clear policy for the nomination and election of student representatives; training for this role, which is increasingly being delivered online, is provided by the Students' Union. Representatives whom the review team met, including those at EWO partners, confirmed that they had access to appropriate support and training for their role.

2.53 The University employs a wide range of mechanisms for engaging its students, and overall these are effective in ensuring that the learning experience is adequately informed by the student voice. Formal representation at University level provides a channel for students to influence decision-making at the most senior level, although the involvement of current students in the relocation to the new Waterside campus is seen as less of a priority, as most students are likely to have graduated by the time of the move.

2.54 Student-Staff Liaison Committees, which are operated at programme level, attended by students and staff, and chaired by an elected programme representative, are a key mechanism for initiating student-led changes to modules and programmes. Examples of improvements initiated in response to student feedback provided through these meetings

include the provision of more detailed guidance on particular assessments, the creation of a subject-based society for students and better learning resources.

2.55 Student feedback is sought at regular points throughout the student lifecycle and responded to through appropriate channels. Rolling action plans, completed as part of the continuous programme monitoring process, reflect on feedback from students, including the results of module evaluation surveys and NSS data. Each term there is an extended rolling action plan meeting, to which students are invited, to identify areas for improvement and suggest possible courses of action. Minutes of these meetings reveal that explicit consideration is given to feedback from students, including those studying the same programme at an EWO partner. In addition, students are encouraged to provide regular feedback on support services, for example feedback on the VLE - Northampton Integrated Learning Environment (NILE) - can be provided through the continuous online 'Rate-my-NILE' survey. Students whom the review team met confirmed that the University is responsive to their feedback and they were able to cite examples of changes made in response to their views.

2.56 The development and approval of new programmes, and the periodic review of existing programmes, now requires evidenced involvement from students. The form this engagement takes can vary from formal participation in a programme design workshop (creating aligned interactive educational resource opportunities) to verbal dialogue with existing or prospective students. The review team met students from an EWO partner who had been engaged in a comprehensive consultation exercise by the academic team on the content and structure of a new programme, which may provide a progression route for current students. The team also saw a sample of validation reports that include a student member on the panel.

2.57 The University has various ways of communicating to students how their feedback has been acted upon. Student representatives attending University meetings are expected to cascade down information to their colleagues. There are also You Said, We Did communications on digital signage around the campus and on University web pages. Improvements made at an institutional level in response to student feedback include extended library opening hours, enhancements to the VLE and staff development to address issues raised by students.

2.58 The University SEC reviews the effectiveness of student engagement regularly and this has resulted in a number of projects to enhance the student voice further. For example, the use of virtual networks and resources to improve relationships with students at EWO partners. The SEC receives an annual report on the operation of Student-Staff Liaison Committees and also monitors student engagement through school-level SECs.

2.59 The review team found that the University has effective processes for engaging its student body in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.60 The University has a clear and comprehensive regulatory framework, comprising a set of policies and procedures, for managing the assessment of its taught awards. Similarly, assessment guidance for postgraduate research awards is given in the Research Degrees Handbook. The Assessment and Feedback Policy sets out the University's overarching principles for effective assessment. The Policy is purposed to inform students and stakeholders of the expectations and processes for assessment and support academic staff in designing and facilitating assessment. This Policy also explains and advises staff on assessment methods, and offers good practice guidelines explicitly in relation to the processes of grading, moderation and feedback strategies. There is further detailed advice available in the Staff Handbook.

2.61 Assessment design is an early consideration of programme development and now principally occurs through the creating aligned interactive educational resource opportunities (CAIeRO) process, which integrates the study and application of learning outcomes into its two-day workshops. Assessment practice and outcomes are then reviewed through annual and periodic review processes, with involvement from external examiners.

2.62 The University operates a two-tiered assessment board structure for confirming the award of credit. Module assessment boards confirm grades for individual modules and review comparative data. Award and Status Boards determine progression between stages of an award and confer final awards on behalf of the Senate. The constitution and function of assessment boards are clearly laid out in the Student and Academic Regulations, and this includes the consideration of Education with Others (EWO) provision. Strategic oversight of assessment processes and outcomes is the responsibility of the Academic Quality and Standards Committee, reporting to annually to the Senate.

2.63 The review team scrutinised the University's policies, procedures and handbooks for assessment. The team also reviewed module and programme specifications, external examiner reports, rolling action plans, validation and periodic subject review reports, and minutes of committees and boards involved in the oversight of assessment. The team confirmed its findings through meetings with a range of senior and academic staff, and students, including those studying at EWO partners.

2.64 The University is thorough in providing sufficient guidance to both staff and students on all aspects of assessment practice. Module and programme specifications set out the assessment strategies for a particular programme and this is further contextualised for students through handbooks and assessment briefs. Students are supported through the assessment process by academic staff, but also by advisers based in the Centre for Academic Practice. Students whom the review team met confidently stated that they understood the practice of assessment, learning outcomes and their function in relation to exit qualifications. They also reported that staff are responsive to feedback and were able to cite examples of where assessment practice had been enhanced in response to student views.

2.65 Staff are appropriately supported in fulfilling their role in relation to assessment. The processes of writing learning outcomes and designing assessments is set out both in the Staff Handbook and the University Modular Framework, and there is training available for all new staff. The CAleRO process used to redesign programmes encourages the development of good practice in assessment. The C@N-DO staff development programme is also important for staff who wish to explore assessment and learning outcomes in greater depth.

2.66 There are robust processes for the setting, marking and moderation of assessments. The University has prescribed processes for the accreditation of prior learning, and for importing students' grades from study abroad arrangements that fall within the normal duration of the programme. The use of plagiarism-detection software aids the prevention and detection of academic malpractice. There is clear guidance on the provision of feedback on assessed work to students, which is increasingly being delivered through an online facility. While the student submission to this report references late feedback as an area for improvement, students whom the review team met confirmed their awareness of the four-week turnaround policy for providing feedback, and most were satisfied with the timeliness and quality of feedback received. The University continues to improve its feedback practices and this is evidenced by the fact that it is in the upper quartile of NSS results for assessment and feedback.

2.67 Assessment boards operate transparently and effectively to confirm credit and qualifications in line with University regulations. External examiners provide further reassurance of the quality of assessment, marking schemes and grading criteria, and confirm that the University's arrangements for its administration and the processes governing assessment are carried out in accordance with stipulated requirements.

2.68 The University systematically reviews and enhances its processes for assessment. This extends beyond the annual review of policies and procedures to include a number of enhancement projects. A 'Creativity in Assessment' agenda is currently being developed and a project designed to develop assessment for the 21st century has been ongoing since 2013. There is also revision work underway concerning the Award and Status Board, the use of NILE for external examiner sampling, and a revised approach for addressing late assessment feedback to students.

2.69 Processes for assessment at the University are carefully considered, monitored and governed by regulations and policies that ensure the assessment of students' work is equitable, valid and reliable. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining

Findings

2.70 The role and responsibilities of external examiners are described within the University's comprehensive External Examiner Handbook. School Quality Standards and Enhancement Committees are responsible for ensuring that all modules and programmes have appropriately qualified external examiners in post; appointments are made at institutional level by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC). The name and affiliation of external examiners is shared with students through their programme VLE. The AQSC is empowered to remove unsatisfactory external examiners, and to extend appointments and reallocate duties as necessary.

2.71 In order to ensure objectivity, the External Examiner Handbook points to the detailed criteria for selection of an examiner. The external's responsibilities are clearly articulated in the Handbook and detailed in a formal on-site induction programme given in the first year of appointment. The same processes are used to appoint external examiners for Education with Others (EWO) programmes and modules. Wherever possible, the examiner appointed is the same as that for home-based provision in order to be able to comment on the comparability of quality and standards across all cohorts.

2.72 External examiners are expected to approve assessment instruments prior to first use, to sample assessed student work, to meet students and to report annually, in writing, on what they have found. Those appointed to EWO provision are encouraged to visit the partner and meet students for validated provision, and for UK-based franchised provision. The University's Assessment and Feedback Policy details moderation processes, including identifying a minimum sample for external moderation. Where a module is delivered in multiple awards or across multiple sites, samples must include a range of scripts from all sites/qualifications. If external examiners identify any grading concerns, the University has clear processes to engage in confirmatory marking, moderation of a larger sample of scripts, or scaling of marks.

2.73 The external examiner's report is completed using a University template, and there is a well-defined process for considering the report both at institutional and school level, producing an action plan if necessary, which would then be brought to the attention of the AQSC. A formal response is sent to the external examiner, and rolling action plans arising from the continuous programme monitoring process are required to take account of feedback from external examiners. The AQSC annual report to the Senate includes an overview of responses from external examiners, identifying any emerging themes and areas for enhancement. There is also a process for external examiners to raise matters of serious concern directly with the Vice-Chancellor.

2.74 The review team tested this Expectation by examining a sample of external examiner reports and associated responses, policies and procedures governing external examining, and the minutes of relevant committees. The team also met a wide range of staff and students.

2.75 Robust arrangements exist for the oversight of external examiner appointments through the committee process, and in particular the review team noted the importance afforded to the process by the AQSC. The induction programme for new appointees is thorough, and the few external examiners who are unable to attend induction are briefed by their school during their first visit.

2.76 The University appoints subject specialist external examiners to examine specialist modules within the University Modular Framework. In addition, principal examiners are appointed to bring oversight of programme outcomes across the University at the Award and Progression Board. More recently, as one of the AQSC's recent enhancement priorities, and in some discipline areas, especially where modules and programmes have a unique single relationship, programme externals have been appointed to consider the coherency of the programme. This principle has also lately been extended to bring a coherent external scrutiny to the delivery of the University's largest EWO programme (the Master of Business Administration). The University has shown similar innovation in piloting a scheme for an external examiner to use appropriate technology to engage with remote distance learning students. While this had not been entirely successful, it demonstrates the University's commitment to supporting examiners in their role.

2.77 In general, external examiners make detailed responses in their annual reports. Externals are asked to specifically confirm that academic standards are meeting the appropriate UK thresholds, and, where their appointments include modules or programmes delivered in partner organisations, that proper consideration is given to the comparability of student achievement across sites. The University has sound arrangements for responding to external examiner reports. This includes detailed responses from the University to the examiner and thorough consideration at school and institutional level. Where detailed follow-up is required, an action plan is formulated in the school, and considered by the AQSC. The AQSC's annual report to the Senate on academic standards contains a detailed analysis of reports from external examiners and reassures the University regarding the quality of its taught programmes.

2.78 External examiner reports are made available to student representatives via Student-Staff Liaison Committee meetings, and in future their consideration will also be made a standing item on the agenda. Both reports and associated University responses are shared with students on the VLE. Students whom the review team met confirmed that external examiners routinely meet with them during their visits, and that external examiner reports are made available through the VLE. Although aware of their availability, students whom the team met did not find particular value in accessing the reports.

2.79 The review team found that the University's appointment, support for, and engagement with external examiners is sound, and brings an appropriate level of external scrutiny to institutional oversight of both academic standards and quality. Where externals raise issues, they are properly addressed in a timely manner. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review

Findings

2.80 The annual review for all taught programmes, including Education with Others (EWO) provision, takes place at module, programme and school level. Programmes, or subject areas, are also required to undergo periodic subject review on a five-yearly cycle. The implementation and operation of these processes are outlined in the Annual Review and Periodic Subject Review Handbooks. The processes for programme monitoring and review are described in further detail under Expectation A3.3.

2.81 School Quality Standards and Enhancement Committees (QSECs) monitor adherence to and progress with the annual programme monitoring process, and also oversee the production of the school annual review (SAR), which draws on common themes arising across programmes. At an institutional level, processes for programme monitoring, modifications and withdrawal are overseen by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC). For postgraduate research provision, the Research Degrees Committee submits an annual report to the Senate that outlines the ways in which standards are set and maintained.

2.82 In testing the University's processes for meeting this Expectation the review team considered a range of rolling action plans (RAPs), Final Rolling Action Plans (FRAPs), SARs, periodic subject review reports, and minutes of relevant committees. The team also reviewed annual reports on postgraduate research provision. The team met a range of staff and students who have been involved in the monitoring of programmes.

2.83 The University's approach to programme monitoring is one of continuous enhancement through the completion of RAPs throughout the academic year, culminating in a summative review at the end of year through a FRAP. This ensures that issues are addressed promptly as and when they are identified but also provides an endpoint to the process allowing wider reflection on progress against the previous year's actions. Programme-level action plans draw on annual module reviews completed by module leaders and feed into SARs. The team found module and programme reviews to be detailed, reflect on a wide range of quality-related matters and make appropriate use of information and data.

2.84 The University's processes for annual programme monitoring also apply to its EWO provision. For franchised provision, University RAPs give separate and explicit consideration to matters relating to the partner. For its one validated partner, where the University does not have comparable provision of its own, the partner is responsible for completing RAPs, which are then reviewed by the relevant school. There is evidence that where issues have occurred at EWO partners, these are identified and addressed through comprehensive action planning, with appropriate follow-up monitoring of intended outcomes.

2.85 SARs are thorough in their analysis of school-wide issues arising from the monitoring of programmes. Reports are detailed and provide a holistic review of the school's provision while also giving consideration to issues pertinent to particular programmes. Annual school review results in the formulation of a school Quality Enhancement Plan to address issues identified through the SAR. SARs and the resulting action plans encourage the monitoring of performance against institutional performance indicators and targets.

2.86 The University operates school Quality Forums as an additional mechanism to the QSEC, where FRAPs are monitored and good practice is disseminated. The Academic Audit and Review Committee, on behalf of the AQSC, audits FRAPs to check the quality of analysis and evaluation, giving particular attention to the extent to which EWO provision is considered by programme teams.

2.87 Periodic subject review operates effectively as a process for checking the long-term academic health of programmes. Reports of these reviews confirm that the process is comprehensive and consistently operated across the University. Appropriate use is made of students and external stakeholders in the periodic review of its programmes to ensure that enhancements are adequately informed by the student voice and the wider sector.

2.88 Sound arrangements exist for changes to and for the withdrawal of programmes. These are managed in accordance with prescribed processes that define the different types of change and stipulate the associated procedure to follow. Major changes require the reapproval of a programme to ensure that academic standards and quality continue to remain secure. All programme closures are overseen by the University Management Team and clear strategies are put in place to support existing students in achieving their intended qualification.

2.89 The University's processes for programme monitoring and review are reliable, effective and operated consistently across its provision. They provide a useful opportunity to both assure and enhance the quality of provision. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints

Findings

2.90 The Academic Appeal Policy and Student Complaint Policy set out the process for appeals and complaints respectively. These policies, along with supplementary guidance notes, are published on the University website. Both policies make clear the University's indicative timescales for each stage of the process. The Complaint Policy encourages informal resolution through an initial local complaints procedure. For Education with Others (EWO) partners, the division of responsibilities between the University and the delivery organisation are stipulated in the operational handbook for the partnership. In all cases, students at EWO partners have final recourse to the University's procedures. The academic appeals and complaints policies are reviewed and updated annually by the University Student Experience Committee (SEC), with amendments approved by the Senate.

2.91 The Director of Student and Academic Services is responsible for the implementation and oversight of processes for academic appeals and complaints. Arrangements exist for the monitoring and review of progress against individual appeals and complaints to check adherence to the University's own processes. An annual report summarising the numbers and types of complaints and appeals received by the University is submitted to the Senate, following initial consideration by the SEC.

2.92 The review team reviewed the University's approach to meeting this Expectation through consideration of policies and procedures for handling appeals and complaints, student handbooks and annual reports. The review team also met professional services staff involved in handling appeals and complaints, and a wide range of students.

2.93 Information on complaints is clear and easily accessible for prospective and current students. Students are further signposted to complaints and appeals policies in student handbooks. In addition to formal policies students are provided with a range of additional information and guidance to support them in accessing the procedures. Independent advice on procedural issues is available through the Students' Union and University academic advice managers. Students whom the review team met were aware of formal processes but most preferred to resolve issues informally, directly with their programme team or personal academic tutor.

2.94 The University's annual report on complaints and appeals provides an effective basis for monitoring, evaluating and enhancing its processes in this area. Reports provide a detailed summary and analysis of data on appeals and complaints by outcome, and identify areas for further improvement for the following academic year.

2.95 There is good evidence of the University undertaking enhancements to its processes in response to the outcomes of internal processes, rulings by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator and through reflection on sector practice. Recent improvements include providing adequate notice to students of complaint hearings and clarification of the arrangements for academic appeals for EWO partners.

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

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.97 The development of strategic alliances and in-country delivery is an important focus of the University's current and former Strategic Plan, as is the desire to consolidate activity through fewer but larger multi-school partnerships. The University also has ambitions to invest in existing and new partnerships with further education providers.

2.98 The University categorises this area of its activity as Education with Others (EWO), and has established a clear typology of the different types of arrangement that it undertakes. Apart from its long-standing relationship with Moulton College, the University no longer validates provision for which it has no in-house expertise, and in the case of Moulton College the University makes use of external academic subject-specific expertise. The University only engages in activity where the language of delivery and assessment is English.

2.99 The University's Managing Education with Others Handbook 2014-15 details how arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with other organisations are set up and managed. The Handbook includes the study abroad framework and approval process. The approval of partners comprises a five-stage process, which includes strategic fit, financial sustainability, risk assessment and due diligence. More in-depth due diligence is carried out for setting up larger partnerships compared to smaller arrangements, such as the joint PhD.

2.100 A recent development in the management of EWO is the establishment of an Academic Partnership Business Office, which will be responsible for developing, amending and leading the development of both UK and overseas academic partnerships. This Office will work closely with Quality and Academic Partnerships, which will continue to manage the approval, monitoring and review of such arrangements.

2.101 The Placements and Work-Based Learning Policy provides guidance and templates for the management of arrangements with employers where learning undertaken in the workplace is an assessed part of the programme. This Policy defines the different types of learning undertaken in the workplace and outlines broad principles for the management of such arrangements.

2.102 The Senate is ultimately responsible for the quality and standards of all the University's academic awards, but delegates oversight and management of the EWO framework to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC). The Academic Audit and Review Committee provides oversight of the outcomes of approval events. The University introduced a Collaborative Quality Forum in 2012-13 to promote the sharing of good practice and the minutes of this forum are received by the AQSC.

2.103 The review team explored the University's strategic approach to EWO and also the approval, monitoring and withdrawal of a number of types of arrangement, including work-based learning. The team reviewed handbooks, policies, case studies of the establishment, renewal and withdrawal from different types of EWO arrangements, monitoring reports and minutes of relevant committees. It tested its findings in meetings

with a range of senior and academic staff, as well as staff and students from delivery organisations.

2.104 The review team found the University's approach to setting up EWO arrangements to be proportionate and risk based. All new proposals must first be approved by the University Management Team to ensure the business case is viable and in alignment with University strategy, before progressing to academic approval by a separate panel. Institutional approval of a new partner must precede any programme collaboration. Documentation associated with initial due diligence and reports from approval events demonstrate that the process is sufficiently thorough. For the University's single validation arrangement with Moulton College, subject expertise was sought through an external expert.

2.105 All approved partnerships are governed by a Memorandum of Cooperation, which is based on standardised templates. This is accompanied by a comprehensive operational handbook, which clearly details responsibilities of the University and the partner for the various aspects of quality assurance. When new arrangements are approved, the withdrawal strategy is also considered as part of the programme collaboration approval event, and arrangements for managing withdrawal are documented in the Memorandum of Cooperation.

2.106 The monitoring of partnerships occurs through a number of mechanisms, some of which are the same as those for on-campus provision. All programmes are subject to the University's continuous programme monitoring process, and the consideration of EWO is integrated into the rolling action plan for the on-campus delivery of the same programme. Recent improvements to the process include updating the templates for programme monitoring to ensure actions relating to EWO arrangements are captured in full. Monitoring of the delivery organisation as a whole is through the recently established Partnership Manager role. For new partnerships, the Manager undertakes an interim review of the partner after the first year of operation, which is reported to the AQSC. For established partners, there is an annual report of the health of the overall partnership, which allows the University to identify and address issues of a more strategic nature. All EWO partners are re-approved through institutional review every five years. EWO programmes are also included in University periodic subject reviews, and considered alongside and comparatively with equivalent campus-based programmes.

2.107 Particularly noteworthy is the growth in delivery of the MBA through delivery organisations across multiple locations, which is testing the University's systems for managing partnerships. The University is addressing this through the employment of a single programme leader for all delivery locations, and also through the appointment of a single external examiner to oversee the whole programme.

2.108 There is a comprehensive operational framework in place to support staff at EWO partners. The University programme leader is the primary academic contact responsible for liaison at programme level on matters of academic quality and standards. The Partnership Manager role was introduced in 2013-14 and this is now a key role in terms of maintaining regular contact with delivery organisations. In 2014, a Partnership Manager forum was established to promote consistency and the sharing of good practice. The University's Postgraduate Research Manager is responsible for the management of jointly supervised research degrees and collaborative research degrees.

2.109 The Academic Planning and Partnerships Office has led in the introduction of partner resource sites on the VLE. All franchise partners currently have a bespoke partner resource site and this is being progressively rolled out to other types of EWO provision. These sites provide a central point for the provision of information and support, and also include partner-specific information. Staff and students from EWO partners whom the review

team met confirmed that they have access to the VLE and commented on the helpfulness of the range and quality of information available to them. Staff at EWO partners are further supported by access to University staff development activities. Staff at delivery organisations whom the team met were complimentary about the range of opportunities available to them and there appears to have been a high level of participation in staff development activities (see feature of good practice under Expectation B3).

2.110 The review team noted that all UK delivery organisations have progression rates below the University's expected threshold, and most had a fall in progression in the year up to 2013-14. While lower than expected progression rates are addressed through review processes for individual partners, given the significant trend across several partners the team considers this to be an issue that requires institutional-level attention. The University has launched a First Year Experience Project to improve progression rates for on-campus provision, but this initiative does not currently extend to EWO partners. The review team **recommends** that the University establish University-level oversight of, and address, progression rates at delivery organisations.

2.111 The University's Department of Marketing and International Relations is responsible for approving marketing material produced by EWO partners. It also undertakes audits of publicly available information produced by the partner, including that published on external websites.

2.112 Arrangements for work-based learning are subject to approval processes that include a risk assessment approach to assess suitability. The University ensures agreements are in place with placement providers, carries out mentor training and also evaluates the quality of the placement. Placements that are part of programmes are considered during validation, annual review and periodic subject reviews. Records of individual placements are held locally but the Placements and Work-Based Learning Office is now bringing the information together in the form of a central register and placement map.

2.113 The review team found that appropriate arrangements are in place to approve, monitor and review education delivered through EWO partners. The University is aware of the need to keep its arrangements under close review in light of its plans for further expansion in this area. Staff at partner organisations are well-supported in their role and have access to a wealth of development opportunities. The team identified one area for improvement that relates to the need to take more strategic action to address progression rates at EWO partners. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Findings

2.114 The Research and Enterprise Committee (REC) exercises oversight of postgraduate research matters, with the detailed work delegated to the Research Degrees Committee (RDC). Four discipline-based Research Degrees Boards oversee the ongoing progress of research degrees students. The REC, RDC and Research Degrees Boards all have student membership, and the Research Student Committee acts as a forum for all postgraduate research students.

2.115 The Research Degree Regulations and the accompanying Research Degrees Handbook stipulate the processes and frameworks governing the award of research degrees. The University also offers a PhD by means of published works and practice-based PhDs. The University's professional doctorates, while awarded as a research degree, undergo validation and periodic subject review processes in order to consider the contribution of the taught element contained therein; the research element is managed by the RDC.

2.116 The University currently has eight PhD students working in animal welfare at a local specialist land-based college. In addition, it has agreements with two Scandinavian universities for the joint supervision and award of PhDs. Management of jointly supervised and collaborative research degrees is the responsibility of the Postgraduate Research Manager, located within the Graduate School. These partnership arrangements have all been agreed following formal approval procedures (see also Expectation B10).

2.117 The Graduate School leads and delivers research degrees programmes in partnership with academic schools. It is the administrative centre for research degrees, overseeing the processes of admission, progression, assessment and award. The Graduate School is responsible for supervisor and student development, the former through an annual 'update day' and a termly supervisors' forum. New supervisors are required to undertake a credit-bearing training module, and may, if they wish, continue study to obtain a Postgraduate Certificate in Research Degree Supervision. The Graduate School is also responsible for overseeing and enhancing the quality of the provision, researcher development programmes and research student experience. Both staff and student programmes are supported by online toolkits giving access to further information on process and procedures. In addition, academic schools, research institutes and groups provide discipline-specific development, overseen by Research Degrees Boards. The Graduate School also provides University-wide events for research students, staff and supervisors, including a Postgraduate Research Student Conference, Research Student Poster Competitions, and an Images of Research Exhibition.

2.118 Supervisory teams are appointed at the point of admission. The regulations and the University's code of practice state very clear and appropriate criteria for both supervisors and the team. Supervisory meetings should take place monthly for full-time students, and students are required to maintain a log of such activity.

2.119 The review team examined regulations, policies and committee minutes relating to research degrees provision. The team also met supervisors, staff from the Graduate School, academic staff and postgraduate research students, including those studying through an Education with Others (EWO) partner and those undertaking a joint PhD.

2.120 The existing handbooks, regulations for research degrees and code of practice are comprehensive. In scrutinising the regulations, it is apparent that the core principles the University has adopted for assessing all of its doctoral degrees are the same. The criteria for assessment are clear and sound. The University has recently approved a new set of policies to govern its approach to research degrees, and the review team formed the opinion that these are similarly and appropriately comprehensive.

2.121 The administration of the admissions process is managed centrally, but the Graduate School coordinates the evaluation of the candidate and the final decision is made by the academic school. Applications are made in writing, accompanied by an outline proposal for the programme of research, in order to allow the University to judge whether it can provide an appropriately-qualified supervisory team and research environment. Students whom the review team met reported that early informal engagement with their potential supervisor is an extremely important element of the process, enabling a more effective outline research proposal to be developed.

2.122 The Graduate School offers a comprehensive development programme for postgraduate research students based upon the national Vitae Researcher Development Framework. All postgraduate research students are required to undertake a four-day induction, and, at the transfer stage, to submit two draft chapters, deliver a research seminar and undertake a transfer viva voce. Students and staff whom the review team met commented upon the wealth of structured additional training and development available from the Graduate School, in their academic schools or delivery organisations, in programmes of research seminars, and from the Centre for Achievement and Performance. Students also commented positively on the opportunities to attend events, seminars and conferences away from the University, both to present research and network within their wider discipline networks.

2.123 The University has recently provided opportunities for postgraduate research students to gain undergraduate teaching experience where appropriate and practicable, thus aligning with the expectations of the national researcher development framework. The University acknowledges that some further work is required to ensure that all those already teaching receive the appropriate training (see recommendation under Expectation B3).

2.124 In validating professional doctorates, the University assesses the staff team supporting the programme, and thus implicitly confirms that an appropriate supervisory team and research environment will be available for the candidates. On completion of the taught elements, the students are still required to submit a formal research proposal, and all the normal postgraduate research processes for supervision, monitoring and assessment then apply.

2.125 Staff from both the University and EWO partners are well aware of the criteria for appointment as a supervisor or Director of Studies, and the associated requirement to attend the annual updating and training presented by the Graduate School. Senior staff whom the review team met confirmed that research degree supervision is recognised and accounted for in workload planning.

2.126 Students whom the review team met were aware of their commitment to meet members of their supervisory team at least once every four weeks (six weeks for part-time students), and of their own responsibility to maintain records of their supervision.

For students conducting their research in joint arrangements with a delivery organisation, the supervisory team always included supervisors from each partner. The relationship between the University and its local land-based college partner is long-standing, and the college supervisory staff regularly attend training at the University; some have been approved as Directors of Studies. One member of college staff sits on a University Research Degrees Board, and the college research leader is a member of the University REC. This demonstrates the strong and mature partnership between the University and this particular partner.

2.127 The RDC produces an annual reflective review of all University postgraduate research provision, which is considered by the Senate. The report addresses: entry, withdrawal, progression and completion statistics; the demographics of the postgraduate research community; training for both students and supervisors; student representation; research ethics; and collaborative partnerships. The report is sufficiently detailed to reassure the University of the quality of the postgraduate research student experience and the standards of University research degrees.

2.128 Overall, the arrangements for the oversight and management of postgraduate research degrees are comprehensive and fit for purpose. The committee structure provides appropriate hierarchy and oversight. The Graduate School provides an appropriate centre of gravity for administrative support and generic researcher training. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

2.130 All Expectations are met and the level of risk is low in each case. There is one recommendation in this area under Expectation B10. The review team found that progression rates at several UK delivery organisations were below the University's own threshold. While the team is satisfied that appropriate processes exist at programme and partner level to monitor and address this issue at the level of the individual partnership, given the trend across several partners it recommends that the University take strategic action to address the matter. The review team affirms the action being taken by the University to support all postgraduate research students in getting access to, and undertaking training prior to engaging in, teaching-related activities.

2.131 There are three features of good practice, which, in the view of the review team, make a particularly positive contribution to the management of this judgement area. These relate to the innovative programme design workshops (Expectation B1), the wide range of development opportunities for all staff (Expectation B3), and the varied initiatives to enhance students' employability and social entrepreneurship skills (Expectation B4).

2.132 The University has appropriate processes for assuring the quality of learning opportunities for its students. The single recommendation in this area relates to better oversight of a specific issue at delivery organisations, and therefore poses a low risk. The affirmation is recognition of action that is already underway to address an identified area for improvement and therefore does not pose a significant risk to the management of this area.

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

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Findings

3.1 The University produces and makes available information about its higher education, for its intended audiences, through a range of media but principally through its public-facing website. This includes, but is not limited to, the Strategic Plan, academic regulations and policies, information about the structure and content of individual programmes, and more general information about the University environment.

3.2 The University has recently introduced a new governance structure to manage information made available online through the website, the VLE and the Student Hub. The Digital Steering Group has responsibility for the oversight of information published through digital channels. Defined procedures are now in place for the approval, amendment and deletion of online material. Publications containing programme-specific information are required to be signed off by the academic team responsible for the delivery of the qualification. All University policies include a summary sheet, which identifies an owner of the policy and confirms approval by the relevant committee.

3.3 All students who achieve an award, including those at Education with Others (EWO) partners, are provided with a transcript, a certificate and a diploma supplement upon graduation. In the future, the University intends to adopt the Higher Education Achievement Report as a replacement to current transcripts.

3.4 In testing the University's approach to meeting this Expectation the review team reviewed the website, the VLE, programme specifications, handbooks, policies and regulations. The team also met staff involved in the production and review of information, and a range of students.

3.5 The University produces information that is clear, accessible, and describes its mission and strategy for higher education. Prospective students are provided with detailed information about the higher education on offer at the University enabling them to make an informed choice. Current students are supported in achieving their qualification through a range of information about their programme, what is expected of them, and policies and procedures governing their period of study at the University. Students whom the review team met, including those at EWO partners, confirmed that the information they received prior to joining the University was accurate and helpful, and that the VLE is the most useful resource for current students.

3.6 The provision of information to staff is equally comprehensive and readily available. Staff with responsibilities for setting academic standards and assuring quality are provided with detailed guidance through a range of handbooks, policies, and staff development activities. Staff whom the review team met were fully aware of the University's various processes for managing quality, including programme validation, periodic subject review and setting up new partnerships. External stakeholders, such as employers and external examiners, are also supported in their role through the provision of detailed information about what is expected of them.

3.7 The University operates a sound framework for producing and checking information about its higher education provision. Each web page has a designated owner, and this provides a robust mechanism for ensuring information is kept up to date and only amended by authorised personnel. At the minimum, all web pages must be reviewed and updated annually. The Director of Marketing and Communications has final sign-off for printed publicity material, such as University prospectuses. For material including information on programmes, there is appropriate consultation with the relevant academic school. Individual VLE sites are also reviewed annually by the module or programme owner, supplemented by regular audits undertaken by the school.

3.8 Appropriate use is made of data and management information in quality assurance processes. For example, programme monitoring processes draw on student achievement, retention and progression data in their evaluation of standards and quality. At University level, increasing use is being made of management information to monitor and evaluate performance against key performance indicators. In delivering the new Strategic Plan (2015-20) the balanced scorecard method will be used to capture a broad range of metrics, enabling the Senate to review progress against high-level measures.

3.9 Secure arrangements exist for the production of transcripts and certificates, the process for which is managed centrally by the Quality and Academic Partnerships Office. Not all certificates or transcripts provided to the review team included the location of study. At the time of the visit, this had been addressed by the University through a recoding exercise to ensure that the name and location of the teaching institution appears on transcripts for all EWO awards. Students graduating in the 2014-15 academic year have been reissued new transcripts to include the location.

3.10 Information about the University's EWO provision is published on the website. The University has separate registers for UK and international partnerships. The accuracy of the public-facing registers is checked as part of the annual business of the Academic Quality and Standards Committee, and at school level by Quality Standards and Enhancement Committees. Clear processes are in place for updating the registers in response to the approval, change or withdrawal of partnerships.

3.11 The University operates sound processes for ensuring information, including that produced by collaborative partners, is fit for purpose, trustworthy and accessible. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

3.13 There are no recommendations or features of good practice in this area. The University has effective arrangements for ensuring the information it produces for its intended audiences is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

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

4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1 The University's priorities for enhancement are expressed through its Strategic Plan 2015-20. In setting out its strategic direction, the values for enhancement are stated in terms of its expressed drivers, which include delivering a high quality student experience; valuing equality and diversity; leading the enhancement of local and international communities through social impact; and performance through continuous investment in, and development of, staff. The immediate priority is planning for the move to the new Waterside campus, through which the University is embarking on an ambitious project of digital transformation, which itself is seen as an enhancement of student learning opportunities.

4.2 Enhancement-related activities are overseen through the University's management and committee structure. The Senate has oversight of all enhancement activities and is informed by its subcommittees. The holistic approach taken by the Executive Dean for Quality and Student Experience is a particular focus for enhancement, which is developed in the Learning and Teaching Plan, delivered by the Institute of Learning and Teaching (ILT) and overseen by the Student Experience Committee (SEC).

4.3 The review team considered the University's Strategic Plan, the Learning and Teaching Plan, annual reports of quality assurance processes, and minutes of committees that have a role in enhancement. The team also met senior and academic staff across schools, and with students and student representatives.

4.4 There is evidence that a culture of enhancement is embedded within quality assurance processes and operational frameworks. In particular, annual reports summarising the outcomes from various quality assurance processes and support services promote the identification of institutional-level enhancement priorities. These annual reports provide a thorough analysis of institution-wide trends arising from processes such as programme validation, periodic subject review, school reviews and the operation of appeals and complaints procedures. The outcome of these reports is the identification of strategic priorities, which inform the work of the SEC in the next academic year. Examples of University-wide improvements arising through these processes include the development of an online Skills Hub for students; investment in physical learning resources and space; and enhancements to the structure, consistency and reliability of the VLE.

4.5 The ILT plays an important role in supporting and developing staff, delivering the Learning and Teaching Plan, and providing access to enhancement opportunities through cross-school engagement. The overall mission of the ILT is to support, promote and research effective and innovative learning and teaching practices, and to enhance the entire University with the outcomes of its work. Enhancements to learning and teaching initiated by the ILT include the provision of web-based resources to support sound academic practice; developing staff capacity and expertise through the professional development framework; improved practices in assessment design and feedback.

4.6 The University is successful in encouraging staff participation in enhancement within and across schools through varied opportunities for the dissemination of good practice. Learning and teaching coordinators located within schools support pedagogical research and innovation initiatives; they pioneer new practices within schools, and where this has been a success there are mechanisms in place and funding available for wider

dissemination. An example of this is the pilot for integrating team-based learning within the curriculum, which started as an initiative in a small area of the University's provision and due to its success is now being rolled out across other schools. Learning and teaching coordinators meet with staff from central support services as part of the learning and Teaching Excellence Forum, which provides a channel for sharing good practice. The annual Learning and Teaching Conference provides an effective platform for sharing research findings and good practice related to enhancing student learning opportunities. At school level, development days offer valuable opportunities for experiences to be showcased and discussed, as well as a platform for enabling staff to take ownership of new ideas for teaching and apply them to their own contexts.

4.7 A specific enhancement-focused initiative, which is closely aligned to the Strategic Plan, is the embedding of Changemaker values across all aspects of the University for the purpose of impacting positively on the social and economic health of communities. While this enhancement initiative is outward facing, in that the obvious beneficiaries are communities served by the University, it has also been used as a tool for enhancing the student experience. As part of this initiative students are encouraged to engage in employment and entrepreneurial activities that can have a social impact. Changemaker values are intended to promote student awareness of local and global issues and empower students to make positive contributions to society. Examples of enhancement related to Changemaker include students undertaking volunteering activities within the local community, the embedding of entrepreneurship modules within the curriculum and, students engaging in projects to develop innovative solutions to address social problems (see feature of good practice under Expectation B4).

4.8 There is evidence of student engagement in enhancement, although this is less apparent for the move to the Waterside campus. Students have been involved in the development of the University's Employability Plus scheme, which rewards students for undertaking activities that develop their employability skills. The Students' Union played an active role in the development and implementation of the framework to support this initiative. Students are continually involved in the enhancement of the VLE through participation in an advisory panel. The Undergraduate Research Bursaries at Northampton (URB@N) project provides undergraduate students with opportunities to participate in University research projects. This enables students to work together in partnership with staff to explore learning and teaching issues for the benefit of the student experience. Recent projects have explored the use of surveys as a feedback mechanism, the readiness of students studying at an Education with Others partner for employability, and the use of automated marking for assessments.

4.9 The University's approach to enhancement is closely aligned with its strategic priorities and effectively implemented through quality assurance processes, and management and operational structures. There is sound evidence of the University taking deliberate steps to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

4.11 There are no recommendations for improvement in this area. The review team acknowledges the positive impact to this area of the feature of good practice located under Expectation B4, which relates to the strategic initiatives to enhance students' employability and social entrepreneurship skills.

4.12 The University has a clearly articulated approach to enhancement embedded through its internal quality assurance processes and structures. This approach is supported by a number of specific strategic initiatives intended to enhance the quality of the student learning opportunities over the coming years.

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

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1 Employability skills are a key goal in the University strategy and embody the University's commitment to the Changemaker ethos, whereby students are encouraged and supported to explore opportunities for employability through engagement with a range of communities, which in turn enables them to develop as active contributors to society.

5.2 The University has taken significant steps, working in partnership with its Students' Union, to focus upon employability. These include the establishment of the University Centre for Employability and Engagement (UCEE) in June 2013; the introduction of a dedicated UCEE adviser for each school; and the development of a wide range of employability initiatives: Schools Engagement, Employability Plus, Volunteering Plus, Placements, Internships, Unitemps, Enterprise Club and Alumni.

5.3 Within schools, employability is embedded within the curriculum in the way that best suits the individual school, and is considered at validation and periodic subject review. In addition to co-curricular and extracurricular opportunities, there are modules taken as part of programmes that address employability issues. Some are available during summer schools or after the examination period.

5.4 The University actively engages with employers in the development and implementation of its employability initiatives. Employers are involved in the design of the offer to students through the UCEE, were involved in development of Employability Plus, and are engaged in new programme design, validation and periodic subject review.

5.5 Employers also play an active role in providing work experience opportunities for students: for example work shadowing, volunteering, curriculum-linked opportunities, placements/internships, part-time and full-time employment. Many programmes involve in-programme placements or work-based learning opportunities.

5.6 Employability is monitored in the Student Experience Committee action plan. It is also monitored via analysis of Destination of Leavers from Higher Education and student barometer data. The University is proactive about evaluating initiatives regarding employability and in October 2015 published a report evaluating its Employability Plus initiative. The University also actively monitors data relating to student employment.

5.7 The employability offer at the University is well coordinated and extensive, and demonstrates substantial engagement with employers. Staff show a high level of commitment to the University's strategy for employability and the opportunities available were well understood by students.

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 29-32 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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