



Higher Education Review of the University of Oxford

March 2016

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About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at the [University of Oxford](#). The review took place from 7 to 10 March 2016 and was conducted by a team of six reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Jeremy Bradshaw
- Dr Douglas Halliday
- Professor David Lamburn
- Professor Diane Meehan
- Mr David Stannard
- Miss Kate Wicklow (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by the University of Oxford 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 6.

In reviewing the University of Oxford 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/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 Oxford

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

- 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 Oxford (the University).

- The comprehensive approach taken to recruitment and admissions across the University to support its ambitions in relation to widening access (Expectation B2).
- The wide range of policies and initiatives which underpin the University's commitment to equality and diversity (Expectation B3).
- The work of the University and OUSU to deliver effective student representation and to monitor its impact (Expectation B5).
- The systematic use of the Quality Assurance Questionnaire to enhance the student learning experience (Expectation B8).
- The accessibility and widespread use of data to monitor, inform and enhance learning opportunities for students (Expectations B8, B3, B4 and B5).

Recommendations

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

By September 2016:

- work with the Conference of Colleges to establish an appropriate mechanism by which the University can, on a regular basis, be informed of the nature and extent of complaints and appeals within the colleges (Expectation B9)
- ensure that there are appropriate procedures in place for the development, monitoring and review of all collaborative partnerships (Expectation B10).

By September 2017:

- provide explicit guidance to enable a consistent approach to student workload across the University (Expectations B1, A3.1, B3, B4 and B6).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The University's progress in implementing the Policy and Guidance on Course Information and the Policy and Guidance for Examiners (C).

Theme: Student Employability

One of the University's key commitments in its Strategic Plan 2013-16 is to ensure that it equips graduates for the best of the diverse range of opportunities for study and employment available to them. Its approach is based on its belief that the most effective way to enhance student employability is through programmes of study which are designed to help students develop the ability to think critically and independently, and which are supported by an individualised approach to teaching and learning. In addition, a growing number of departments are now timetabling sessions geared to employability and embedding employability-related activities within the curriculum.

The University has a developing focus on innovation and on entrepreneurship, building on a range of existing activities such as its Student Entrepreneur Programme, and employers have played a role in, and in some cases inspired, the development of a number of new programmes.

The University has excellent employment rates and its Careers Service works with departments, divisions and colleges to provide students with a range of support, advice and employability-related activities, including internships.

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

About the University of Oxford

Oxford is the oldest university in the English-speaking world and can trace its origins as a teaching institution back to the late 11th century. Recognition as a *universitas* or corporation followed in 1231, with the first colleges being established some years later.

The University's current mission is to lead the world in research and education in ways that benefit society on a national and a global scale. Its associated vision stresses the importance of independent scholarship, academic freedom and a culture of innovation.

The structure of the University has remained largely unchanged since the Institutional Audit undertaken by QAA in 2009. The University consists of 57 academic departments organised into four divisions, the Department for Continuing Education, and 44 colleges and permanent private halls. These are complemented by a number of central University academic and administrative services.

Divisions provide academic leadership in teaching and research and oversee the educational quality and standards of programmes; departments serve as academic homes to the range of programmes and disciplines offered by the University, and provide lectures and classes, laboratories and practicals. They work closely with the colleges, particularly in relation to the undergraduate tutorial teaching that the latter provide.

While the University sets and supervises its examinations and is the awarding body for degrees, the University and the colleges are interdependent communities and all students registered for degree-level awards are members of both the University and a college. The colleges are separate legal entities from the University with their own charters and governing statutes. They admit undergraduate students and present them for matriculation (formal admission) by the University. In addition to providing small group teaching for undergraduate students, they provide residential and social facilities, learning resources and pastoral support for all students.

Undergraduate student numbers show little change since the 2009 Audit, but the number of postgraduate students has grown substantially, particularly on taught programmes. In 2014-15 the University had more than 22,300 registered students on award-bearing programmes, more than 10,000 of whom were studying at postgraduate level. In addition, there were a further 14,500 enrolments on non award-bearing courses offered by the Department for Continuing Education.

Key challenges faced by the University include widening access to students from all socioeconomic, cultural and geographical backgrounds, achieving consistency of the student experience in a collegiate structure, and developing an academic environment and infrastructure befitting a global university in the 21st century.

The University has generally undertaken appropriate action to address the recommendations from the 2009 Institutional Audit. Some actions are ongoing and at the time of the review the University had not fully implemented its recently agreed revised policies covering collaborative provision, in particular the currency of its legal agreements with partner organisations.

Explanation of the findings about the University of Oxford

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 (FHEQ)* are met by:

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

1.1 The University sets out its awards in its University Awards Framework (UAF), which is aligned with *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)* and describes the University's approach to credit and the naming of qualifications. Development of new programmes and major changes to existing programmes are guided by the University's Policy and Guidance on new courses and major changes to courses (including Closure), which was revised and updated in the course of 2014-15. The Policy and Guidance makes clear reference to the UAF and relevant external reference points, and processes include external input. Confirmation of continuing alignment with external reference points is provided by external examiners and through Departmental Review. Guidance relating to Departmental Review is being reviewed for 2015-16 to incorporate consideration of threshold standards explicitly within the terms of reference of Departmental Review Committees.

1.2 This framework would allow the Expectation to be met. The team tested the Expectation by reading relevant University regulations, policies and guidance and the minutes of key committees, and by meeting senior and academic staff, professional services staff and a range of undergraduate and postgraduate students.

1.3 The majority of the University's awards reflect the naming conventions within the FHEQ. There are four sub-degree level awards offered through the University's Department for Continuing Education (OUDCE) which use historic titles. The team explored this issue

and learned that one of the awards, the Undergraduate Certificate, is equivalent to the more commonly used Certificate in Higher Education, comprising 120 credits at Level 4, while the other three awards are University specific and broadly follow the principles set out within the FHEQ.

1.4 The use of credit is not a standard mechanism in the University for qualifications other than for a small number of OUDCE programmes. Where credit is used, it is awarded for the successful achievement of learning outcomes and recorded in the definitive record of the programme.

1.5 At the time of the review the revised process for programme approval was still relatively new and there were few available examples of it working in practice. Examples provided to the team demonstrated general alignment with the guidance, and staff were familiar with its requirements. External examiners' reports read by the team confirmed that threshold standards for programmes appropriately reflect the FHEQ and any applicable Subject Benchmark Statements.

1.6 The University has no requirement for courses to map explicitly individual learning outcomes against assessment tasks and there is currently no intention to introduce such a requirement. Course documentation outlines assessment strategies which support student attainment of learning outcomes, and students confirmed that they are made aware of assessment strategies through course handbooks. The University provides information for students about the overall framework for assessment on the Oxford Students website.

1.7 The UAF is aligned with the FHEQ. External reference points are considered during programme approval. Explicit consideration of alignment with threshold standards is being added to the University's guidance for departmental review. Assessment strategies support student attainment of learning outcomes. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.8 The University's academic governance structure is set out in its Statutes and Regulations, and key components at University, division, department and college levels are summarised in the Quality Assurance Governance Framework. Council has overall responsibility for academic matters. Education Committee, chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education), has strategic oversight of all aspects of teaching and learning and the wider student experience, supported by a number of subcommittees and panels including Quality Assurance Subcommittee (QASC), Undergraduate Panel, Graduate Panel and Examinations Panel. Students are represented on all relevant committees.

1.9 Each division has a set of committees responsible for education-related matters. Common to all divisions are divisional boards, which have a role in ensuring that faculties and departments satisfactorily implement quality assurance procedures. The composition and the powers and duties of divisional boards are set out in Council regulations.

1.10 The Department for Continuing Education is overseen by the Continuing Education Board, which reports to Council. The Conference of Colleges operates through a number of committees, including the Senior Tutors' Committee (STC), the Graduate Committee (GC) and their joint Quality Assurance Working Group (QAWG).

1.11 The University Statutes and Regulations provide the overall framework for the award of academic qualifications. The UAF sets out the University's approach to the use of credit and the naming of qualifications. Academic and assessment regulations, including general and special regulations, are contained within the Examination Regulations. Examination conventions define the standards of achievement required to attain the relevant award, including marking schemes, assessment and classification criteria. The University's template for examination conventions has recently been revised and individual sets of examination conventions are reviewed annually. The regulatory framework for doctoral programmes, overseen by the Graduate Panel reporting to both Education and Research Committees, is set out in the Examination Regulations and in the Policy and Guidance on Research Degrees.

1.12 This comprehensive framework would allow the Expectation to be met. The team tested this by reading relevant University regulations, policies and guidance. It also read minutes of key committees and met senior and academic staff, professional services staff and a range of students at undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

1.13 The minutes of Education Committee show that it is operating effectively and in line with its stated terms of reference. Council and its committees have in place a programme of self-assessment reviews. Education Committee's most recent review, in 2013, concluded that it was performing well overall and also identified areas for improvement; its next review is scheduled for 2016. In its documentation, the University highlighted the contribution of QASC, which was established in 2011-12, to providing a more consistent and comprehensive approach to routine quality assurance matters and to supporting institutional oversight of quality and standards. The minutes of QASC, reported to Education Committee, support this view.

1.14 There are appropriate reporting mechanisms in place between committees at University, divisional and college levels. Divisional representation is an essential component of Education Committee subcommittees, panels and working groups and supports two-way reporting between Education Committee and the divisions. The Conference of Colleges operates its own quality assurance and enhancement procedures. The STC and the Graduate Committee of Conference provide key channels of communication across the University, which is supported by the ex-officio membership of their chairs on Education Committee. The two college committees are also consulted on all proposals for new programmes and major developments originating from Education Committee. The outcomes of the annual reporting undertaken by their joint QAWG are considered by the College Committees and by QASC.

1.15 Oversight of the policies, regulations, procedures and codes of practice governing the conduct and outcome of examinations and assessments is the responsibility of the Examinations Panel. Examination conventions are reviewed on an annual basis by the relevant board of examiners with any changes approved by the supervisory body. Examinations Regulations vary in their structure and level of detail and the University anticipates that a review of their structure and content will take place in 2016-17. The comprehensive Policy and Guidance for Examiners and Others Involved in University Examinations provides information to staff on the relevant regulations and statements of policy and guidance on examinations and assessment for taught courses.

1.16 The review team concludes that the academic framework is comprehensive and the committee structure is effective. Regulations are reviewed regularly and made available to staff and students, with guidance available to staff on their application. Hence Expectation A2.1 is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.17 The University no longer publishes programme specifications. The relevant general and special regulations set out in the Examination Regulations, supplemented by the relevant course handbook and examination conventions, form the definitive record of a course. The general and special regulations contain a record of the key elements of each course; examination conventions set the detailed standards of achievement required for the relevant award. General and special regulations for research degrees operate similarly and are normally supplemented by departmental or programme handbooks.

1.18 Examination Regulations for new programmes are approved as part of the formal approval process and there are appropriate processes in place for ongoing changes to regulations. Academic transcripts reflect the assessment items identified in the course entry in the Examination Regulations.

1.19 This framework allows the Expectation to be met in principle. The team tested this by reading relevant University regulations, policies and guidance and samples of information provided to students, by reading minutes of key committees and by meeting with senior staff, academic staff, professional services staff and a range of students at undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

1.20 The University's Policy and Guidance on Course Information, approved in April 2015 by QASC, sets out what is required in relation to the format, availability and content of course information and includes a course handbook template. The examples provided to the team were comprehensive packages of information, although there was some variation in the information provided in course handbooks, which is being addressed by the University. The Examination Regulations are currently provided to students in both hard copy and online through the University's website but, from 2016-17 onwards, the online version will become the authoritative version, with hard copy publication ceasing.

1.21 The student submission highlighted the complexity of the Examination Regulations and conventions, although it also recognised that course handbooks provide a user-friendly version of them. This view was reflected in discussion with students, who reported some difficulties in relation to accessibility of regulations due to their comprehensive nature and pointed to other sources of information such as staff and course handbooks. Some students also reported not receiving course handbooks, although links are provided to these on the Oxford Students website.

1.22 The University provides a comprehensive and definitive record of each programme and qualification through the relevant general and special regulations set out in the Examination Regulations, supplemented by the relevant course handbook and examination conventions. Examination Regulations are approved through the course approval process and there are appropriate mechanisms in place for changes to be made. A more accessible

version of assessment regulations is made available to students through their course handbooks. The team concludes that Expectation A2.2 is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.23 Approval of new courses at the University of Oxford follows a protocol described in the Policy and Guidance on new courses and major changes to courses (including closure). The three-stage process starts with consideration by the relevant department, before proceeding to divisional and institutional levels. Final authority for the approval of new courses is delegated by Council to Education Committee. The process includes explicit reference to academic standards and external reference points.

1.24 The processes in place would allow the Expectation to be met. The review team tested this by scrutinising documentation including policy and guidance documents, regulations, committee papers and examples of approval of new programmes and major changes to existing ones, and by meetings with staff and students.

1.25 The University's Policy and Guidance on new courses and major changes to courses (including closure) describes measures designed to ensure that the programme is academically sound, with clear aims and learning outcomes and a teaching and assessment methodology that supports those aims. The policy also requires alignment with the UAF, and therefore with the qualification descriptors set out in the FHEQ, the appropriate Subject Benchmark Statement, and any specific requirements set by professional, statutory or regulatory bodies (PSRBs).

1.26 The introduction of a requirement for student consultation and a formal external review element were introduced in Michaelmas term 2015. The external review takes the form of engagement with outside contacts such as external examiners, as well as consideration of the proposal by an external reviewer appointed by the relevant academic division.

1.27 Staff whom the review team met were aware of the existence of the new policy and procedures and the template for proposals. They recognised the requirement for new teaching provision to be aligned to external reference points, including Subject Benchmark Statements, the FHEQ, and PSRB requirements, and knew that changes to courses require approval by both the division and Education Committee. The policy requires the volume of study to be considered formally, but students reported large variations of workload between colleges, and this issue is examined in greater detail in section B1 of this report (paragraphs 2.8 and 2.9).

1.28 While there are very few examples of courses being considered under the new arrangements, the review team was able to scrutinise example documentation relating to the approval by Education Committee of a new curriculum for BA Theology and Religion and an MSc in Taxation. The documents include a record of external consultation and consideration of academic standards relative to external reference points and details of the assessment.

1.29 The policy and procedures for the approval of new courses at the University are of recent date and there are very few examples of their execution. However, the examples seen, together with clear understanding by staff of the new requirements, indicate that they

are fit for purpose and will enable the University to secure the standards of its taught provision. For these reasons, Expectation A3.1 is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.30 The University does not use academic credit as its standard mechanism for awarding degrees. Instead, its UAF, General Regulations for the First and Second Public Examination, course-specific examination conventions, and course handbooks detail how students can meet the award criteria through mapping against the FHEQ and relevant subject benchmarks. Some of the awards offered through the Department for Continuing Education do have credit assigned to them, which is detailed in the UAF.

1.31 An assessment strategy is considered at the course development stage of programme design and is reviewed through the six-yearly departmental review process. Departments formulate new programmes and the relevant supervisory body is responsible annually for approving examination conventions, including mark schemes, in line with the approved programme. University undergraduate and postgraduate degrees are assessed through public examinations. For undergraduate students, the results of the First Public Examination, which is taken in the first or second year of study, do not count towards a student's final classification, but must be passed to continue to study the award. The Second Public Examination, elements of which might be spread over several years, generates a student's final degree outcome. In a large number of cases, written examinations form the greater part of the summative assessment which a student takes. The supervisory body is responsible for the oversight of examination boards, which use the criteria set out in the examinations conventions to award final classifications.

1.32 The University has a clear qualifications framework, which departments use to design their programmes in line with the FHEQ. Examinations conventions, the Policy and Guidance for Examiners and Examinations, and examinations boards all play their part in ensuring that standards are set and maintained. The Proctors are responsible for ensuring that the Examination Regulations are adhered to, and annual reports are developed by the Proctors, internal and external examiners to review the success of assessment each year. The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education) is ultimately responsible for the effective running of examinations in line with University regulations.

1.33 The framework and its attendant policies and guidelines would allow the Expectation to be met. The review team tested this by scrutinising the University's policies and procedures and Examination Regulations, reading examination conventions and information supplied to students about their assessment, reviewing minutes of committees and reports relating to assessment and meeting staff and students of the University.

1.34 The University's assessment strategy is managed through its Examination Regulations. The Policy and Guidance document for Examiners and others involved in University Examinations outlines marking schemes and covers the appointment of internal and external examiners and assessors. There is a separate policy for the award of postgraduate research degrees.

1.35 The review team saw examples of how the University reviews its assessment strategies annually through the supervisory body, Examinations Panel and QASC. Internal examiners and assessors are responsible for the marking of student assessed work and Proctors and the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education) are responsible for approving the examiners and assessors annually. However, in order to streamline this process, the review team saw that the University was considering proposals in which those staff who have assessment duties outlined in their contracts would no longer require annual approval. External examiners confirm through their reports and presence at examination boards that academic standards are met and that the grade boundaries are appropriate.

1.36 The course handbooks that the review team saw specify programme aims and intended learning outcomes, as well as assessment structure. The students whom the review team met were confident that they knew what was expected of them in terms of the assessment required to complete the award, but were less confident in articulating the overall knowledge and skills they expected to gain from their degree. The University is aware that programme learning outcomes could be made more explicit to undergraduate students, and the Policy and Guidance on new courses and policy and guidance on course information both aim to make clear connections between learning outcomes and assessment. Academic staff confirmed that this was happening in practice. Because of its non-modularised approach to learning and teaching, the University does not require these connections to include an explicit mapping of learning outcomes to specific assessment items.

1.37 The University has a clear set of policies and procedures in respect of assessment and the programme approval process ensures that appropriate learning outcomes and assessment are specified. Marking, moderation and examination processes are specified in regulations and in student handbooks and are monitored by the supervisory body and examination board. Therefore Expectation A3.2 is met and the 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

1.38 The University states that it puts emphasis on the role of the external examiner in maintaining standards. There are annual and periodic review processes that require consideration of academic standards against external reference points. The principal processes that contain explicit reference to academic standards are annual monitoring and the Quality Assurance Questionnaire, which considers undergraduate, postgraduate taught and postgraduate research provision in a three-year rolling cycle.

1.39 The processes operated by the University to monitor and review courses would allow the Expectation to be met. The team tested the Expectation by examining documentary evidence including policy and guidance documents, review documents and examiners' reports.

1.40 The process for annual monitoring of provision by the University is described in the Procedures for the annual monitoring of courses. These procedures include scrutiny at departmental and divisional levels, before final consideration at institutional level on behalf of Education Committee. There is an explicit requirement for the relevant academic committee to assure itself that UK threshold standards and those set out in the examination are being maintained. This includes consideration of internal examiners' and external examiners' reports. The University places considerable emphasis on the role of the external examiner in ensuring that threshold standards are met, together with cohort performance analysis. Overall academic standards, in terms of the distribution of different outcomes, are also monitored through the consideration of annual programme statistics by divisions and OUDCE, and by the Undergraduate and Graduate Panels on behalf of Education Committee. Research degree standards are monitored through the examination process itself, as well as on a cohort basis through consideration of annual programme statistics.

1.41 The three-yearly Quality Assurance Questionnaire asks specific questions about whether external examiner reports and any PSRB reports have been considered and any requirements addressed, and whether, in the annual monitoring of undergraduate courses, learning outcomes of each course are considered.

1.42 The team concludes that the University has processes in place to monitor and review programmes and ensure that academic standards are being maintained. Expectation A3.3 is therefore met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.43 Department teams proposing new programmes for approval must explicitly reference key external reference points such as Subject Benchmark Statements and PSRB requirements in their proposal documentation. Departments are encouraged to consult with external examiners, subject associations, employers and PSRBs during the developmental stage of programme design. Once departmental approval has been given for the proposed new programme, the division reviews the proposal. The University recently strengthened its requirements regarding externality by including an external reviewer nominated by the University in the divisional scrutiny of proposals.

1.44 Once a programme has been approved, external examiner reports confirm continuing alignment with the FHEQ and any applicable Subject Benchmark Statements, and that threshold standards are being met. External examiners are asked to compare University programmes with those offered at other institutions. Departmental review also makes full use of externality by requiring the involvement in review committees of at least two external reviewers who have no previous relationship with the University. Normally, one external reviewer is from outside the UK to ensure alignment with international quality benchmarks.

1.45 The University has clear processes to ensure that external experts are consulted during programme, development, assessment, and periodic departmental review. This would allow the Expectation to be met. The team tested this by analysing documentation pertaining to programme design and review, and to the involvement of external examiners and PSRBs. The team also met University staff and students.

1.46 The University's new process has clear requirements for externality at various points of the programme development process, which ensure that subject specialists and industry professionals are able to review proposals before final approval. Guidance is provided to assist them in engaging effectively with the process. While this process is very new, the review team saw examples of how departments have been consulting with external specialists during the development stage.

1.47 External examiners are required to complete a template to ensure that they are explicitly mapping programmes against national benchmarks, and their reports are widely discussed at departmental, divisional and University committees.

1.48 The University engages extensively with PSRBs both in curriculum design and in the review of its programmes, though the review team noted some variation in the ways in which divisions, departments and colleges discuss and respond to PSRB reports.

1.49 The University has developed a considered approach to externality through its recently revised programme approval process, its regulations with regard to external

examining and its engagement with PSRBs. Therefore the review team concludes that Expectation A3.4 is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

1.50 In reaching its judgement about threshold academic standards, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All Expectations in this area are met and the level of risk is low in all cases. The team therefore concludes that the setting and maintenance of academic standards at the University **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1 The University's procedure for the development and approval of new courses is described in the Policy and Guidance on new courses and major changes to courses (including closure). It is a three-stage process that includes consideration at departmental, divisional and institutional levels, and covers major changes to existing programmes as well as new provision. Authority for the approval of new courses and oversight of course design is delegated by Council to Education Committee.

2.2 The processes in place for approval of new courses would allow the Expectation to be met. The review team tested this by scrutinising documentation including policy and guidance documents, regulations, committee papers, examples of the approval of new programmes and major changes to existing ones, and by meetings with staff and students.

2.3 The Policy and Guidance on new courses and major changes to courses (including closure) is new this academic year, having been revised for implementation in Michaelmas term 2015. It was designed to align with *Chapter B1* of the Quality Code and includes new requirements to consult students, to engage with external contacts such as external examiners, and to involve an external reviewer in reviewing the proposal by correspondence. The document also provides guidance on what would be considered a major change and the role of divisions in monitoring the cumulative impact of minor changes.

2.4 A template for new course proposals forms an annexe to the Policy and Guidance. It includes explicit reference to internal and external reference points, including the alignment of programmes with the UAF, Subject Benchmark Statements, and any relevant PSRB requirements. The template also includes prompts for consideration at division, department and institutional level, in respect of the provision of IT, library and subject-specific resources. Departments are required to consult with current external examiners, subject associations and PSRBs when designing new courses. The relevant division, rather than the department, allocates external reviewers, thereby ensuring objectivity.

2.5 Teaching staff whom the team met knew about the new policy and procedures, were aware of the existence of a template for proposals and said that they would seek advice from Education Policy Support about whether a proposed amendment constituted a major or minor change.

2.6 Divisions play a key role in the formulation and presentation of plans for new courses or major changes to existing courses, and put them forward for consideration by Education Committee. The relevant division is responsible for ensuring that appropriate consultation with students has taken place, that there has been engagement with external review, and that consideration by the relevant committee of Conference has taken place. The review team examined committee minutes recording consideration of new programmes at department and division level, including the MSc in Taxation and the DPhil in Area Studies.

2.7 The University, rather than the colleges, is responsible for determining the structure and content of the curricula for all courses, and for providing lectures and classes, laboratories and practical classes. The terms of reference for Education Committee are clear about its responsibilities for the approval of new programmes, and its minutes record consideration of a number of new programmes and of major changes to existing programmes, including the approval of a new curriculum for BA Theology and Religion (January 2016), and major changes to the MSc in Global Health Science (Michaelmas term 2014) and to the MBA and EMBA (Michaelmas term 2014).

2.8 The programme approval process described in the Policy and Guidance on new courses and major changes to courses (including closure) includes a requirement to consider student workload but approval documents scrutinised by the review team indicate that this stops short of prescribing it in terms of number of teaching hours and volume of assessment, even if only maxima and minima. As a result, individual college tutors are expected to use their discretion in deciding how many tutorials their tutees require and how much written work they should undertake, guided by recommended patterns of teaching published by STC and information in course handbooks. Students whom the review team met said that 'rigour is lost to excessive workloads'. Other students told the review team that there was little parity across the colleges in terms of workload. They had tried raising this with their departments but had been told that it was a college matter. As a result, students believe that the system is unreceptive to complaints about variability. The student submission also states that workload is a significant concern for undergraduate students.

2.9 As the awarding body it is the University's responsibility to oversee its provision, including all aspects of learning and teaching. The review team considers that the most effective way for the institution to address the problem of uneven workload would be to provide clear guidance and expectations through its programme approval processes and the definitive record of its awards. The review team **recommends** that the University provides explicit guidance to enable a consistent approach to student workload across the University.

2.10 The University intends to monitor implementation of the Policy and Guidance on new courses and major changes to courses (including closure), with an initial review scheduled for 2016-17. Feedback from those involved in the process will be gathered by Education Policy Support.

2.11 While the revised processes have not been in place long enough for an extensive range of evidence to accumulate, the indications are that they are appropriate and effective. Overall, the team found that robust processes are in place at the University and that there is evidence of their systematic and comprehensive application. Staff understand and engage with the processes effectively. As a result, the University meets Expectation B1 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

2.12 The University identifies the recruitment and admission of students as one of the main priorities of its Strategic Plan. It sees one of its key challenges as being to inform, attract, select and support students from a wide range of backgrounds who have the academic ability and who are best suited to take advantage of the education it offers, with a broader ambition to create a more diverse student body.

2.13 There are separate processes for undergraduate and for postgraduate admissions, underpinned by clear policy frameworks. For undergraduate programmes there is a well embedded Common Framework for Undergraduate Admissions, which sets the policy for the operation of the admissions process. It requires departments to agree admissions procedures and criteria for each subject for colleges to use in considering applications and admitting students. Operational guidance for all those involved in the admissions process is provided by a comprehensive Undergraduate Admissions Handbook, and the process as a whole is supported by the Undergraduate Admissions and Outreach Office (UAO), which works closely with both the colleges and the departments.

2.14 Undergraduate applicants are able to demonstrate their academic potential through a range of mechanisms which are kept under ongoing consideration and development, with guidance provided in the Undergraduate Admissions Handbook. Many departments use admissions tests, which supplement other relevant information and aim to identify a candidate's aptitude for their chosen programme. Admissions tests are reviewed annually and quinquennially by the Admissions Executive Committee.

2.15 For postgraduate programmes, admissions policy is set out in the revised Policy and Guidance on Postgraduate Taught Courses, which was approved in Michaelmas Term 2015, and in the Policy on Research Degrees. Detailed guidance for admissions tutors is provided in the Graduate Admissions and Funding Handbook, with the process being managed overall by the Graduate Admissions and Funding Office (GAF).

2.16 Undergraduate admissions are overseen by the Admissions Committee, which reports to the Conference of Colleges and works closely with the Education Committee. It has a standing committee, the Admissions Executive Committee, which coordinates undergraduate admissions policy for the University. Admission to graduate programmes is overseen by the Graduate Admissions Committee, which reports to the Education Committee.

2.17 The University's strategic drive to increase diversity in admissions is supported by its Access Agreement, which sets out stretching targets for enhancing access and also details activities to support potential applicants and outreach work in particular. The University also introduced a Common Framework on Widening Access in 2012 in order to facilitate greater awareness of outreach activities, as well as to encourage cooperation and the sharing of good practice across the University. The University has developed and uses contextual information to highlight the potential of candidates from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds for admission to undergraduate programmes.

2.18 There are processes in place for admissions-related complaints and appeals, set out on the University's website, with annual reports on their operation considered and discussed by relevant committees. The number of such complaints and appeals is small.

2.19 The University's strategic focus on the recruitment and admission of students, with an institutional-level ambition to enhance the diversity of its student body, is implemented through clear policies and procedures which are managed and overseen by key committees and executive offices. These arrangements provide the structure and systems to enable the Expectation to be met. To test this the review team reviewed the University website and considered a range of documentation including key policies, procedural guidance, and committee papers and reports. The review team also met several groups of undergraduate and postgraduate students, as well as staff involved with admissions in the University and in the colleges, to discuss how recruitment and admissions processes operated.

2.20 The University's admissions webpages are the primary source of information for prospective students and applicants. They provide detailed information for each programme and comprehensive details of programme costs, college costs and other relevant information. They have been substantially revised during 2013-14 to provide improved information and enhanced navigability. The students whom the review team met highlighted some areas relating to the admissions process, about which they would have liked further clarity, including the nature and timing of interviews, the centrality of the colleges to the student experience and, particularly at a graduate level, the timing of college admissions decisions and the funding opportunities available. The review team acknowledges the ongoing work of the University in keeping information on its admissions processes under review in order to ensure transparency in all stages of the process.

2.21 Some of the students whom the review team met have reservations about the effectiveness of the University's efforts to widen access. However, the review team also heard from students and from staff about the significant range of activities that the University and colleges undertake to support the widening access agenda. These include training for tutors involved in admissions, the extensive and detailed use of statistical information to reflect on and guide the admissions process, and the wide-ranging outreach activity provided by the University and colleges.

2.22 Training for tutors involved in the admissions and interviewing process is developed by UAO and GAF and delivered by the Oxford Learning Institute. The review team read the online training materials and found that they are extensive and cover a wide range of relevant concerns, ranging from the legal requirement to eliminate discrimination and advance equality of opportunity to the promotion of socio-cultural inclusivity and the avoidance of unconscious bias. The training materials specifically check familiarity with the Common Framework on Undergraduate Admissions.

2.23 Admissions procedures and their operation are monitored on an annual basis. This monitoring includes consideration of contextual information, based on detailed statistical information, which informs discussions relating to widening access and diversity. The Admissions Committee checks specifically whether recruitment targets for certain under-represented groups have been met. Processes are kept under review to ensure equality of treatment for all applicants and also to ensure the consistency and effectiveness of good practice.

2.24 There is considerable investment on outreach initiatives at University, college and department levels, and the wide range of outreach activities includes student conferences targeted at Key Stage 4 and 5 state school students of Black and Minority Ethnic origin, regional teachers' conferences to advise teachers how best to identify and support potential applicants and a link college for every school in the UK using local authority networks.

2.25 These initiatives lead the review team to consider the comprehensive approach taken to recruitment and admissions across the University to support its ambitions in relation to widening access to be **good practice**.

2.26 The University has clear admissions policies and processes, which support the equitable treatment of students from a wide range of backgrounds. The operation of those processes is regularly monitored and reviewed, with appropriate revisions made where necessary. The review team therefore concludes that Expectation B2 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

2.27 Oversight of learning and teaching lies with the Education Committee, operating through its Undergraduate Panel and Graduate Panel, the University's academic divisions and OUDCE, complemented by the work of STC and the Graduate Committee of Conference.

2.28 The University's Strategic Plan places an emphasis on the personal education of each student, and includes commitments to ensuring that the 'best Oxford experience is the typical experience for all undergraduate and postgraduate students' and that 'the unique richness of the University's academic environment is both retained and refreshed'. Key strategies, therefore, include individualised education through tutorial and small group teaching, and a commitment to research-led teaching with opportunities for students to engage as active researchers. The University's approach to learning and teaching is reflected in a range of policy framework documents relating to undergraduate learning and teaching, postgraduate taught courses (both full-time and part-time), student engagement and representation, digital education strategy and the development of policy on inclusive teaching and learning practice.

2.29 Support for learning and teaching is located in the Oxford Learning Institute (OLI), which provides a range of research-informed resources to support academic staff in understanding their roles and in developing their skills. Its aim is to support excellence in learning, teaching and research and it contributes to policy formation. The University provides a framework for staff and postgraduate research students who teach, which is accredited by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and aligned to the UK Professional Standards Framework. Teaching is evaluated in a variety of ways, including reports from external examiners and boards of examiners, student representation and feedback, annual course monitoring and departmental reviews.

2.30 The University has appropriate structures, strategies and policies to articulate, review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices which enable the Expectation to be met. In order to test the effectiveness of the University's approach, the review team met senior and academic staff, professional and support staff and students. The team also analysed evidence provided by the University, including committee minutes, papers and policies, and viewed online resources.

2.31 Staff and students whom the review team met showed an awareness of the strategic approach to learning and teaching. The University provided examples of its approach to research-led teaching in a variety of disciplines. Students also gave examples of research-led teaching and its positive contribution to their learning.

2.32 At undergraduate level the University provides a flexible framework which enables students to personalise their education around core components complemented by a wide range of options. Some students whom the review team met observed that in practice choices could be constrained by availability.

2.33 Departments provide lectures and practical teaching sessions. The college-based tutorial provision operates within the appropriate departmental framework and is central to the undergraduate educational experience. College-based tutorials and small group sizes enable students to receive detailed individual feedback on work and progress. Student progress is monitored by college subject tutors, with senior tutors being responsible for students' overall progress and provision of support. Individual tutors provide termly progress reports to the college and students through OxCORT, a college reporting tool. Students are able to discuss progress each term with subject tutors, and with the head of the college or senior tutor at least once each year. Such meetings also provide opportunities for students to provide feedback on their educational experiences.

2.34 The student submission identifies concerns about variation in aspects of college-based provision and, while appreciative of the college-based tutorial system, students told the review team that there could be variability in the quantity of tutorial provision for students studying the same subject in different colleges. This issue is examined in greater detail in section B1 of this report (paragraphs 2.8 and 2.9).

2.35 The student submission recognises that the Conference of Colleges and its QAWG have served to address inconsistencies in provision. Similarly, the joint appointment of staff holding appointments in departments and a college aims to promote a coherent approach to teaching across the University. Colleges and departments provide guidance, support and mentoring for new staff, and evidence of effective teaching is considered during the five-year probation period and for staff seeking the conferment of the title of Professor.

2.36 The University has effective structures, processes and activities to support those involved in teaching. The OLI is responsible for the coordination of staff development. Its programmes promote reflective practice to support excellence in learning and teaching. It provides a Teaching Fellowship Programme and courses for new entrants relating to good practice and the Oxford approach to teaching. Fellowship of the HEA is available for staff through the completion of the Teaching Fellowship Preparation programme and the submission of a teaching portfolio. Mandatory training is provided for postgraduate research students who wish to teach, which can be enhanced by the provision of mentoring and additional activities drawing on educational scholarship. In turn this can lead to associate fellowship of the HEA. A number of the students whom the review team met praised the teaching of postgraduate research students.

2.37 The number of staff gaining national qualifications in teaching has increased markedly in the last five years. OLI provides a wide range of other courses to promote an inclusive environment and ensure that staff supporting teaching, including administrative and support staff, may obtain an appropriate qualification. The University ensures that regular updates are provided on policy changes. The review team confirms that these programmes have a positive impact on staff development. Teaching Excellence Awards provide institutional recognition of outstanding practice and Oxford University Students' Union (OUSU) coordinates student nominations for OUSU Teaching Awards. The University has effective mechanisms to disseminate outstanding teaching practice through its divisions, the OLI, and online resources demonstrating the innovative use of technology in teaching and learning.

2.38 The review team was able to confirm that the University has effective mechanisms to evaluate teaching and learning through, for example, examination processes, annual monitoring, college consideration of teaching quality and student surveys. Analysis of the results of surveys enables it to take steps to address issues identified and to enhance the student experience. The team noted effective guidance for staff provided by OLI to help evaluate teaching and saw evidence of this in operation at local level, with departmental responses being communicated to the students.

2.39 Approaches to learning and teaching at undergraduate level within the OUDCE are tailored for the needs of largely part-time and mature students. In two important respects the provision differs from that of the rest of the University. Most OUDCE undergraduate students are not members of colleges, which have no involvement in course delivery, and the courses offered lead to the award of undergraduate certificates, diplomas and advanced diplomas rather than to degrees. Curricula are set by OUDCE, which is also responsible for delivery, and usually include online elements. Assessment strategies feature continuous assessment approaches and the provision of extensive personalised feedback tailored to the needs of the students. OUDCE has appropriate provision for the monitoring of student progress and provides extensive study skills opportunities.

2.40 Teaching provision for taught postgraduate courses is provided by departments and uses a variety of teaching approaches. Close contact with academic staff is maintained through small group seminars or classes, and research project work receives more individual supervision. Course directors are responsible for coordinating provision and monitoring progress, and the Directors of Graduate Studies use reports on graduate student progress to ensure satisfactory progress and the meeting of course requirements. The online Graduate Supervision System provides an opportunity for students and staff to give feedback on progress, with additional support being available through the college adviser system, overseen by the relevant college Tutor for Graduates.

2.41 The University has developed a range of approaches to fostering equality and diversity in all areas, including learning, teaching and assessment, and the related issue of student achievement. Institutional leadership is provided by the recently appointed Pro Vice-Chancellor and Advocate for Diversity who chairs the Student Attainment Working Group. The working group's brief includes consideration of any significant differences in performance between particular groups of students in the same discipline, such as differences by gender, ethnicity, fee status, nationality group, disability or school type.

2.42 The University takes the view that its approach to personal and individualised education promotes inclusivity because it can accommodate the needs of diverse students. The University's Undergraduate and Graduate Panels recently launched a project to develop this approach by identifying inclusive practices capable of enhancing the disabled student experience of learning and teaching and by considering ways of incentivising innovation in inclusive teaching practice. The University has a clear Equality Policy and a Common Framework for supporting disabled students.

2.43 The Vice-Chancellor's Diversity Fund was established in 2013 and has funded events to support diversification of the curriculum in terms of racial and ethnic perspectives. In addition, during the Michaelmas term 2015, the University commenced a thematic consideration of the diversity of the curriculum from the perspective of race, and the review team saw evidence of the initial work being undertaken on the resulting Race and the Curriculum project.

2.44 The review team noted that the University's commitment to equality and diversity includes a range of measures addressing the under-representation of women among academic staff and is further evidenced by the success of academic departments in achieving the Equality Challenge Unit's Athena SWAN awards in two of the four divisions. The wide range of policies and initiatives that underpin the University's commitment to equality and diversity is **good practice**.

2.45 The review team considers that the University has a robust approach to learning and teaching. Mechanisms to review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices are effective. Consequently, Expectation B4 is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement

Findings

2.46 The University has a strategic commitment to enable the academic, personal and professional development of its students. An integrated support network links departments, colleges and University support services. Changes to the organisation of student services within the Academic Administrative Division are intended to develop coherent and collaborative policies and practices to support students at all stages of their time at University. Institutional responsibility for enabling student development rests with the Education Committee, which draws on membership from across the University, is attended by key officers, and links with other relevant committees of the Conference of Colleges, subcommittees and panels reporting to it.

2.47 A number of strategies underpin the University's commitment to the development of students. The institution has an IT Strategic Plan 2013-18, which addresses its vision for the ways in which technology can support the student experience, including teaching and learning, and it has created a Digital Education Strategy. Other relevant strategies include the Estates Strategy 2013-18 and the Bodleian Libraries Strategic Plan 2013-18. There are comprehensive policies covering equality, mental health and harassment and there is a Common Framework for the Support of Disabled Students. In 2011 the University created the post of Director of Student Welfare and Support Services, responsible for the development of coherent and collaborative policies and practices across the institution to support students at all stages of their University experience.

2.48 The University has appropriate strategies, structures and policies to monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources, which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. The review team met a range of academic and support staff and students to test the approach. It also considered key documentation provided by the University, which included policies, procedures and committee papers.

2.49 Professional services staff explained to the review team that the restructuring of Student Administration and Services (SAS) had been prompted by variation in the ways in which individual services had operated previously. SAS now has a cohesive managerial structure overseeing a cluster of related student-facing services able to work with each other and with colleges and departments to support and enhance the student experience. Oversight of its activities has been strengthened through direct reporting to Education Committee via the Student Health and Welfare Subcommittee and the Careers Service Subcommittee. The review team read reports from both subcommittees and found them to be well evidenced and insightful.

2.50 The Counselling Service makes an extensive range of provision available, through trained professionals, podcasts and self-help materials, and links effectively with college-based staff.

2.51 The University and colleges are to review the Mental Health Policy to allow gaps in provision for some students to be addressed. A network of trained harassment advisers is available and support is provided both in colleges and centrally. Dedicated Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender and Black and Minority Ethnic advisers are also available to provide advice.

2.52 Student Welfare and Support Services have a close working relationship with OUSU's independent Student Advice Service, which provides additional support to students and publicises relevant initiatives.

2.53 Each college has named individuals who liaise with their contacts in the relevant central support service to provide a coordinated support network for students. Staff informed the review team that one advantage of this arrangement is that because each college supports a manageable number of students, students receive more personal attention than they would receive if all interactions were channelled through SAS.

2.54 The review team found that websites and course handbooks provide students with appropriate information about the opportunities and resources enabling their development both prior to and during their studies. For some students, cross-departmental residential bridging courses are available to facilitate transition to the University. Both departments and colleges provide induction to support academic transitions, which include information about expectations, academic and welfare support, and the development of key skills. Postgraduate student induction arrangements follow a similar pattern, including input from central student services. Detailed guidance on induction for postgraduate students is integrated into policies covering taught and research degrees. The Bodleian Libraries provide a full range of relevant induction sessions.

2.55 Academic skills development is supported through departmental teaching and tutorials, and employability related skills development is integrated into the curriculum. College tutors and advisers, course directors and Directors of Graduate Studies provide additional support, and appropriate training in research methods is available. As reported in section B1 of this report (paragraphs 2.8 and 2.9), some students expressed concerns that variation in the number of tutorials provided by colleges could have a detrimental impact on their academic development. The University provides central advice relating to good academic practice and the avoidance of plagiarism, and the Language Centre provides tuition in 12 languages in addition to English, as well as independent study materials in 190 languages.

2.56 The University has an extensive range of digital resources to support learning and teaching and the student experience. The University's strategy in this area is set out in its IT Strategic Plan 2013-18. In addition, IT Services engages with students to understand how they use digital resources, and the IT Innovation Seed Fund provides an opportunity to develop projects to enhance the student experience. Students at all levels have access to a comprehensive range of courses and online materials to enhance their digital literacy skills. The University's virtual learning environment (VLE) is supported by a learning technologies team, which provides advice to departments to enhance their VLE presence. OUDCE has developed a wide range of online courses developed by its Technology-Assisted Lifelong Learning team, which combine pedagogical approaches with research in e-learning solutions.

2.57 The University has extensive library provision and specialist library holdings, which support student development and achievement. College library provision supplements the main library holdings, although some students commented on variability in respect of the extent of college holdings and opening hours. The Bodleian Libraries Strategic Plan 2013-16 provides for investment in and renewal of its library collections and physical infrastructure. Extensive support is provided to enable students to make full use of the resources.

2.58 The commitment to equity expressed in the University's Equality Policy guides its approach to student development. This is reflected in, for example, the provision of support for disabled students in making full use of library provision, the Accessible Resources Unit in the Bodleian for students with disabilities that prevent them from accessing printed materials,

a centrally coordinated Disability Advisory Service and a network of disability advisers and coordinators in colleges and departments.

2.59 The University uses a variety of mechanisms to evaluate student satisfaction, including the National Student Survey (NSS), the Student Barometer and regular library user surveys. The survey reports are used to guide enhancement to services and to advise the departmental review process, and the review team found them comprehensive and informative. SAS also convenes a Student Advisory group to enable students to give their views about the University's services and planned developments, and the reviewers saw evidence of changes to service provision that had resulted from such consultation.

2.60 The University has recently conducted a professional services survey to facilitate benchmarking and action planning. During 2014-15 mini-reviews were undertaken of all parts of the Academic Administration Division more generally. A Services Review Group was also established to consider the effectiveness and efficiency of the University's service provision. The review team was able to confirm the comprehensive nature of the reports received. Overall, the review team found that the institution has effective mechanisms to evaluate, review and enhance the provision of services to students.

2.61 The review team considers that the University has procedures and an effective and reflective approach to student development which enable students to develop their academic and personal potential. Consequently, Expectation B4 is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student Engagement

Findings

2.62 The University considers students to be members of the academic community and the Strategic Plan commits the University to giving students the opportunity to provide feedback with the aim of improving their educational experience. The University surveys all students through the Student Barometer and NSS, and a summary of the results is available on the University webpages. There are documented procedures for considering the outcomes of these surveys at departmental, divisional and institutional level, with institutional oversight being provided by QASC. Student representatives are members of all major University governance committees and there is a framework for student representation in departments and divisions. Colleges operate separate procedures that include student representation on each college governing body, as well as on the Conference of Colleges.

2.63 The review team notes that student engagement is an area where the University has implemented a number of changes since the Institutional Audit, and considers this framework appropriate for meeting the requirements of the Quality Code. To test this, the team reviewed policy documents and minutes of relevant committees and discussed the operation of student representation with staff, student representatives and members of the wider student body.

2.64 The University policy on Student Engagement and Representation was recently approved for implementation in 2015-16. This new document brings together existing policy and practice and sets out a clear commitment to engaging students in the improvement of their educational experience. The policy covers student representation at department, division and University level, student engagement in evaluation and feedback, and student engagement in quality assurance and enhancement. Divisions have tasked departments to implement the revised policy during 2015-16.

2.65 The student submission reports a very positive relationship between Students' Union officers and senior staff, and the views of student representatives confirmed this. The team learned that opportunities for student representatives and other students to engage with senior staff at the University include open-door sessions and briefings for student representatives by chairs of University committees. The University provides a block grant to OUSU to support student representation. The team saw documents which confirmed that, as a result of this support, OUSU has been able to establish increasingly comprehensive and accurate information about numbers of student representatives in all departments. Training for course representatives is provided through OUSU by the Academic Representation Officer, funded by the University, and student representatives whom the team met are very positive about the value and impact of the training they have received. In addition, OUSU provides a helpful and informative guide for staff on effective operation of the student representation system.

2.66 OUSU's annual quality report was first produced in 2015 and is considered annually by QASC. The review team saw appropriate actions being agreed by QASC, including improvements in the organisation of, and support for, student reviewers in departmental reviews, and the provision of information on additional costs for all courses through undergraduate course webpages. The team concluded that the monitoring process was a highly effective mechanism for identifying concerns and extending the strong working relationship between the University and OUSU.

2.67 In view of their wide-ranging and effective working relationship, the work of the University and OUSU to deliver effective student representation and to monitor its impact is **good practice**.

2.68 At University level there are six elected sabbatical officers. At least one is a member of every formal University committee that has direct relevance to the student experience. Training for sabbatical officers is provided by the OLI as part of their induction, and there have been recent discussions on giving them voting rights.

2.69 Student representatives are members of divisional boards and other key divisional committees including student forums. Membership is coordinated by OUSU.

2.70 Committees for Library Provision and Strategy, which operate at divisional level, include student representatives. The Student Advisory Group is convened by OUSU's Student Administration Team. The review team saw evidence that this group has recently contributed to work on employability skills, a rethink of student communication channels, approaches for communicating different types of information and access to postgraduate study, and funding. The team noted many instances where the views of students had informed the development of a range of support and IT services.

2.71 Students are represented at departmental level by course representatives, who typically sit on a Joint Consultative Committee (JCC). Departments are responsible for enabling the appointment of these representatives. An equivalent Graduate JCC (GJCC) exists for postgraduate students. The team saw documented case studies evidencing effective engagement with undergraduate and postgraduate students through their JCC and GJCC work. The team noted the approaches being taken in one department to engage the wider student community in departmental life through, for example, a quantitative reading group, a film society and a Student Newswire containing articles relevant to common student interests, as well as a number of student profiles. The team found a range of evidence that local practice in departments was aligned with University Policy and Guidance on Student Engagement and Representation.

2.72 Student representation mechanisms in colleges follow a range of practice. The team learned that most colleges offer students the chance to provide termly feedback via surveys, and other mechanisms such as focus groups are also used. Some students reported that it was difficult in some cases to know how colleges had responded to feedback from the student body. Students are represented at college level through the committees of the Junior or Middle/Graduate Common Rooms, and undergraduate students have an annual opportunity for a two-way feedback conversation, usually with the head of college.

2.73 Student input is an important element of the annual monitoring of courses. The University is currently implementing a new dashboard system which enables a visual display of student responses to the Student Barometer survey by course. Results can be compared with the average across a division. More detailed consideration of survey results across all departments is stated to be a priority during the next academic year.

2.74 The team concludes that the University has a strong and active commitment to student engagement at all levels. The University has a very effective relationship with OUSU, which encourages a culture of good student engagement, and has worked with OUSU to facilitate a good level of training and oversight of student representation. It continues to be receptive to annual reports from OUSU, which it receives through formal governance structures. The most recent policy framework for student representation is

relatively new but the team saw wide-ranging evidence of its implementation and oversight to enable the University to assure itself of effective representation. The team concludes that Expectation B5 is met and the 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

2.75 Overall responsibility for defining the philosophy of assessment and managing policies and standards across the University resides with Education Committee. The Examinations Panel has delegated responsibility for the overview of Examination Regulations and process, and the Proctors are responsible for ensuring that regulations are adhered to during the assessment cycle. Examination arrangements for postgraduate research students are overseen by Graduate Panel which reports to Education Committee and Research Committee.

2.76 The University examinations are governed by its Examination Regulations, its course-level examination conventions and its Policy and Guidance for Examiners and others involved in University Examinations. Postgraduate research assessments are governed by the award-specific Examination Regulations and by the Policy on Research Degrees. Other policy frameworks with relevance to assessment include the Policy and Guidance on Undergraduate Learning and Teaching and the Policy and Guidance on Postgraduate Taught Courses.

2.77 For undergraduate degree programmes, the primary summative points are the First and Second Public Examinations. While unseen timed written examinations are the predominant form of assessment, a wide range of other assessment methods is in use, with students either required or allowed to do parts of their final assessment through the submission of written work. Courses run by OUDCE and some postgraduate taught programmes have more diversity in summative assessment methods as do undergraduate programmes in the sciences. Undergraduate students must pass the First Public Examinations, which are usually taken at the end of their first academic year, in order to continue on their programme, but the results do not count towards their final degree classification. The Second Public Examinations are the main summative assessment point and are usually taken during a student's final year or over the final two or three years.

2.78 Divisions and supervisory bodies consider the assessment approach as part of approval and review. Examination boards manage assessment on an annual basis, ensuring that assessment tasks meet the learning outcomes of the programme, and managing the marking process. Internal and external examiners, chairs of examination boards and internal assessors are subject to approval by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education) and the Proctors.

2.79 Students obtain information about their assessments through their course handbooks and have access to past papers through the OXAM website. In conjunction with commentaries from examiners about individual past papers included in their annual reports (which are available to students), this enables students to have a full understanding of what is expected. Many students also have the opportunity to sit mock exams called Collections. Students receive their examination results through the VLE.

2.80 The University's approach to learning and teaching is set out in its Policy and Guidance on Undergraduate Learning and Teaching and is based on regular formative assessment through tutorial essays. Students have weekly college tutorials to help them

prepare for their final summative assessments. Regular feedback is provided to students in small groups or individually to support their learning. There are separate policy and guidance documents for postgraduate taught courses and for research degrees.

2.81 Assessment is anonymous and double-marked across the University. If significant differences in marking are found a third marker, such as another member of department or the external examiner, may be asked to assess the work. Scaling of marks can be used at the final examination board if it is shown that a paper was easier or harder than that of the previous year.

2.82 Good academic practice is discussed at induction, and support is available for students online and in their student handbooks. The University's website contains a warning to students that plagiarism is potentially a disciplinary offence that will be referred to the Proctors.

2.83 The assessment process is reviewed annually through internal and external examiners' reports, which are discussed at joint consultative committees and shared with students. The University has a clear process for developing assessment practice and monitoring its effectiveness. Regulations are scrutinised and amended, and course-level examination conventions are approved as part of the formal approval process. There is a clear procedure for marking and moderation and the running of examination boards. This would allow the Expectation to be met. The review team tested the effectiveness of these processes by analysing the regulations and committees that govern assessment across the University, by reviewing documentation relating to the monitoring of assessment, by scrutinising information provided to students, and by meeting staff and students across the University.

2.84 The University's awards record the connection between programme-level learning outcomes and assessment, and the review team was provided with evidence showing how departments plan assessment in line with approval documentation. There is no plan for the University to make the link between the programme outcomes and assessment more explicit, but by examining documentation relating to course changes and new programmes the review team was able to confirm how assessment is discussed as part of the management of the programme, and how it is communicated to students through examination conventions.

2.85 Students have a good understanding of how they will be assessed due to guidance provided in course handbooks. They are less satisfied with the support they receive in preparation for their final examinations, and students whom the review team met expressed their desire for feedback on their formative examinations in order to better prepare themselves for their final examinations. They stated that in the absence of personalised examination feedback, they evaluate their own performance against internal and external examiner reports. The review team learned from staff that the University is considering the provision of feedback on First Public Examinations.

2.86 While students are generally positive about the feedback received on their tutorial essays (or equivalent) and about support from their tutors, many feel that the tutorial essays do not help them to develop their examination skills. Because colleges operate autonomously from the University, albeit within the curriculum, teaching and assessment frameworks established by the University, they are able to set their own formative assessment tasks and to plan their own tutorials. Students told the review team that this leads to a significant difference in the workload patterns of students on the same programme studying in different colleges. This issue is discussed more fully in section B1 of this report (paragraphs 2.8 and 2.9).

2.87 The review team was provided with examples of the examinations conventions, which set out the assessment strategies for different programmes, the standard required to achieve the award, marking schemes and classification criteria. The University has developed a template for examination boards and supervisory bodies to use when reviewing their examinations conventions to ensure consistency of practice across the divisions.

2.88 The supervisory body nominates annually examiners and assessors, who are approved by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education) and Proctors. These can sometimes include postgraduate research students for both undergraduate and postgraduate taught assessments. Research students involved in teaching told the review team that they feel well supported in this role, and that academic staff are willing to provide additional support if required. Examination boards are overseen by the supervisory bodies. All internal and external examiners are present, unless they have received an exemption from the Proctors. Once marks are confirmed, the Academic Records office publishes the results to students.

2.89 There is an annual evaluation of assessment which is reported to QASC and Education Committee. The University, through its Equality and Diversity Panel and Student Attainment Gap Working Group, is also measuring the impact that different assessment methods have on student attainment for different demographic groups, most notably the relationship between gender and final examination results.

2.90 The University recognises that historically its assessment strategy has been very focused on final examinations. Education Committee is encouraging the diversification of assessment by divisions, and now many undergraduate programmes offer at least one other form of assessment task, primarily a final project or dissertation, with more variety in the sciences. This work is ongoing, and is being monitored by Education Committee.

2.91 The University has clear policies and guidance in relation to assessment and manages its awards effectively through examination boards, the Proctors and its committees. Therefore Expectation B6 is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining

Findings

2.92 The requirement for external examiners is set out in the Examination Regulations, which specify that each supervisory body responsible for examinations must nominate external examiners for approval by the Proctors and the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education). The duties and responsibilities of external examiners are given in the Policy and Guidance for Examiners and others involved in University Examinations. The University relies on external examiners to act as external arbiters of standards and requires them to attend meetings at which marks are finalised. External examiners report annually using a recently introduced standard template. Receipt of reports is monitored by Education Policy Support (EPS) which, for each annual cycle, produces an initial summary of external examiners' reports for QASC. External examiners' reports are forwarded to divisions, which are responsible for ensuring that departments consider and respond to them. Responses from departments are considered at divisional level, with divisional reports being received by QASC in the context of an end of cycle report produced by EPS assuring QASC of the completion of the cycle and highlighting common issues. Student representatives are engaged in this process.

2.93 This process is consistent with the requirements of the Quality Code and would enable the Expectation to be met. To test this, the review team considered regulations and policy documents related to external examining, committee minutes and examples of completed examiners' reports. The team discussed the operation of the external examiner system with staff and students.

2.94 External examiners are nominated by departments and faculties, known as supervisory bodies for assessment purposes. Nominations are sent to divisions for consideration and checking before being forwarded to the Proctors and Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education) for consideration and approval. Once approved, all examiners are included in the register of appointed examiners, which is maintained by the Examinations and Assessment team. Detailed criteria for the appointment of external examiners are incorporated in the Policy and Guidance for Examiners and align with the relevant sections of the Quality Code. On the basis of examining documentary evidence of the process and discussing its operation with senior staff, the review team concludes that this is a robust process with effective oversight by the University. Further work on the process for nominating external examiners is currently underway, involving the introduction of a standard term of four years and changes to the timing of the management of documents.

2.95 The regulations require external examiners to act as external arbiters of standards and it is the responsibility of the relevant supervisory body to ensure that examiners have sufficient information to do this. A standard template is sent to all external examiners, along with concise guidance regarding what is expected of them and the mechanism for submission. These documents are placed on a public-facing external examiners' section of the University's website. External examiners also have access to a VLE site with documents relating to their role.

2.96 The University introduced a standard report form for external examiners' reports in 2015. Despite some initial misgivings, the review team found from scrutiny of completed reports that the introduction of a standard template had not reduced the quality of the reports received by the University, and that it served to confirm that the requirements of the Quality Code are met. External examiners operate effectively as arbiters of standards and their

reports are detailed, providing a thorough analysis of the programme with suggestions for further improvements.

2.97 Completed reports are received centrally in a process managed by the EPS team, which monitors reports on behalf of Education Committee. Reports are then sent to divisions to share with the relevant department. EPS officers submit an initial analysis of external examiners' reports to QASC, enabling the identification of any common themes. Common themes identified across undergraduate programmes in 2015 included the use of marking criteria, the full use of the marking scale and scaling. Divisions are asked to consider issues raised in the EPS report as part of their deliberations. In addition, at the end of the reporting cycle, EPS officers identify any issues or themes raised in divisional reports and refer them to the appropriate University committee for consideration, reporting on the completion of the cycle to QASC. The review team saw examples of enhancement that had emerged from this process, including changes to the policy regarding scaling of marks, a standard approach for formative feedback to postgraduate students, and the adoption of standard comment sheets for substantial assessment items.

2.98 The review team read departmental minutes from all four divisions recording the departmental consideration of external examiner reports for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes and found them to be detailed. The team also saw evidence of very thorough consideration of external examiners' reports at the divisional level, with divisions ensuring that all reports are fully considered by departments. Responsibility for responding to external examiners lies with divisions, which ensure that departments respond to the reports appropriately. QASC receives reports enabling the committee to assure the institution that this process is operating effectively.

2.99 A recent report from EPS on the preliminary consideration of external examiners' reports for postgraduate taught provision in 2015 was considered by QASC. The team found this report provided thorough and effective oversight of the operation of the external examiner system for all postgraduate taught programmes and enabled the University to capture any issues requiring consideration or a response. The team considers that this process, and the equivalent process for undergraduate external examiners' reports, provide effective oversight of the external examiner system.

2.100 Divisions and supervisory bodies are required to make external examiner reports available to students. There is also a requirement that the names of external examiners are provided to students, and the team found evidence of this in course handbooks. The policy on student engagement and representation was amended for 2015-16 to include a requirement that terms of reference for JCCs should include consideration of examiners' reports. The review team saw documents demonstrating that external examiners' reports were discussed by students, and that this was an area that had improved over the last year. The team also heard from students that there are varying levels of awareness of external examiners' reports, with some students reporting that they find external examiners' reports a source of useful information about their course.

2.101 The team concluded that overall there is good evidence of the effective use of external examiners and their reports to assure academic standards. Procedures are operated in alignment with the requirements of the Quality Code. Recent improvements in the process for reporting and consideration of the reports have strengthened oversight and monitoring of this activity. Expectation B7 is therefore met and the 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

2.102 The University has a range of processes in place to monitor and review programmes at all levels, covering taught, research and collaborative provision. Degree programmes are subject to regular review by the University, through annual monitoring and periodic review processes that include six-yearly departmental review and three-yearly Quality Assurance Questionnaires. Together these processes are comprehensive and consider institutional, collegiate and departmental aspects of provision. The Quality Assurance Questionnaire, formerly known as the Quality Assurance Template, was identified as a feature of good practice in the previous institutional review. It is now used in a three-year cycle, covering undergraduate, postgraduate taught and postgraduate research provision in successive years.

2.103 The processes operated by the University to monitor and review programmes would allow the Expectation to be met. The team tested this by examining documentary evidence including policy and guidance documents, regulations, committee papers, review documents, examiners' reports and other documentation. The team also met senior and teaching staff, support staff and students.

2.104 QASC approved new procedures for the annual monitoring of courses in Michaelmas term 2015, with the intention of bringing together guidance on a number of monitoring processes into a single document. These include consideration of student admission and performance statistics, examiners' reports, student feedback and Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) data. The monitoring process begins at departmental level, before consideration of the reports by the relevant division and Education Committee.

2.105 Alongside the University's annual monitoring process, QAWG is responsible for a parallel system of annual reporting of academic provision by the colleges, which aims to document, share and encourage good practice. There is a reporting template that prompts the consideration of student performance data, and takes account of standard current practices in colleges and of relevant Education Committee policy.

2.106 Education Committee oversees a six-year programme of departmental reviews which take place jointly with the divisions. The Procedures for Departmental Review describe the process and expectations. Reviews typically last for two days and are chaired by the relevant head of division and co-chaired by a member of Education Committee, often the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education). Review panels include at least two external members and a student member, who is normally one of the OUSU sabbatical officers. Although they do not receive specific training for their contribution to departmental reviews, students feel valued as panel members and feel their voice is heard.

2.107 In accordance with the process described in Procedures for Departmental Review, departments prepare a self-evaluation document. The self-evaluation document includes consideration of external examiners' reports, student performance data, the most recent Quality Assurance Questionnaire, NSS responses, student progression and achievement data and teaching space usage, in addition to a range of other documentation. All central

services are asked to comment on Departmental Review documents. They also supply data for the reviews. The wider community is informed by a notice in the University Gazette.

2.108 Departmental Review reports are scrutinised by QASC. The department prepares a formal response to the report and an action plan, which are then considered by divisional committees. The departmental response and action plan, divisional commentary and full report are then considered by Education Committee. Progress against the recommendations is checked through a mid-term review conducted by officers on behalf of Education Committee and the divisional board, and QASC receives a termly update of reviews.

2.109 The Departmental Review process is due to be reviewed in late 2015-16.

2.110 The design and systematic use of the Quality Assurance Template was noted as a feature of good practice in the 2009 Institutional Audit. The template is still in use, though it is now known as the Quality Assurance Questionnaire. The questionnaire contains around 80 questions that reflect each year's current priorities, recent policy developments and any specific quality assurance concerns related to provision at the particular level being considered that year. Analysis of the results is primarily carried out by divisions, which then report their findings to QASC.

2.111 Senior and teaching staff reported that, though time-consuming to complete, the Quality Assurance Questionnaire was effective and promoted critical self-reflection. The 2011 Questionnaire identified a number of areas for further improvement, including variations in the opportunities for student representation on courses, and identified postgraduate taught courses as a quality assurance priority for 2012-13. The Questionnaire results for 2014 confirmed uneven use and consideration of DLHE data across the institution, and resulted in the introduction of strengthened requirements for consideration of the DLHE results by departments. It also fed into a review of policy and guidance documentation, particularly to do with formative assessment and feedback for postgraduate taught students, and it is hoped that the current undergraduate questionnaire will do the same this year.

2.112 The Quality Assurance Questionnaire ensures that student views and performance data, together with input from central services are considered systematically, at both local and institutional level. The three-year cycle mitigates survey fatigue but results in a very detailed report that the University makes good use of in order to enhance its provision. The systematic use of the Quality Assurance Questionnaire to enhance the student learning experience to be **good practice**.

2.113 The annual and periodic review processes are examples of the way in which the University makes excellent use of student data to monitor and improve its provision. The data, supplied by central services, contains sufficient detail for meaningful cohort analysis and tracking of student performance. The data is considered on an annual basis, at departmental, divisional, and institutional level. Annual monitoring procedures require the relevant academic committee to consider in particular any trends in relation to key demographic characteristics including sex, ethnicity, gender, disability and (for undergraduates) contextual flags. The Quality Assurance Questionnaire has questions about monitoring of overall degree outcomes and student progression in terms of gender, ethnicity, and any other relevant characteristics, and departmental review reports are required to include student performance statistics broken down by gender, ethnicity, disability, nationality and (for undergraduates) school type, or (for postgraduates) funding and previous degree. The accessibility and widespread use of data to monitor, inform and enhance learning opportunities for students is **good practice**.

2.114 Overall, the team judged that the University has in place effective processes to monitor and review programmes, taking account of academic standards and student learning

opportunities. The team concludes that Expectation B8 is therefore met, and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints

Findings

2.115 Separate processes operate for dealing with complaints and academic appeals relating to the decisions and provisions of the University and of the colleges. Formal complaints and appeals relating to University matters are considered by the University's Proctors, while those relating to the Colleges are considered through each College's own complaints and appeals process.

2.116 Information for students on the complaints and appeals processes is provided on the Oxford Students website and in a number of other ways, including the University Student Handbook, course handbooks and college handbooks. Support for students is provided by a range of staff at both University and college level, as well as by the OUSU Student Advice Service.

2.117 The Proctors play a key role in relation to the University's complaints and appeals process. They are nominated annually by the colleges in sequence to serve for a one-year period, receive a thorough and wide-ranging induction and handover process, and are supported by a permanent team within the Proctors' Office, which ensures consistency of process and of decision-making. The Proctors make an annual report to both the General Purposes Committee and the Education Committee, which covers a range of matters including complaints and appeals. The number of complaints is relatively small.

2.118 In order to enhance the operation of its processes, the University has increased the size of the Proctors' Office in the current academic year and has also introduced Proctors' Office Standard Operating Procedures for Complaints, Appeals and Mark Checks, which are intended to enhance communication with students during the consideration of a case. It has also established a process by which it can learn from the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) judgements.

2.119 Each College has its own complaints and appeals processes, about which students are informed through college handbooks and websites and through college inductions.

2.120 The University's approach to the complaints and appeals process, which encompasses separate yet appropriate processes for University and college matters, enables the Expectation to be met. To test this, the review team considered a range of evidence, including policy and process documentation. In order to explore how effectively processes work in practice, the review team met several groups of undergraduate and postgraduate students, including students studying with partner institutions, and met a range of staff including those in colleges with responsibility for complaints and appeals processes.

2.121 Students have identified the University's complaints and appeals processes as complex. Students whom the review team met are not necessarily clear about the nature of these processes, although they are generally aware that a range of people could provide advice and support if needed, including staff within OUSU. The review team learned that the University is to introduce a number of changes to its complaints and appeals processes from 2016-17. These changes are intended to make the processes more transparent for students and easier to access, to reduce the length of time that consideration of cases takes, and to

introduce a third stage allowing students to request a review of the Proctors' decision by an independent reviewer before considering referral to the OIA.

2.122 Students studying at collaborative partners confirmed that the University's complaints and appeals processes also operate with respect to students studying at a partner institution. They told the review team that they are aware of the means by which they might seek advice on these processes if they should need to do so.

2.123 The Conference of Colleges provides guidelines for complaints and appeals processes within the colleges which, while setting out some high level generic principles, allow those colleges discretion to operate their own processes in order to align with their governance structure and the nature of their student body. These guidelines were revised in May 2015 to take into account good practice guidelines from the OIA, in particular the need to make sources of advice and guidance and processes clear to students, and to identify the owner of the process within each college. The annual college reports on undergraduate academic provision considered by QAWG discuss the operation and accessibility of processes and also highlight the need for colleges to keep policies under review.

2.124 If students are not satisfied with the outcome of their college process, then they can appeal to the independent Conferences of Colleges' Appeal Tribunal (CCAT), which has a set of regulations guiding its operation and which provides an annual report to the Conference of Colleges on its activities. The number of appeals to CCAT is relatively small. Participation in CCAT is voluntary and all colleges are members except for St Catherine's College, which is confident that it has robust and appropriate processes in place. These processes are reviewed regularly and provide for the timely resolution of cases. No cases from St Catherine's College have progressed to the OIA for a number of years.

2.125 On the basis of the written evidence it examined, and its discussions with a range of students, the review team formed the view that there is the potential for variation in the operation of complaints and appeals processes across the colleges. The review team also heard that the University does not currently have a mechanism permitting central institutional oversight of the nature and operation of complaints and appeals processes within the colleges. The review team was informed that colleges are autonomous bodies, that oversight is provided by the Conferences of Colleges through CCAT, and that the University feels that maintaining a strong working relationship with the Colleges is the most effective mechanism to ensure that processes operate appropriately.

2.126 While recognising the independent nature of the colleges and acknowledging that their relationship with the University is productive in many areas, the review team is concerned that the University does not have a complete overview of a key element of the experience of students who are studying on degree programmes delivered and awarded in its name. The review team therefore **recommends** that the University works with the Conference of Colleges to establish an appropriate mechanism by which it can, on a regular basis, be informed of the nature and extent of complaints and appeals within the colleges.

2.127 The University has been developing its policy and operations with regard to complaints and appeals processes and this has broadly put in place effective arrangements for the future. While further work is needed to ensure that the University is effectively informed of how processes are operating within its Colleges, the strong working relationship between the University and the colleges ensures that procedures are fair, accessible and timely. The review team therefore concludes that Expectation B9 is met and that 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

2.128 The University describes its approach to collaborative partnerships as modest and currently has no plans to increase the number of partners. These relationships are published in its collaborative register, maintained by Education Policy Support and, from 2015, updated annually. Information about collaborative arrangements is also provided on the University's website. Executive responsibility for collaborative provision rests with the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education) and institutional oversight of collaborative provision is delegated by Council to Education Committee.

2.129 The University's Framework for managing higher education with others is set out in its Policy and Guidance on providing education with others (P&G EWO), approved in 2015 and replacing the previous Policy and Guidance on Collaborative Provision of Education Including Placements and Exchanges. The P&G EWO sets out the key categories of activity in which the University engages and the policy requirements and approval process for each category. The latter vary but aim to be proportionate in relation to both risk and the frequency with which the University engages in such arrangements. Five categories of collaborative arrangements are defined: taught collaborative courses; collaborations involving postgraduate research students; minor collaborations; international placements (student exchanges, language placements and years abroad); and integrated and professional placements.

2.130 As of December 2015 there were 279 students studying on collaborative taught programmes and 94 students studying on collaborative research programmes. The University has a limited number of collaborative taught courses; the centres involved in the University's partnership with the local NHS Trusts have full responsibility for the courses involved, while in four other partnerships, the partners make a contribution to aspects of provision or to part of a postgraduate taught course. Arrangements with another four partners are designated as minor collaborations where an organisation makes a small or specialised contribution to a course. The University also has a number of collaborative postgraduate research degree programmes, including two split-site DPhil programmes with research laboratories, collaborations with various institutions arising out of its Doctoral Training Partnerships and Doctoral Training Centres (DTCs), and a jointly awarded DPhil/PhD in Biochemistry.

2.131 The framework would allow the Expectation to be met. The review team tested this by reading a range of policy documents, information provided to students studying through collaborative arrangements, minutes of committee meetings, and through meetings with University and collaborative partner staff and students studying through collaborative arrangements.

2.132 The review team explored the progress made by the University to address the advisable recommendation from the 2009 Institutional Audit that it should review its process of oversight of legal agreements covering collaborative provision, particularly to ensure that such agreements remain current. In discussion with the team the University acknowledged that it has taken some time to address this recommendation, in part because it was awaiting the publication of *Chapter B10* of the Quality Code.

2.133 Following a survey undertaken in summer 2015, the University updated its collaborative register, and its plans for maintaining it and for monitoring its collaborative arrangements. The 2015 survey, the first review of the University's collaborative arrangements since 2010-11, also led to the identification of a small number of collaborations not previously recorded on the Register, a number of collaborations without current written agreements and a range of areas where existing practice did not meet the policy expectations of the P&G EWO. A number of actions arose from this review relating to transcripts and certificates, legal agreements, monitoring and review of collaborative arrangements and, in the case of one partnership, the development of appropriate quality assurance arrangements. Evidence seen by the review team confirmed that these actions are being actively monitored by QASC.

2.134 The minutes of the QASC meeting of 2 March 2016 capture an update on the progress made in relation to the actions arising from the 2015 survey. The team noted that four partnerships are still without current, signed legal agreements; these are being pursued and the University confirmed that it is committed to ensuring that all collaborations will have written agreements in place by Trinity term 2016. The minutes confirmed that the details of the dates of the next scheduled periodic reviews of collaborative arrangements had been provided by the divisions and the OUDCE, but the team was informed that the exact nature of these reviews is still under discussion.

2.135 In the 2015 survey it was noted in relation to one partner that no specific quality assurance oversight of the partnership was in place, and that this was still being developed and would be in place for the next academic year. The minutes of QASC also noted that action was underway to ensure that the contribution of all partner organisations was recorded on transcripts for future cohorts, and that special arrangements were being made in relation to the degree certificates for the University's jointly awarded DPhil/PhD programme to record the contribution of the partner.

2.136 While the team recognises that significant effort has been made in relation to the actions arising from the 2015 survey, and that progress has been made, a number of actions are still ongoing, one of which relates to the advisable recommendation from the 2009 Institutional Audit. Therefore, the team **recommends** that the University ensures that there are appropriate procedures in place for the development, monitoring and review of all collaborative partnerships.

2.137 New collaborations will now be subject to the processes set out in the P&G EWO, with new collaborative programmes following an adjusted version of the Policy and Guidance on new courses and major changes to courses (including closure) although at the time of the review the University had not developed any new relationships under the new guidance, as a result of which the effectiveness of the new procedures could not be tested. The University confirmed that, with the exception of Erasmus agreements, there is no standard template for agreements due to their infrequent and variable nature, and that the arrangements for due diligence vary according to the nature of the partnership.

2.138 The team heard that the University's standard processes for external examining and complaints and appeals apply to its collaborative partnerships and feedback is collected from students in the normal way through the Student Barometer. Information published by partners in relation to the University is checked by departments and through the process of annual updating of the Collaborative Register. The team reviewed documentation relating to a number of existing relationships and, while these arrangements varied, they generally provided evidence of appropriate oversight of partnerships, as did discussions with staff. The team also met students from a number of collaborative partnerships all of whom are very positive about their experiences.

2.139 Placements, with the exception of those organised on an individual basis and integrated professional placements, are recorded on the Collaborative Register. Some placement arrangements are without current written agreements and the University has identified issues with the ownership of some student exchanges and the management of lapsed exchange arrangements, which are being addressed as part of the actions arising from the 2015 survey. This was confirmed in the minutes of the meeting of QASC held on 2 March 2015. The University offers two courses that involve integrated professional placements and the relevant departments have in place their own policies and management frameworks. A number of courses include short integrated placements as part of the curriculum and departments offering such placements are advised to follow the policy framework for international placements. The Careers Service also provides support to students who wish to undertake a placement. The evidence provided suggests that the arrangements in place in relation to placement activity are generally appropriate, although the team did not meet any students who had undertaken a formal placement opportunity.

2.140 The University's Strategic Plan includes a commitment to expand international placement opportunities for students, and a variety of such opportunities are available. Some courses have integrated international placements, while others offer optional study abroad experiences, and the University offers some University-wide arrangements with particular exchange partners or funders.

2.141 The University has appropriate processes in place for the development, approval and monitoring of the different types of international placements and these are set out in the P&G EWO. A number of international placements and student exchange opportunities are listed on the Collaborative Register. Students confirmed that opportunities were in place and that those undertaking international placements had been appropriately prepared, although contact with the University during the placement period had been limited. The arrangements for transfer of marks varies according to the nature of the international placement.

2.142 Research students may also undertake research placements, which can vary in nature and length and may include an internship with an employer, a research fellowship, a period of time in a laboratory or other research environment, or a period of language training or specialist skills training. Through reading the evidence provided and through meeting with staff and students, the team was able to confirm that the processes in place for the approval and oversight of research placements are appropriate and are working effectively.

2.143 While the University has made progress in relation to the actions arising from its 2015 review of its collaborative provision, a number of actions remain to be completed and it has been slow in responding to the recommendation arising from the 2009 Institutional Audit in relation to its legal agreements. At the time of the review there was still a lack of specific quality assurance oversight for one partner, although this is currently being developed. However, the recently developed P&G EWO is fit for purpose and the evidence provided to the team suggests that in general there are appropriate mechanisms in place for the oversight of the majority of existing partnerships which ensure that quality and standards are not put at risk. Hence the Expectation is met. The level of risk is moderate as there are still gaps in the University's quality assurance processes and their application in this area, and not all actions arising from the 2015 survey are as yet complete.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

2.144 The University's Strategic Plan identifies the recruitment of research students as an important aspect of its mission. The University aims to provide a world-leading research environment for its postgraduate research community and considers research students as members of an active international research community. At 1 December 2014 the University had 5,637 registered research students, including 129 part-time students. In conjunction with colleges and other funding sources, the University provides a substantial scholarship programme, and of those starting in 2013-14, 65 per cent have full scholarships and 8 per cent have part-scholarships.

2.145 Institutional oversight of research degree provision is undertaken by the Graduate Panel reporting to Education Committee and Research Committee. Each division has a Graduate School Committee, or similar, which has responsibility for the monitoring of research degree provision. Division Boards and Faculty Boards have powers to admit research students, and departments are responsible for arranging research student supervision and training. A University-wide framework for the formal progression of research students is set out in the Examination Regulations. Regulations for research degree examinations are also set out in the Examination Regulations with supporting details provided in the Policy on Research Degrees which was reviewed in 2013. The effectiveness of research degree programmes is considered as part of the annual monitoring process.

2.146 The framework for the support of research degrees would enable the Expectation to be met. The review team tested this by meeting with research students, research student supervisors, senior staff and those responsible for the management of research degree programmes. The review team also considered regulations and policy documents, and reviewed committee minutes, research degree examination reports and feedback from research students captured in surveys. The operation of these procedures was discussed with research students.

2.147 The review team noted that the Policy on Research Degrees had been re-developed in 2013 to provide an accessible and straightforward document on University practice, and found it to be a comprehensive document that aligns with the requirements of the Quality Code and covers all aspects of research degree study. Additional relevant information is provided for students via the University website, and a separate policy document covers part-time students. Departmental research student handbooks describe local arrangements for support and academic development. Research students confirmed that information on their programmes of study was readily available through these channels.

2.148 Meetings with staff and students confirmed that postgraduate research students were a strategically important element of the University's provision. Recently this provision has diversified, with an increasing number of doctoral places offered through doctoral training partnerships and Centres for Doctoral Training, some of which involve educational collaboration with Universities and other organisations.

2.149 Divisional boards and faculty boards admit research students. Admissions can be delegated to a recognised University admitting body such as a DTC. The review team heard from students that their experience of the admissions process was generally positive, although some students reported that decisions on college membership could take longer to be confirmed. The team learned from staff responsible for this process that college decisions can take longer than initial admissions decisions because of a range of factors, including the number of applicants and the time taken in seeking to match individual applicants to college-related scholarship packages. The colleges agree collectively to accept all admitted research students.

2.150 The Policy on Research Degrees gives academic departments primary responsibility for induction, with additional inductions offered by colleges in coordination with departments. The policy provides a helpful framework for departments and contains examples of good induction practice. The documents make it clear the importance of communication between students and supervisors in the first term to establish an agreed framework to support study. Additional activities are offered to support international students. The team considers that this guidance would enable an effective induction. Students whom the review team met reported some variation in their experience of induction and research students in DTCs reported a more highly structured induction experience.

2.151 University policy specifies that departments are responsible for the provision of supervision and must ensure that it is in place before an offer is made. Local expectations of supervisors are set out in divisional codes of practice for supervision, and there is some variation in approach. The team noted that Graduate Panel had reviewed the University's approach to supervision arrangements in 2013 and agreed that no changes were required to policy, which permits a range of joint and co-supervision across different disciplines with the option that formal supervision can take place through a sole supervisor. All students are also appointed a college adviser.

2.152 The team heard from a number of students that their supervisory arrangements do not provide all the support they require. Similarly, a number of students reported little contact with their College Adviser whose role is to provide general academic or pastoral advice and assistance to students during their studies. The team formed the view that clearer articulation of supervision arrangements to these students would be of benefit. The team noted that the University is also exploring research student satisfaction levels from the Student Barometer, including the differences in research student satisfaction levels between research students in DTC and non-DTC environments.

2.153 Departments are responsible for training new or inexperienced supervisors according to divisional policy, and the team noted a range of practice with support offered at department or division level. All supervisors have access to some detailed and helpful information and tailored support provided by OLI through a series of high-quality specialised workshops and web resources. Departments are required to provide a mentor for new supervisors and to facilitate their participation in supervisory teams. Staff whom the team met reported that their experience of training for supervision was positive. The team learned that one division has a formal requirement for training of research supervisors and that another division had recently agreed, through its Graduate School Committee, to adopt the same approach. The team considers this a welcome development which could usefully inform the approaches taken in other divisions.

2.154 Research students and supervisors must submit formal termly reports through the online Graduate Supervision System (GSS). Examples of completed reports provided to the team demonstrated that this is an effective system. Reports are completed by supervisors, and research students are encouraged to submit a reflective account of their own progress. Reports are available to departmental Directors of Graduate Studies (DGS) and also to

college and University administrators to support pastoral care and support. The team heard that some students found this system helpful and that it provided a valuable opportunity to receive written comments from supervisors. The team learned that the GSS is currently being reviewed by Graduate Panel, with some staff and students reporting a desire to see it improved.

2.155 Departmental oversight of research programmes is maintained by a DGS and a departmental Graduate Studies Committee. The remit of the DGS includes oversight of admissions and induction, monitoring of GSS and liaison with colleges. College oversight is achieved via a college tutor for graduates. The GSS enables a DGS to have oversight at department level.

2.156 Research students begin their studies as probationer research students and subsequently apply to transfer to DPhil status, normally within four terms. The team learned from staff and students that this is considered a robust formal progression requirement. Students are supported in this process through information made available in departmental handbooks and on the University website. A second formal monitoring stage occurs at Confirmation of Status, usually three terms before submission of the final thesis for examination. The confirmation criteria for all students are set out in the Examination Regulations. The team considers confirmation of status to be a highly effective process, which has the added benefit of preparing students for their final oral examination.

2.157 The University articulates a strong commitment to skills training. Responsibility for training lies with divisions and departments, according to local priorities. Each division has a dedicated skills training officer and an academic lead. Academic leads meet regularly to share good practice through the University's recently formed Postgraduate Researcher Development Group, which provides termly reports to Graduate Panel. The team considered the training available to students to be wide-ranging and comprehensive. Research students can access a full list of training opportunities through the University's Research Training Tool. Training needs are reviewed during induction and through termly GSS reports. Training is also considered at the Transfer and Confirmation of Status reviews. Research students are very positive about their experience of research training.

2.158 Training for research students preparing to teach is provided by departments and divisions, with departmental staff ensuring that students have undergone training. In view of the relatively modest range of opportunities to teach compared with the demand, the University has undertaken work to advertise these opportunities and to create imaginative teaching schemes. Undergraduate students whom the reviewers met were very positive about their experience of being taught by research students.

2.159 The monitoring and evaluation of research degree programmes is included in the departmental review process described in detail in section B8. Graduate Panel reviews research degree provision at institutional level. The team noted that the annual statistics report considered by Graduate Panel is detailed, giving high quality information about this provision across the University. The team also saw good evidence of effective consideration of research degree programmes at divisional level.

2.160 The Examination Regulations set out formal requirements for assessment of degrees, consisting of general regulations for all research degrees and qualification-specific and subject-specific special regulations. Research degree examinations are supported by the Research Degrees Examination Office. Graduate Panel periodically reviews and has recently updated the doctoral examination process, and the review team saw documentary evidence demonstrating that this is a thorough process. Information is provided on the students' website, and where special regulations apply these are supplemented by handbooks.

2.161 Research students are covered by a common complaints and appeals process as described in section B9.

2.162 The team acknowledged the strategic importance of postgraduate research degree provision within the University's provision as a whole, and concluded that it is well resourced and that good levels of oversight are exercised. The team identified a range of practice with respect to supervision, as permitted within the institutional framework which delegates responsibility to divisions and departments. The team formed the view that clearer articulation of the formal supervision arrangements to research students and the consideration of best practice in all divisions with respect to supervisor training would further enhance this area, and concluded that Expectation B11 is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.163 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. All Expectations are met and the level of risk is low in all but one case.

2.164 There are three recommendations in this area under B1, B9 and B10. Under B1, the review team recommends that student complaints about uneven workloads and variable tutorial contact hours across colleges should be addressed through the provision of explicit guidance in the University's programme approval processes. Under B9, while recognising both the autonomy of the colleges and strength of their working relationship with the University, the review team is concerned about the University's lack of oversight of the parallel complaints and appeals processes operating within them and recommends that it work with the Conference of Colleges to establish an appropriate mechanism by which it can, on a regular basis, be informed of the nature and extent of complaints and appeals within the Colleges. Under B10, the review team notes that while it has made substantial progress in addressing an advisable recommendation dating from its 2009 Institutional Audit, a significant amount of work has still to be completed. Accordingly, the review team recommends that the University should ensure that there are appropriate procedures in place for the development, monitoring and review of all collaborative partnerships. The level of risk attaching to this recommendation is moderate as there are still gaps in the University's quality assurance processes and their application in this area, and not all actions arising from its 2015 collaborative arrangements survey are as yet complete.

2.165 There are five 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 University's comprehensive approach to widening access, its commitment to equality and diversity, its use of the Quality Assurance Questionnaire, its work with OUSU to promote and monitor student representation, and its use of data to inform and enhance learning opportunities for students.

2.166 In summary, the University makes available to its students appropriate learning opportunities to achieve the intended learning outcomes of the award for which they are studying. The recommendations in this area relate to enhancing the effectiveness of existing processes and therefore pose low risk in two cases and moderate risk in the third. The review team concludes, therefore, 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 main source of publicly available information about the University is its website, supplemented by a range of other documents. The Public Affairs Directorate has operational responsibility for the top-level content of the University's website and key publications, while more specific sections of the website, in particular those sections relating to central services, departments, divisions and colleges, are managed locally.

3.2 The Undergraduate Admissions and Postgraduate Admissions websites are the primary source of information for prospective students and applicants, with printed prospectuses also made available. They provide detailed information for each programme and comprehensive details of programme costs, college costs and other relevant information. The admissions webpages were substantially revised during 2013-14 to provide improved information and enhanced navigability. Feedback on the websites is obtained from student focus groups and from an online survey for all postgraduate applicants. This information is supplemented by information on departmental and college web pages. In response to guidance recently issued by the Competition and Markets Authority, colleges have reviewed the information provided for applicants on their websites.

3.3 Information for current students is provided primarily through the Oxford Students website, which is maintained by the Academic Administration Division communications team working with the Student Information Team. It is complemented by a comprehensive University Student Handbook, which is available in both electronic and hard copy formats, and which is provided to most new students.

3.4 Course handbooks for all programmes provide a wide range of information and links to all handbooks, including those for postgraduate research programmes, are embedded within the Oxford Students website. In 2014-15, a review took place of information provided to students by their department. This led to the development of the Policy and Guidance on Course Information which includes a new template for course handbooks, which came into effect for the 2015-16 academic year.

3.5 Detailed information about each of the colleges is provided on their websites. Each college is able to set its own approach to providing information to current students and all colleges confirm in the annual College Reports on Academic Provision that new students are made aware through induction of the expectations of them and of the support available.

3.6 The University provides graduates with appropriate records and an academic transcript at the end of their studies, with a diploma supplement available on request.

3.7 The Education Committee website is the primary location for information about the University's framework for the management of quality and standards and is maintained by Education Policy Support. Education Policy Support also maintains the Register of Collaborative Arrangements Involving Students and the University's website makes information on collaborative partnerships publicly available. The accuracy of information published by collaborative partners is monitored and reviewed both by the relevant

department and by Education Policy Support as part of its annual review of the Register of Collaborative Arrangements Involving Students.

3.8 The public availability of a range of appropriate sources of information about the University, including the information provided for prospective and current students, and the accessibility of quality assurance documentation and processes, would enable the Expectation to be met. The review team tested this through scrutiny of the University's website and relevant documentation, including information provided to prospective and current students. The review team also met current students, including those studying on collaborative programmes, and academic and professional staff in order to test the effectiveness of the University's policies and procedures in this area.

3.9 The students whom the review team met broadly agreed that information provided by the University to them in advance of their studies was accurate and reflected their experience. Some students highlighted that when they were applying to the University, the full cost of living in college was not as clear as they would have wished. However, the review team recognises that the University has been working with the Conference of Colleges to provide information about college accommodation costs centrally on the admissions websites, and that a breakdown of those costs had only been provided for the first time in 2015-16.

3.10 The review team noted that QASC had recently reviewed the implementation of the new Policy and Guidance on Course Information in relation to undergraduate programmes and had found that there were variations in the information provided within handbooks, including some required elements which had been omitted. The University is currently addressing this, and divisions have been asked to work with relevant departments to ensure full implementation of the new course handbook template for the start of the 2016-17 academic year.

3.11 Students are provided with information about assessment on their programme in a variety of ways and from a range of sources and there has been extensive development of the Examinations and Assessment section of the Oxford Students website to provide further information in this area. Students are issued with comprehensive examination conventions, which detail assessment regulations. The students whom the review team met feel that these documents are so thorough and wide-ranging as to be effectively inaccessible. Alongside the Policy and Guidance on Course Information, a new template for examination conventions has been produced which is designed to provide students with further clarity on assessment expectations and standards. This template is included in the Policy and Guidance for Examiners. The review of the implementation of the Policy and Guidance on Course Information found that not all conventions meet the expectations of the policy and that further work is required to ensure full implementation for the start of the 2016-17 academic year.

3.12 The review team found that there was variability in knowledge of, and access to, external examiners' reports among the students whom it met, although it is University policy that all students, including those on programmes delivered by partner institutions, be given an opportunity to see them. The review of the implementation of the Policy and Guidance on Course Information confirmed that there was variability in the accessibility to students of external examiners' reports. This variability, in conjunction with the variability relating to both the introduction of the new course handbook template and the template for examination conventions, leads the review team to **affirm** the University's progress in implementing the Policy and Guidance on Course Information and the Policy and Guidance for Examiners.

3.13 The University provides a range of publicly available information, including detailed and accurate information for both prospective and current students, on its websites and in

other formats. It is working towards full implementation of policies and guidance that will provide clear, consistent and accessible information to current students on their programme of study. As a result, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

3.14 In reaching its judgement about the quality of the information about learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. There are no recommendations or features of good practice in this area. There is one affirmation in respect of the University's progress in implementing the Policy and Guidance on Course Information and the Policy and Guidance for Examiners.

3.15 The University employs effective mechanisms to ensure that the information it produces for internal and external stakeholders is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The review team concludes, therefore, 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 Oversight of the University's approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities is the responsibility of its Education Committee, in cooperation with the Conference of Colleges. The Education Committee has a close working relationship with the academic divisions and there is divisional representation on its subcommittees and other groups, including its QASC, which was established in 2011-12 and includes in its membership key divisional officers and committee chairs.

4.2 The Conference of Colleges also operates through a number of subcommittees, including the STC, the Graduate Committee of Conference and the QAWG. These arrangements enable the University and colleges to promote an integrated approach to enhancement, the evaluation of enhancement actions, and the sharing and dissemination of good practice. The shared ethos amounts to an expectation of continuous improvement across a range of activities, commensurate with that expected of an international University.

4.3 The University describes its approach to enhancement as 'the deliberate steps which it takes to make demonstrable improvements to the quality of students' opportunities for learning, and to the effectiveness of student support'. It uses quality assurance procedures to identify enhancement opportunities and to identify and disseminate good practice. Other enhancement initiatives derive from themes identified in its Strategic Plan and are addressed through the Education Committee, its panels, subcommittees and working groups.

4.4 The University's approach to the enhancement of students' learning opportunities would enable the Expectation to be met. To test this, the review team analysed evidence provided by the University to indicate its approach to enhancement and also met staff and students.

4.5 The review team saw clear examples of enhancement initiatives emerging from quality assurance processes. The quality assurance framework, scrutiny and analyses of student surveys, departmental reviews, course monitoring and systematic integrated monitoring of quality assurance processes at departmental level, reports to the STC and Graduate Committee, examiners' reports and Conference of Colleges, enable the institution to identify areas of good practice for dissemination and to address matters in need of enhancement.

4.6 The use of data to enhance learning opportunities for students has been identified as a feature of good practice and is referred to more fully in section B8 of this report (paragraph 2.113). The external examining process contributes to enhancements at programme level and may lead to institutional level enhancements. The review team saw evidence of changes to policy and procedure resulting from institutional scrutiny of internal and external examiners' reports. For example, concerns relating to the treatment of medical evidence resulted in revised guidance to boards of examiners on what is expected, with the aim of ensuring better and more equitable treatment of students. New requirements on feedback to postgraduate taught students on formative assessed work in their first term and on dissertations, along with guidance on feedback of elements of summative assessment, followed from recommendations of external examiners and extensive consultations with students. Analysis of feedback from student surveys led the University to introduce new

templates for course handbooks and examination conventions in order to develop a shared understanding of assessment criteria and standards. There is ongoing work relating to proposals to enhance the feedback given to undergraduate students on summatively assessed work.

4.7 The University's mechanisms for the identification and dissemination of good practice enable quality enhancement to be promoted. The review team saw evidence of enhancements in quality assurance templates at departmental and college levels. In addition to providing a valuable resource for the development of policy and practice, such mechanisms have the potential to ensure greater consistency in the quality of learning opportunities. The systematic use of the Quality Assurance Questionnaire on a three-yearly cycle was identified by the review team as a feature of good practice and is also considered in section B8 of this report (paragraphs 2.110-2.112). The review team noted that it had informed the development of formative feedback for taught postgraduate students and consideration of the future development of the Graduate Supervision System. The most recent questionnaire would be used to develop new policy and guidance for undergraduate provision.

4.8 The University has taken steps to enhance the learning opportunities it provides to students through changes relating to student services and teaching provision. The key aims of changes relating to student services have been to integrate and improve accessibility to student support, enhance the availability and accessibility of information for students and better coordinate work with colleges and student representative bodies. The creation in 2011 of the role of Director of Student Welfare and Support Services has helped the University to develop coherent student health and welfare provision. All sections of University administration supporting various stages in student lifecycles have been restructured to ensure effective service provision for all students.

4.9 Partnership between departments, colleges and central support services has been augmented by the implementation of a common framework for the support of disabled students, and assessment procedures have been extensively revised. Teaching provision has been enhanced through the endowment of up to 75 core joint teaching appointments between colleges and departments. The Education Committee's Teaching Review has addressed issues relating to workload planning and the matching of teaching capacity and demand - work which will continue through divisional reports to Education Committee. The review team also acknowledges the contribution of OLI to the ethos of educational enhancement, which is referred to in section B3 of this report (paragraphs 2.29, 2.36-7). Some projects supported by the Vice-Chancellor's Diversity Fund are designed to enhance the student experience.

4.10 Further examples of strategic, cross-institutional initiatives designed to enhance learning opportunities for students are linked to the University's strategic plan. These include the development of clear policies on and incentivisation of inclusive teaching and learning practice; improvements to the experience of international students and approaches to induction and study skills; clearer role descriptors for college tutors for graduates to enhance consistency of provision; work to increase student engagement and representation; the provision of online training resources for students to promote good academic practice; the extensive provision of the University's Language Centre; and the development of a Digital Education Strategy to support, resource and identify structures to enhance sector-leading teaching.

4.11 The review team considers that the University takes deliberate steps to improve the quality of learning opportunities for students through its use of quality assurance processes and a range of integrated and planned strategies. Accordingly, 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

4.12 In reaching its judgement about the enhancement of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. There are no recommendations for improvement or affirmations in this area.

4.13 Students have a wide range of opportunities to contribute to quality assurance processes and the three features of good practice identified under Expectations B5 and B8, which relate to the University's work with OUSU to deliver effective student representation, the systematic use of the Quality Assurance Questionnaire and the accessibility and widespread use of data to monitor and inform learning opportunities for students, also make a contribution to the management of this area.

4.14 The University takes a critically self-reflective approach, which is informed by internal and external review processes and by high quality management information. There are clear examples of enhancement initiatives emerging from quality assurance processes, and enhancement-related projects, such as the recently established Vice-Chancellor's Diversity Fund, have resulted in demonstrable improvements. The review team concludes, therefore, that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the University **meets** UK expectations and that the level of risk is low.

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1 One of the University's key commitments in its Strategic Plan 2013-16 is to ensure that it 'fully equips graduates for the best of the diverse range of opportunities for study and employment available to them'. Its approach is based on its belief that the most effective way to enhance student employability is through their programme of study, developing key skills and the ability to think critically and independently, fostered through an individualised approach to teaching and learning. The employability agenda is threaded through provision for students, with the emphasis on developing transferable skills alongside subject knowledge, and is experienced by students as part of a coherent and interlinked range of opportunities provided by the Careers Service working with the divisions, the departments and the colleges, as well as through widespread extracurricular activities.

5.2 The University's Careers Service provides a range of support, advice and employability-related activities and initiatives. There are high levels of satisfaction among students with the Careers Service and with the support it provides. The students whom the review team met are also generally positive about the support provided. The Careers Service has an Internship Office, which promotes four distinct programmes that deliver between 30-50 per cent of internships taken by students and also provides two other key opportunities for students to gain employability experience. These are the Student Consultancy, which uses management consultancy as a vehicle for students to gain practical experiential learning, and a number of Insight programmes, which provide students with the opportunity to undertake work placements with external organisations, delivered according to a common model. Student feedback on the Insight programmes is positive.

5.3 The University has excellent employment rates, and DLHE data is provided by the Careers Service to departments in ways that allow them to drill down to a significant level of detail. Although the review team was made aware that the data is considered carefully as part of departmental review, there has previously been uneven use of DLHE data across departments on an annual basis. The University has strengthened its requirement for divisions to consider DLHE data.

5.4 While DLHE data suggests that Oxford graduates perform very well in obtaining graduate-level jobs or in obtaining further study opportunities, it has also highlighted some gender differences. The Careers Service is seeking to tackle such differences through various projects, including the Springboard for Students initiative. The University has pioneered this programme and feedback has been positive.

5.5 Some programmes provide direct professional training, with the employability agenda influencing the provision. In addition, the Careers Service has a number of Employability Advisers who work with specific departments and colleges to provide advice and to organise activities and events. The review team learned that an increasing number of departments are now timetabling specific sessions relating to employability and embedding employability-related activities within the curriculum. In a number of cases these make use of service teaching or existing provision provided by other parts of the University, most notably the Saïd Business School. Nevertheless, there appears to be less student satisfaction with the preparation for employment provided by individual departments, and the students whom the review team met confirmed the view stated in the student submission that the nature of this provision varies significantly.

5.6 While the student submission suggested that there was little employer involvement in curriculum design, the review team was made aware of a number of examples of new

programmes where employers had been involved and had, in some instances, provided the inspiration for the initiative.

5.7 A number of programmes include placements as a formal element. While the review team was made aware of some variability in the extent of the support provided for students undertaking such activities, providing opportunities for placements and internships is increasingly seen as a key aspect of academic provision.

5.8 Each of the four divisions provides initiatives that promote employability as part of their broader skills programmes for postgraduate research students and, as well as discipline-specific training provided by the Careers Service, there are also cross-divisional events such as the GRAD Challenge course. The Humanities Division collaborates with the Saïd Business School to provide tailored enterprise and entrepreneurial training for doctoral students. The review team met with a number of postgraduate research students who are positive about the support and activities provided.

5.9 The University has a developing focus on innovation and on entrepreneurship, building on a range of existing activities. The Business School provides a focus point for activity in this area through its Entrepreneurship Centre as well as by working with other departments to develop provision. Other initiatives include the Student Entrepreneur Programme run by the Careers Service, the Oxford Entrepreneurs student society and the Enterprising Oxford website. The University is now considering how best to emphasise innovation and entrepreneurship to broader groups of staff and students, both within and outside the curriculum, linked to the development of a University Innovation Strategy and related action plan.

5.10 The Careers Service also works with the colleges to support and deliver employment-related events, although employability-related activities in colleges are mainly focused around drawing on alumni links, on student representation and on student society and social event organisation.

5.11 The review team concludes that the University seeks to develop the employability of its students through its pedagogy, enhanced by the Careers Service working with others to provide further opportunities and initiatives. This approach provides an effective mechanism to enhance the employability of students at all levels of study.

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 30 to 33 of the [Higher Education Review handbook](#).

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

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

Academic standards

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

Award

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

Blended learning

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

Credit(s)

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

Degree-awarding body

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

Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

Dual award or double award

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

e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

Enhancement

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

Expectations

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

Flexible and distributed learning

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

See also **distance learning**.

Framework

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

Framework for higher education qualifications

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

Good practice

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

Learning opportunities

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

Learning outcomes

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

Multiple awards

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

Operational definition

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

Programme (of study)

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

Programme specifications

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

Public information

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

Quality Code

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

Reference points

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

Subject Benchmark Statement

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

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)

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

Threshold academic standard

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

Virtual learning environment (VLE)

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

Widening participation

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

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Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel: 01452 557 050
Web: www.qaa.ac.uk