



Higher Education Review of University of Southampton

February 2015

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About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at the University of Southampton. The review took place from 2 to 5 February 2015 and was conducted by a team of five reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Demelza Curnow
- Dr Jenny Gilbert
- Dr Douglas Halliday
- Mr Simon Pallett
- Ms Joanne Caulfield (student reviewer).

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

The [themes](#) for the academic year 2014-15 are Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement and Student Employability,² and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

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

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

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

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

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

Key findings

QAA's judgements about the University of Southampton

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

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

Good practice

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

- The wide-ranging and interdisciplinary opportunities available to students through the Curriculum Innovation Programme, which has increased student choice and enhanced the learning, teaching and assessment practice of staff (Expectation B3, Enhancement).
- The coordinated, pan-University induction experience for all students through the Southampton Welcome Project, which enables successful transition to study (Expectations B4, B2, Enhancement).
- The use of students to lead enhancement projects, which has a demonstrable impact on both staff practice and the student experience (Expectation B5, Enhancement).
- The clarity, scope and effectiveness of the complaint and appeals procedures and the emphasis on early, and alternative forms of, resolution (Expectations B9, C).
- The use of Post Graduate Research (PGR) Tracker for the benefits it brings to supervisory teams, students and senior academic staff in the monitoring of postgraduate research student progress (Expectation B11).
- The clarity, availability and accessibility of regulations, policies and procedures (Expectation C).
- The strategic approach to cross-institutional enhancement through projects and activities that successfully engage staff and students (Enhancement).

Recommendations

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

By September 2015:

- adopt a consistent approach that enables students to understand how their module feedback is acted upon (Expectation B5)
- make external examiner reports systematically available to all students (Expectation B7)
- review and amend the process of programme closure to ensure that the interests of all parties are adequately protected (Expectation B8)

- consistently provide information on additional course costs at programme level for prospective and current students (Expectation C).

By January 2016:

- ensure that the composition of the transfer/upgrade panel is independent of the supervisory team and that a consistent approach to the timing of the transfer/upgrade is adopted (Expectation B11).

At the next point of validation:

- ensure that level 7 exit qualifications have positively defined programme learning outcomes (Expectation A1).

Theme: Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

The operational relationship between the University of Southampton and its Students' Union is outlined in a published Relationship Agreement. This outlines the key features of the relationship, including a commitment to strategic partnership; ensuring consultation on key decisions; adopting a student-centered approach to the development of academia; and maintaining a principle of openness and trust. A student representation system operates across the institution, which matches the hierarchical committee structure of the University of Southampton. Both parties work collaboratively to ensure students are elected to the available posts, and that appropriate training is provided by the Students' Union. Students are also encouraged to participate in quality assurance processes such as validation, the evaluation of modules, and Staff Student Liaison Committees, as well as being engaged in, and on occasions leading, education enhancement initiatives.

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 Southampton

The University of Southampton (the University) awards degrees under a Royal Charter granted in 1952, although the origins of the institution date back to 1862 with the founding of the Hartley Institution. The University is located on seven campuses: five of which are located in Southampton; Winchester School of Art is located approximately 15 miles away in Winchester; and the University operates an overseas campus at the University of Southampton Malaysia Campus (USMC). In 2013-14, there were 23,510 students undertaking University of Southampton degrees, which included 4,270 postgraduate taught students, and 2,800 research degree students. The University offers degrees in over 70 subject areas.

The University mission is 'to change the world for the better' with a vision 'to be a distinctive global leader in education, research and enterprise'. The University's Vision 2020 statement outlines the institutional values, future ambitions and strategic priorities. The strategic direction is led by the University Academic Executive, which includes the Vice-Chancellor, Pro Vice-Chancellors and the Chief Operating Officer. The University Senate has ultimate ownership of academic policy and regulation, and overall responsibility for the maintenance of academic standards and quality. The Senate delegates a number of responsibilities to the central Academic Quality and Standards Committee, Chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education), and other areas, including operational responsibility for both taught and research programmes, to Faculty Programmes Committees.

The University is organised into eight faculties: Business and Law; Engineering and the Environment; Health Sciences; Humanities; Medicine; Natural and Environmental Sciences; Physical Sciences and Engineering; and Social and Human Sciences. Faculty Deans have formal responsibility for education, and appoint Associate Deans (Education and the Student Experience) to lead on ensuring that academic frameworks are implemented appropriately for taught and research awards. Directors of Programmes and Programme Leaders manage programme delivery. Directors of Faculty Graduate Schools support the work of Deans and Associate Deans in the management of postgraduate research degrees, under the central strategic leadership of the University Director of Graduate Studies. Faculties and academic units are supported through integrated and centrally coordinated Professional Services that link with key faculty staff .

The academic regulatory framework is defined in the University's Constitution and Regulations, which are published in the University Calendar and in related policies. The constituent parts of the University's Quality Monitoring and Enhancement Framework (QMEF) are drawn together in a Quality Handbook, which sets out the delegation of powers, and outlines policies and procedures for quality assurance. The Quality Handbook is supplemented for postgraduate research programmes by the Code of Practice for Research Candidature and Supervision.

The organisational structure outlined above has been introduced since the previous QAA Institutional Audit in 2008, at which point provision was grouped into three faculties with numerous separate central and distributed support services. In light of the changes to faculty structures and to the Quality Code, the University has reviewed its approach to quality assurance and enhancement, resulting in the introduction of a new framework from 2013-14 referred to as the QMEF. This review was facilitated through a structured Operational Excellence Programme to identify and deliver process improvements in priority areas, such as programme validation, admissions and assessment processes. Other significant changes since the last review include a change in Vice-Chancellor in 2009, a new strategic plan in 2010 and the establishment of the USMC in 2012.

The University has a number of awards delivered in collaboration with UK and international partners. The University's largest overseas partner is Dalian Polytechnic University in China, which delivers undergraduate awards and accounts for the largest volume of students studying at partner providers. The majority of the University's partnerships consists of postgraduate taught and research degrees delivered in collaboration with institutions overseas, and with other UK universities through Centres for Doctoral Training.

The 2008 QAA Institutional Audit reported that confidence could be placed in the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. Nine features of good practice were identified in areas that continue to feature positively in the current approach to quality management. There were five recommendations for action, which have been duly taken forward by the University, although the actions to improve oversight of collaborative provision have been relatively recent. Three recommendations related to oversight, including attention to the delegation of powers exercised by Associate Deans, and greater clarity on the extent of local variation permitted at faculty and academic unit level in the implementation of central policies and procedures. The University has taken appropriate steps to address these issues and has produced clear documentation defining the delegation of responsibilities and the extent of compliance required. Internal discussions on acceptable levels of consistency and local variation are still evident in current activities, notably in the implementation of the new QMEF and through incremental revisions to the Quality Handbook. Recommendations made through this current Higher Education Review continue to indicate areas where the student experience would benefit from greater consistency of practice across the institution.

Explanation of the findings about the University of Southampton

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

1 Judgement: The setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards

Expectation (A1): In order to secure threshold academic standards, degree-awarding bodies:

a) ensure that the requirements of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* are met by:

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

1.1 The University aligns its programmes with *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and the three cycles of the Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area. Since 2009, credits are expressed in European Credit Transfer System points; the minimum number of overall credits, and the credits at the award level, are defined in the University Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme held within the University Calendar. Regulations for higher degrees are also outlined in the University Calendar. The University Quality Handbook specifies that the threshold levels of the relevant frameworks should be adhered to, and that Subject Benchmark Statements must be considered through validation; these are captured in published programme specifications. Postgraduate research programmes follow the University's Code of Practice for Research Candidature and Supervision and make use of the Research Council's UK Statement of Expectation of Doctoral Training. A doctoral profile is produced for postgraduate research students to a standard University template. Collaborative partners are required to comply with the same procedures.

1.2 The review team explored the effectiveness of the processes by scrutinising the component parts of the QMEF, including the University Calendar, the Quality Handbook, programme specifications, programme validation documents and external examiners' reports, and by meeting University staff during the review visit.

1.3 The review team confirms that the programme approval process makes reference to appropriate external reference points, including the FHEQ; Subject Benchmark Statements; professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) requirements; QAA Doctoral Degree Characteristics; Vitae; and, in some faculties, Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. An external adviser participates in the programme approval process as a member of the Faculty Scrutiny Group, and specifically provides external verification for the alignment of modules and programmes to the relevant frameworks. An internal academic member of staff, independent from the faculty, is also involved in the Faculty Scrutiny Group, acting on behalf of the Academic Quality and Standards Committee to promote consistency and ensure compliance with internal requirements. External examiners report annually on the achievement of threshold standards and confirm that standards are equivalent to other UK universities.

1.4 European Credit Transfer System points are embedded across the institution as the default system for quantifying and recording module and programme credit. Under a process entitled 'forward and backtracking' students are permitted to count 15 European Credit Transfer System points towards the level above or below the level at which the credit is designated, thus enabling students to take modules from other discipline areas as part of the Curriculum Innovation Programme (see section B3). The academic regulations, as outlined in the University Calendar, allow for students who do not achieve their target to exit with a named qualification. In most master's programmes, the programme specification allows students to gain a Postgraduate Certificate or Diploma, providing they have the requisite number of credits. The learning outcomes achieved at the point of exit are therefore dependent on the modules passed. Although module learning outcomes are mapped to the learning outcomes of the full master's programme, there are no specifically defined programme outcomes for students who exit with a Postgraduate Certificate or Diploma award. The review team therefore **recommends** that at the next point of validation, the University ensure that level 7 exit qualifications have positively defined programme learning outcomes.

1.5 The review team considers that the University generally makes appropriate use of external reference points to ensure threshold academic standards, although further work is required regarding the specification of learning outcomes in some areas. Overall, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.6 The Senate is the ultimate academic authority, and delegates powers for setting and maintaining academic standards to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee through management of the QMEF. The University Calendar provides the definitive statement of the regulatory structure, and includes a list of awards and the academic regulations. The roles, responsibilities and procedures for the implementation of the academic frameworks and regulations are set out in the Quality Handbook. Faculty Programmes Committees ensure compliance with the University's regulatory and quality frameworks, and report to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee on quality monitoring and enhancement within an annual reporting cycle. Faculty Programmes Committees also manage the Recognition of Prior Learning Policy and make recommendations to the Senate for the University's awards.

1.7 The University responds to external body requirements in its academic frameworks and a large number of programmes have links to PSRBs. The University also has accreditation by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency to deliver programmes at its Malaysian campus, and there are a number of partnerships with European universities under the Erasmus Mundus programme.

1.8 The review team explored the operation of the process for awarding credit and qualifications by analysing handbooks, validation documentation, annual programme monitoring reports, programme specifications, committee minutes and external examiners' reports. In addition, the team met a wide range of staff to discuss the approach.

1.9 The review team considers the Quality Handbook to be a clear and well-structured document. It is available online and draws together the policies and processes that comprise the QMEF, with helpful clarification of responsibilities and accountability. It presents the processes for programme validation, annual monitoring and assessment, and includes standard templates and helpful flowcharts. Staff involved in approvals under the previous and the new system commented on the improvement in processes, the clarity of the documentation and the benefits provided by the opportunity for wider internal consultation.

1.10 Staff are well supported in designing programmes and assessment within the required academic frameworks. Guidelines are provided for writing approval documents, including advice for writing programme aims and learning outcomes at appropriate levels. The Faculty Scrutiny Group checks that learning outcomes are appropriate and the external adviser's role is well specified and generally effective. Training on the design of appropriate module and programme learning outcomes is available through the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice and for Chairs of Faculty Scrutiny Groups. The Associate Deans (Education and the Student Experience) and the Faculty Academic Registrar also provide guidance and support to staff within their faculty. Programme specifications and module learning outcomes reviewed by the review team conform to the guidelines. The Assessment Framework is laid out clearly in the Quality Handbook and staff are confident in accessing and applying the framework. The suitability of assessment is checked at programme validation and regularly during annual monitoring.

1.11 The review team considers that the University has clear and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations in place to govern the award of academic credit and qualifications. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.12 Programme specifications provide the definitive record for all taught programmes. Doctoral profiles are produced for all PhD programmes and provide similar information. Definitive module information is presented in module profiles. Programme specifications, doctoral profiles and module profiles conform to a standard University template, which is aligned with relevant internal and external reference points. PSRB accreditation is included in the programme specification and a central register is confirmed at the Academic Quality and Standards Committee on an annual basis. On completion of their studies, students are issued with a European Diploma Supplement itemising module marks.

1.13 The review team analysed relevant documentation submitted by the University, including programme specifications, doctoral profiles, module profiles and transcripts. The team also met staff and students during the review to discuss the approach to maintaining and using definitive programme records.

1.14 Faculties maintain records for the schedule of programme validations and Faculty Programmes Committees are responsible for approving any amendments to programme specifications, or to module profiles. Details of changes to these definitive documents are approved through Faculty Programmes Committees and recorded on the document to ensure an up-to-date record is maintained. Programme specifications reviewed by the review team clearly demonstrate the history of programme approval and modifications.

1.15 Doctoral profiles were introduced in March 2014, as an outcome of the new QMEF for postgraduate research degrees. These are now in place across all such programmes; the review team considers these an authoritative and useful record. Profiles are informative for current and prospective students, and supervisors, and can be accessed on the SUSSED (Southampton University Staff/Student Social and Educational Directory) portal. All successful students receive a confirmation of award letter with their certificate and final transcript based on the relevant programme specification or doctoral profile information.

1.16 The review team considers that the University has appropriate processes to ensure the maintenance of definitive records for all programmes of study and for individual student records. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.17 The University's programme validation process is set out in the Quality Handbook and is a 'defined' process, meaning that local variation is not permitted. The process was revised in March 2013 as part of the review of the QMEF, and implementation was reviewed by the University after a 12-month period. The process references, and provides links to, key external reference points, including the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements, and internal ones, including the University's Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme and institutional guidelines for degree programmes.

1.18 The process consists of four stages, commencing with strategic approval at stage 1, followed by internal stakeholder consultation at stage 2, during which a report is produced by an external adviser. Stage 3 consists of internal academic scrutiny, which is conducted through a meeting of the Faculty Scrutiny Group. Academic approval is confirmed at stage 4 by the Faculty Programmes Committee on the recommendation from the Faculty Scrutiny Group. The University's Academic Quality and Standards Committee receives an annual report of all approvals. Approval of a named programme is for a finite period of time and the same validation process is used for re-approval. Consideration of academic standards is undertaken throughout the process, specifically at stages 2 and 3, and is facilitated by the use of both external advisers and internal academic staff, who are independent of the delivering faculty.

1.19 The review team considered documentation relevant to the programme validation process, including a sample of case studies demonstrating the process in operation for new and existing programmes. The team also met a range of staff responsible for programme development, scrutiny and approval for both taught and research programmes.

1.20 The template for programme validation is clear in setting out the four stages of the process; staff with experience of the validation process, whether as a programme developer or as a member of Faculty Scrutiny Group and Faculty Programmes Committees, confirmed that the template was easy to follow. A member of academic staff, independent from the proposing faculty, is appointed to Faculty Scrutiny Group by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee to comment explicitly on whether the process has been followed appropriately, and a line to this effect is normally included in the resulting report. Although the review team observed some differences in approach between faculties, these were minor, and the paperwork that progressed at each stage, including to Faculty Programmes Committees and the Academic Quality and Standards Committee, appeared full and robust.

1.21 The setting of appropriate academic standards is principally addressed through the Faculty Scrutiny Group at stage 3 of the process. The Faculty Scrutiny Group terms of reference comprehensively define the role of the group and include specific consideration of external reference points, learning outcomes, assessment and curriculum design. The Faculty Scrutiny Group also involves an external adviser, who has a specific role in commenting on academic standards. Advisers are appropriately qualified for this role and also receive guidance from the University, including information on the University's own

guidelines and expectations for each qualification level. In addition to attending the Faculty Scrutiny Group meeting, the external adviser writes a report to inform stage 3 of the validation process, and this forms part of the paperwork scrutinised by the Faculty Programmes Committees. This report is written to a template and, among other considerations, requires comment on alignment with the FHEQ and appropriate use of relevant Subject Benchmark Statements, and confirmation that the design, content and assessment allows for the achievement of the learning outcomes. Examples of reports seen by the review team were variable, although the team was assured that further information would be sought if a report was considered inadequate, and that inclusion of the external adviser in person at the Faculty Scrutiny Group meeting allowed for further detailed input.

1.22 The review team considers that the processes for the approval of taught programmes and research degrees are appropriate, robust and operate consistently across the institution in ensuring academic standards are in accordance with internal and external frameworks. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.23 As noted in section A3.1, the programme validation process ensures that programmes have appropriate learning outcomes and assessment. Learning outcomes are set out in module profiles and programme specifications, with programme learning outcomes mapped against modules. Both external examiners and external advisers are required to confirm that the programme design allows candidates to demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes, as well as confirming UK threshold standards and alignment with the FHEQ. The University Calendar sets out the rules for progression and the classification of awards, with further detail being provided in the Quality Handbook regarding marking, moderation, external examining and the conduct of examination boards. The credit scheme covers the assessment of the learning outcomes and states the credit requirements for all programmes at all levels. Learning outcomes and assessment requirements for research degrees are outlined in the Code of Practice for Research Candidature and Supervision, and in doctoral profiles.

1.24 The review team explored the approach through scrutiny of the relevant policies and procedures, including evidence from the validation process and external examining for both taught and research degree programmes. In addition, the team met staff during the review to discuss the approach to assuring assessment standards.

1.25 There are thorough procedures for the approval and review of programmes, which ensure that learning outcomes are appropriately assessed and make appropriate use of external experts. Learning outcomes are set out at module and programme level, and programme specifications clearly demonstrate the links between module and programme outcomes. In practice, external advisers' reports clearly state alignment with the FHEQ and confirm that the programme is designed to allow achievement of the learning outcomes.

1.26 The University Calendar outlines clearly the rules on which assessment and Boards of Examiners are based, and these are designed to link results to the achievement of learning outcomes. External examiners are used to ensure that standards meet UK threshold requirements and satisfy the University's own requirements. External examiners' reports confirm that assessment procedures measure student achievement appropriately against the intended learning outcomes of the programme.

1.27 The review team considers that the procedures for ensuring the appropriate award of credit and qualifications are thorough and make good use of external experts to comment on programme design and student achievement. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.28 All University programmes are approved for five years after which they are reviewed and re-approved. Re-approval of existing programmes follows the original validation processes, as outlined in section A3.1, and the same measures for the setting of appropriate academic standards are applied. Faculties manage the schedules for validation of new and existing programmes, and early in each academic year the Academic Quality and Standards Committee receives lists from the faculties detailing the programmes undergoing validation. Since March 2014, research degree provision is also subject to five-yearly reviews on a faculty basis as part of the new QMEF.

1.29 The University's approach to programme monitoring was most recently approved in 2013 as part of the QMEF, and is set out in the Quality Handbook. Annual monitoring takes place at module, programme and faculty levels. Module Report Forms are completed annually by module coordinators, which inform Annual Programme Reports produced by Directors of Programmes. Faculty Programme Reports draw on the Annual Programme Reports and other sources, such as reports from external examiners, and are submitted to the Academic Quality And Standards Committee. Strategic oversight of academic standards is undertaken at this Committee on the basis of Faculty Programme Reports and also through consideration of annual reports on student achievement and progression.

1.30 The review team considered a range of documents, including relevant policies, regulations and procedures, validation case studies, examples of annual monitoring, information on external examining, and reports taken by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee relating to student performance and achievement. The team also met staff with varying levels of responsibility and involvement in monitoring.

1.31 As the process for re-approval corresponds with the process for original approval, the same key confirmations on academic standards are required, including alignment with the FHEQ, appropriate use of relevant Subject Benchmark Statements, and confirmation that the design, content and assessment are appropriate for the achievement of learning outcomes.

1.32 The monitoring report templates for modules and programmes require explicit statements on whether modules and programmes are delivered as per the approved programme specification and module profile; such information is used to inform the Faculty Programme Report. Annual progression reports received by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee for both taught and research programmes indicate careful consideration of student achievement, and include analysis by different factors such as academic discipline, demography, and disability.

1.33 The role and responsibilities of external examiners with regards to the confirmation of academic standards is clear, and the report template ensures that this assurance is explicitly confirmed on an annual basis. The Academic Quality and Standards Committee maintains oversight of external examiner reports through a detailed report identifying key issues for institutional attention, complemented by a response from the Pro Vice-Chancellor

(Education) on action to be taken. This report is thorough and provides sufficient detail in its analysis for assurance of standards at institutional level.

1.34 The review team considers that the University has appropriate processes for the monitoring and review of programmes, which explicitly address whether UK threshold academic standards, and those of the institution, are being maintained. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.35 The University considers external advice to be an important part of validation, and appoints external advisers to comment and report on academic standards through the approval process. Nomination, approval and support of external advisers is subject to the External Adviser Policy within the Quality Handbook. Nominations are approved by the Chair of the Faculty Programmes Committee. Research degrees also involve external advisers in the validation process. Collaborative provision is subject to the same requirements and follows the same policies. Validation can also draw upon external advice from industry and from PSRBs depending on the subject area.

1.36 Following validation, the University uses external examiners to monitor taught programmes and research awards. The roles and responsibilities for external examiners are outlined in the Quality Handbook, and the criteria for appointment ensure that examiners have sufficient expertise and independence to fulfil the role, with appointments being approved at a senior faculty level. External examiners are required to specifically report on the appropriateness of academic standards; these reports inform the validation and annual monitoring processes.

1.37 The review team explored the approach by analysing relevant policies and procedures, validation documents and external examiners' reports. The team also met a range of staff during the review visit to discuss the use of externality in assuring academic standards.

1.38 The review team considers that appropriate use is made of external and independent advice in validation, with external advisers writing a report and also taking part in Faculty Scrutiny Group meetings. Criteria for appointment ensure that the external adviser is appropriately qualified and cognisant of relevant reference points in the sector. The External Adviser Policy also details the guidance that must be given to the external adviser in carrying out the role, including information on the University's own guidelines and expectations for each qualification level. Examples of completed external adviser reports demonstrate the necessary confirmations about standards. There is evidence of industrial and PSRB involvement in the process, although approaches to the engagement of these parties is variable.

1.39 As detailed in section B7 of this report, the review team considers that proper use is made of external examiners to confirm the alignment of standards. The template for annual external examiner reports for taught awards requires specific statements on the achievement and maintenance of academic standards. External examiners' reports are also used comprehensively to inform annual programme monitoring reports and, through these, to inform the validation of existing programmes.

1.40 The review team considers that the University makes appropriate use of external and independent expertise in key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

1.42 The review team considers that the University has appropriate policies and procedures for ensuring that academic standards are set at a level that is consistent with UK threshold, and internally set, academic standards. The University produces and maintains definitive programme documentation, which is generally comprehensive with regards to alignment with internal and external reference points, although the review team recommends that the University ensures that level 7 exit awards have positively defined programme learning outcomes. Good use is made of external input into both the setting of academic standards and in ensuring that such standards are maintained through the assessment for awards.

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

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1 As outlined in section A3.1 of this report, the University approach to validation is a four-stage process, which is outlined in the Quality Handbook. This includes strategic approval; consultation with internal stakeholders; academic scrutiny by internal and external peers; and final academic approval by Faculty Programmes Committees, reporting to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee. The validation process allows for student input to be actively sought at the internal stakeholder stage. There is also formal student representation on the Faculty Scrutiny Group and Faculty Programmes Committee. An external adviser is involved at stage 3 when they write a report; they may also attend the Faculty Scrutiny Group meeting. A response to the external adviser's report is included as part of the documentation. Consistency across the University is supported through the inclusion of a member of academic staff from a different faculty in the Faculty Scrutiny Group, who specifically confirms that due process is followed. The Academic Quality and Standards Committee maintains oversight by receiving faculty reports through its annual cycle of business reports, which detail the programme validations scheduled and those that have taken place. Support and training is provided to staff involved in all stages of the programme validation process.

2.2 The review team considered documentation relating to the procedures for programme design and approval, including case studies of validation. The team also met staff who had various experiences in the design and operation of the process and with students who had been involved in validation.

2.3 The programme validation process is relatively new and builds on the previous periodic programme review process. It was introduced in 2013-14 as an outcome of the Operational Excellence Programme. Despite some degree of variation, the process was broadly followed in its first year of operation and a thorough review took place after the first 12 months, with some recommendations made for improvement. There is evidence that annual reporting to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee (formerly the University Programmes Committee) from the faculties has taken place with respect to programme validations since this process was established, and that this provides the Academic Quality and Standards Committee with an effective mechanism for institutional oversight and the opportunity to consider consistency in the operation of the process across faculties.

2.4 There is clear evidence of engagement with appropriately qualified external advisers. The process allows for the engagement of PSRBs, where appropriate, and the University is working to develop greater industry engagement in instances where there is no PSRB involvement. Student engagement, both in terms of formal representation on panels and the opportunity to contribute during development, is variable in its extent, but there are indications that the University is making efforts to develop greater consistency in this area. The review team met students who had been involved in validation and who reported that this had been a valuable experience.

2.5 The roles and responsibilities of those involved at each stage in the development process are clearly set out in the documentation. Detailed templates and guidance are provided, and staff met by the team spoke positively about the clarity of the process. Support and training is provided for new staff through the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice, including a core module that covers the foundations for learning and teaching and the writing of learning outcomes. In addition, the Professional Development Unit (now part of the Institute for Learning Innovation and Development) offers a programme design workshop, and additional support is provided through Associate Deans (Education and the Student Experience) and Faculty Academic Registrars.

2.6 The review team considers that the University operates effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.7 The University's Admissions Policy outlines the aims and overall approach to admissions, and details how both central and faculty level processes operate. The policy states that the University is committed to attracting 'the most talented students, irrespective of background' and the policy is explicitly linked to the University's mission statement and strategy. The strategic approach to supporting access and achievement in under-represented groups is outlined within a separate Access Agreement. Oversight for recruitment is delegated by the Senate to the Recruitment and Admissions Subcommittee (formerly the Recruitment and Admissions Group), which is Chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education) and reports to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee. Admissions strategy and policy is managed by the Head of University Admissions, with some responsibilities being devolved to Faculty Admissions Controllers. The University employs international agents to support its recruitment overseas, who provide information, advice and guidance to potential applicants, but are prohibited from making offers of admission.

2.8 The University's general entry requirements are set out in the central policy, with admission regulations being outlined in the University Calendar. Admissions criteria are set by Faculty Programmes Committees, with operational responsibility for candidate selection undertaken by Student and Academic Administration, who make offers in line with the requirements of each faculty. Admissions arrangements are outlined in each Memorandum of Agreement between the University and its partners. The Admissions Policy and procedures for postgraduate research programmes are defined in the Code of Practice for Research Degree Candidature and Supervision.

2.9 The review team explored the operation of the process by analysing relevant policy and procedural documents. The team also met current students and a cross section of staff involved in recruitment and admissions to discuss their experience of the process.

2.10 The Admissions Policy sets out the aims and processes clearly and is subject to annual review by the Recruitment and Admissions Group. This group provides effective oversight of the recruitment and admissions process, through receiving relevant papers and considering a range of management information. Staff met by the review team reported that this group facilitates a detailed and informed discussion, and provides an effective means for evaluating this area of activity, which has led to overall enhancement of the process. Recent developments arising from this group include piloting the use of contextual data for admissions and revisions to English language proficiency requirements.

2.11 Further evidence of ongoing evaluation and improvements are the changes made to the recruitment and selection processes for undergraduate students, following a review under the Operational Excellence Framework in 2012-13. This review focused on providing an improved experience for prospective students, identifying areas of good practice and highlighting potential improvements. Example of changes to the process include an improvement in the turnaround time of applications and offers, which is underpinned by

positive feedback from applicants. The University is in the process of replicating this review process for postgraduate admissions.

2.12 The University holds four undergraduate open days each year and is considering establishing its own postgraduate open day, in addition to the event currently undertaken in partnership with other Russell Group universities. Faculties also hold separate visit days. The production of marketing materials is coordinated by the central Communications and Marketing department, and the review team saw evidence of close working relationships with the relevant staff at faculty level. Generally, there are appropriate arrangements to ensure prospective students are supplied with the information required to make appropriate choices, although, as detailed in section C of this report, details on additional programme costs are variable.

2.13 As detailed in section B4 of this report, the Southampton Welcome Project has brought demonstrable benefits to the pre-entry and induction of new students. The review team saw evidence that the initiative has made a significant impact on transition and induction, with students reporting a noticeable improvement in the quality of these arrangements.

2.14 The International Office is responsible for recruiting, training and monitoring overseas recruitment agents and there are clear procedures for exacting these responsibilities, including regular site visits and an annual review of performance. The University seeks applicant feedback on their interaction with agents in order to evaluate the scheme, and monitors the suitability of applications as measures of the agent's performance. The review team saw evidence that these oversight mechanisms are working effectively.

2.15 The University has a Recruitment, Outreach and Admissions Functional Network, Chaired by the Head of University Admissions. This informal forum brings together Professional Services staff involved with recruitment to share good practice and foster close working relationships across the university.

2.16 The review team considers that the University operates effective processes for the recruitment, selection and admission of students. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.17 The University's approach to learning and teaching is set out in the University Strategy and the Student Charter, with policies and procedures supporting learning and teaching being described in the Quality Handbook. The Charter emphasises, among other matters, a focus on research-led education and the opportunity for individual student choice in programmes of study. It also describes the University's commitment to supporting students in fulfilling their academic and personal potential, and outlines the roles and responsibilities of the University and students. As outlined in section B4, the University shares its approach with students during a welcome and induction programme.

2.18 Since 2014, support for learning and teaching has been located in a new Institute for Learning Innovation and Development (ILlAD), which brings together the Professional Development Unit and the former Centre for Innovation in Technologies in Education. The ILlAD aims to promote learning and teaching approaches that enhance the experience of students by facilitating workshops, conferences and access to resources. The University requires all new probationary academic staff to undertake a Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice accredited by the Higher Education Academy; training is also provided for postgraduate research students who support learning and teaching. The University has a framework accredited by the Higher Education Academy for staff wishing to achieve higher levels of Fellowship through submission of a portfolio. A policy on the Peer Development of Teaching is implemented and monitored at faculty level to promote reflection on practice. Evaluation of teaching practice is captured through the annual monitoring process at module, programme and faculty level, and the Academic Quality and Standards Committee exercises oversight through annual monitoring reports and the consideration of other management information data.

2.19 The review team considered the effectiveness of this approach through the analysis of strategy documents, policies and procedures and relevant committee paperwork. The team also met staff and students during the review, including those involved in the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice programme, and considered the training and support offered by the University.

2.20 The staff and students the review team met demonstrated an awareness of the strategic approach to teaching and learning. Notably, students provided a range of examples of research-led teaching, and other opportunities to engage with research, and described the positive impact this had on their learning.

2.21 A specific example of the strategic approach is the Curriculum Innovation Programme introduced in 2009. This provides opportunities for students to choose interdisciplinary modules as part of their degree programme. Curriculum Innovation Programme modules include a range of languages; modules based in strategic research groups, often of an interdisciplinary nature; and modules that enhance employability skills. A key aspect of Curriculum Innovation Programme modules is the widespread use of innovative approaches to delivery and assessment. The review team learned that the Curriculum Innovation Programme had brought together staff from different disciplinary

backgrounds and had prompted a wider debate across the institution about the nature and purpose of different forms of assessment. A recent development in the Curriculum Innovation Programme is the introduction of coherent 'minor' pathways to recognise students who had studied a particular aspect of the Curriculum Innovation Programme to a specified depth. Students met by the team confirmed that the Curriculum Innovation Programme had made a positive impact on their studies; the team also noted increasing demand for Curriculum Innovation Programme modules. There was evidence that the Curriculum Innovation Programme has increased student choice and enhanced the learning, teaching and assessment practice of staff. The team therefore considers the wide-ranging and interdisciplinary opportunities available to students through the Curriculum Innovation Programme to be **good practice**.

2.22 The University has a Disability Statement, and an Equality and Diversity Policy, which is supported by a comprehensive Inclusivity Good Practice Checklist covering the full range of student activities from marketing through admissions, programme design, assessment and graduation. The review team heard evidence of this being used in a range of circumstances, and observed a culture of inclusivity in the meetings with support staff and students. A fitness to study policy ensures a consistent approach to managing situations in which a student's health or wellbeing raises concerns about that student's fitness to study.

2.23 The review team confirms that the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice programme is effective, has a positive impact on staff development and helps staff understand the University's approach to learning and teaching. Staff on this programme are supported by a teaching mentor. In addition to the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice, there is evidence of wider engagement with the Higher Education Academy, including 11 Principal Fellows who act as mentors for staff wishing to obtain higher levels of fellowship through the accredited framework established by the University. The Peer Development of Teaching Policy requires staff to engage in dialogue and reflection on all aspects of their teaching; the team reviewed evidence of this in operation. Postgraduate research students who support learning and teaching spoke positively about their training programme, and undergraduate students met by the team cited examples of effective teaching and support from such students.

2.24 The ILIaD is responsible for coordinating staff development, building on the work done previously by the former Centre for Innovation in Technologies and Education, and Professional Development Unit. The review team learned that one of the main themes for the ILIaD is the development of digital literacy in both students and staff. A group of Student Innovation and Digital Literacies Champions, known as iChamps, are recruited and supported by the ILIaD to raise awareness of issues associated with digital literacy among students and staff; the team heard examples of how this had increased staff confidence in using new approaches.

2.25 Annual module reports provide an opportunity for staff to reflect on their teaching and student feedback, and to consider opportunities for development; examples of completed module reports viewed by the review team demonstrate such reflection by staff. Annual monitoring reports are considered at programme and faculty level, which enables good practice to be shared within the faculty. The Academic Quality and Standards Committee receives faculty reports in order to take institutional oversight of learning and teaching. In addition, the Academic Quality and Standards Committee considers a wide range of management information on an annual basis, including: degree results; results from the National Student Survey (NSS); the Postgraduate Taught/Research Experience Survey; and student barometer surveys, which it uses to exercise oversight and inform strategy. A clear impact of this oversight is through the selection of annual enhancement themes.

2.26 The review team considers that there is a robust strategic approach to learning and teaching. There are effective mechanisms for the review and enhancement of the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices, and evidence of good practice in this area. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement

Findings

2.27 The University Strategy covers both education and the student experience. Institutional responsibility for the delivery of this strategy lies with the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education) in accordance with the requirements of the Senate. Deans have responsibility at faculty level and delegate this to Associate Deans (Education and the Student Experience). Directors of Programmes coordinate the delivery of programmes and sit on Faculty Programmes Committees. The policies and procedures for annual monitoring, validation and mechanisms for assessment are outlined in the Quality Handbook. An equivalent process operates for postgraduate research students, as described in section B11 of this report. Students are informed on how they can engage fully with the educational and personal development opportunities available to them through the Student Charter, open days, induction information and online resources.

2.28 The review team considered key documentation, including strategy documents, policies and procedures, and committee papers, and explored the online support provided to students. The team also met a range of academic staff, support staff and students during the review to discuss the approach.

2.29 The University undertakes an annual planning process to align resource allocation to strategic priorities. A Capital Programmes Board, consisting of senior academic staff, has oversight of the large-scale allocation of resources for major projects to develop the educational infrastructure. Faculty and programme level resource planning is considered through Faculty Executive Groups, as part of the annual business planning process. More detailed planning takes place at faculty and professional service level, with student input through Faculty Programmes Committees and through the annual quality monitoring process. Validation and annual monitoring processes also enable the assessment and monitoring of student academic development and achievement. Academic and support staff met by the review team described a strategic approach to the allocation of resources, which was consistent with the University's policies and procedures on student achievement and support. Staff demonstrated a clear understanding of their role, as defined in University documents, and provided helpful examples of their roles in operation.

2.30 The Southampton Welcome Project was launched in 2012 with the aim of producing a consistent set of information for all new students, and ensuring a smoother transition and induction into higher education. The project is a collaboration between faculties, Professional Services and the Students' Union, and focuses on the period from a student accepting an offer until the end of their second week of study. Support for students with special requirements is highlighted through the 'Are you ready' website. Specially designed web pages provide information to students at the appropriate time in their induction, with information provided for different student groups. There are specific examples of improvements made to the student induction experience as a result of this project. Students also confirmed that their experience of induction had improved in recent years as a consequence of the Welcome Project. The review team considers that the Southampton Welcome Project enables successful transition to study, and the coordinated, pan-university induction experience for all students is identified by the team as **good practice**.

2.31 The University has built on its previous student support system by introducing a framework that allocates a Personal Academic Tutor to all students to provide academic

advice. A wide range of academic and non-academic support, including employability and skills development, has also been recently brought together under an initiative called the Southampton Opportunity. Examples of activities under the aegis of this initiative include: a peer mentoring buddy scheme initiated in one faculty and now being adopted by other academic units across the institution; a programme of student champions, including support for digital literacies being led by the ILlAD; and the development of a website publishing student development opportunities. A Careers Destinations programme offers work experience and mentoring opportunities, along with career planning guidance and support. Students met by the team described engagement in a range of developmental opportunities, although student awareness of the overarching framework was limited at this stage. Although the initiative is new, the review team considers that the Southampton Opportunity has the potential to be an effective approach in communicating the range of available opportunities to students, and developing a more integrated approach to student learning and development.

2.32 The Disability Statement describes the support provided by a range of enabling services with the aim of empowering students to achieve their full potential. Student wellbeing is supported by Personal Academic Tutors, overseen at faculty level by Senior Tutors. A university-wide Senior Tutors Forum meets regularly to discuss issues and share good practice. A review of mental health in December 2013 resulted in the appointment of a Student Support Manager. The University also works closely with the Students' Union, ensuring the Union's Advice Centre liaises with Professional Services when necessary. Students and staff met by the review team described examples of effective support resulting from this approach. An appropriate monitoring framework is in place for these groups of students; the review team also noted the appointment of a Dean as Diversity Champion.

2.33 The review team noted a 30 per cent increase in library expenditure over the five years to 2013-14. Students confirmed to the team that the library, the virtual learning environment (VLE), and the student electronic portal (SUSSED) provided appropriate, accessible and effective support for learning. Academic Liaison Librarians provide effective contact between the library and academic departments by attending Staff Student Liaison Committee meetings and soliciting feedback from students on the library. The review team also heard of increasing use of video platform software to record lectures and the benefits that this provided to students.

2.34 The review team considers that the University adopts a coordinated and effective approach to student development and achievement, with evidence of good practice in this area. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student Engagement

Findings

2.35 Priorities for student engagement are outlined in the Student Charter and the Students' Union University Relationship Agreement. The Charter was developed jointly with the Students' Union and is reviewed on an annual basis. The University and Students' Union are jointly responsible for ensuring effective student representation via the Academic Student Representation System. Students are represented on high-level University committees via Students' Union sabbatical officers, and at faculty and academic unit levels by elected student representatives. The Students' Union President and Vice-President (Education) meet regularly with University senior managers to discuss student matters. Procedures for the validation of new and existing programmes allow for student involvement in all stages of the process. All taught students are afforded the opportunity to comment on their experience via the University's module survey system and through Staff Student Liaison Committees.

2.36 The review team explored the approach by analysing key policies, procedures and minutes of meetings provided by the Students' Union and University. The team also met staff, student representatives and Students' Union sabbatical officers during the review.

2.37 The structure of student representation outlined in the policy is standardised across the institution and does not allow for local variation. All faculties have Staff Student Liaison Committees operating at faculty or discipline level, including at the University's Malaysia campus and Winchester School of Art. The University policy requires Staff Student Liaison Committees to meet three times per academic year and requires co-chairing, but there is variability across faculties and academic units in the number of meetings held and the extent of co-chairing. Student representatives are elected by students via ballots organised by the Students' Union. The Students' Union produces a detailed handbook for representatives and offers comprehensive training to all student representatives, with over half attending in the current academic year.

2.38 The University gathers in-depth feedback from students via a broad range of mechanisms, including individual module surveys and nationally administered surveys. Reports from these surveys are fully considered by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee and shared with the Students' Union. Results from internal and external surveys are also discussed at Faculty Programmes Committees, Programme Boards, and at some Staff Student Liaison Committees. The University is implementing a new online module questionnaire system, which is gradually being introduced across all faculties. Module survey results are used systematically as part of the annual module reporting process.

2.39 University-level action taken to improve the student experience is clearly reported to students through a You Said, We Did website. The student representation policy states that students should be informed about actions taken in response to their module feedback, although meetings with staff indicated broad inconsistency in this area. Furthermore, students met by the team reported a lack of awareness on how module feedback is addressed by the University and communicated to students. The review team therefore **recommends** that the University adopts a consistent approach that enables students to understand how their module feedback is acted upon.

2.40 Representation for students on postgraduate research degrees has no formal structure, and research students met by the team confirmed that the model of representation for taught programmes is not appropriate for their needs. Postgraduate research students currently organise their own representative structures and considered these effective, although the University and Students' Union are conducting a review to better support representation and bring all students under the Academic Student Representation System.

2.41 The University employs students to lead a number of enhancement initiatives via the Southampton Opportunity project. These student champions are involved in projects to improve assignment feedback, innovation and digital literacies in education, sustainability, employability, and student development opportunities, as well as developing peer mentoring buddy schemes across the institution. An example includes Feedback Champions, who have been employed to collect examples of good practice in assessment feedback, and disseminate these to staff and students through a new website. This project also compared staff and students' expectations and understanding of feedback, through student-led interviews, and made recommendations to the University for action. Staff and students from across the University spoke positively of the student champions scheme, with staff reporting examples of how working with these students has improved their teaching practice. The review team noted that the student champions approach has a demonstrable impact on both staff practice and the student experience, and considers the use of students to lead enhancement projects to be **good practice**.

2.42 Students are involved in the validation of new programmes, at all stages of the process, from idea creation, scrutiny at Faculty Scrutiny Group, and the formal approval stage. The process has been deliberately designed to ensure student opinion can be sought and effectively incorporated into the programme development and there was sound evidence of this process in operation.

2.43 The review team considers that the University takes deliberate steps to engage students collectively and individually in quality assurance and enhancement processes, and noted good practice in this area. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.44 Assessment practice is governed by the Assessment Framework in the Quality Handbook, which was revised in 2014 to improve navigation and reflect changes to the Quality Code. The Assessment Framework sets out the ways in which assessors are prepared for their roles. The Quality Handbook outlines the institutional approach to marking and moderation, and to the conduct of Boards of Examiners and assessment panels. The decisions of Boards of Examiners are reported to Faculty Programmes Committees. Assessment is normally in English, but there are exceptions covered by multilingual external examiners. The University has guidance on inclusive assessment, as well as procedures for dealing with candidates with disabilities. Information on assessment is provided to students through definitive programme documentation, SUSSED and the VLE.

2.45 Learning outcomes are set out at programme and module level, with programmes validated with explicit reference to the FHEQ. Credit requirements for awards are also specified, and progression requirements are set out in the University Calendar, which details the conditions for progression and the rules for classification. The assessment regulations and procedures for postgraduate research programmes are set out in the Code of Practice for Research Candidature and Supervision.

2.46 The review team analysed assessment policies and procedures, and also reviewed evidence of the assessment process in operation. In addition, the team met a range of staff and current students to explore the approach to assessment.

2.47 The Quality Handbook provides clear information on assessment processes and is readily accessible to staff and students. A recent review as part of the Operational Excellence Programme has resulted in revised guidelines designed to ensure greater consistency; staff the team met demonstrated a good understanding of the approach to assessment. Students also showed a good awareness of assessment criteria and regulations. The University Recognition of Prior Learning Policy has been updated recently to reflect changes in the Quality Code. The Policy devolves responsibilities to faculties within a framework of clearly defined principles, supported by clear and helpful documentation.

2.48 Training is provided through the ILlaD in order to prepare staff in assessment roles, and this is supplemented for inexperienced assessors by mentoring and access to the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice. Postgraduate research students who teach undertake a useful introduction to teaching skills course, from which they can proceed to the first module of the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice and obtain Associate Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy.

2.49 The programme validation process encourages staff to reflect on modes of assessment and requires a matrix to show how and where programme learning outcomes are assessed. There are guideline assessment descriptions in the Assessment Framework, but these are generic and therefore cannot apply in every discipline. The University guidance on inclusive assessment is thorough and is intended to inform assessment design, although the level of awareness demonstrated by staff at the visit suggests that this may not have a

significant influence on practice. Nevertheless, arrangements for adjustments and support for individual students were reported as positive.

2.50 There is clear guidance on marking and moderation, which is monitored by Programme Leaders and external examiners. Guidance to Boards of Examiners and assessment panels is clear, and improvements have been made to the data available to allow for greater analysis of marks across modules. This is considered useful in practice and has enabled Boards to interrogate the data more effectively and compare performance across cohorts and modules.

2.51 An effort is made to manage assessment deadlines, although cross-faculty programmes can be challenging in this regard. The Assessment Framework requires that constructive and developmental feedback on assessments be provided to students within specified deadlines. There is evidence that students generally regard assessments as fair, but that fewer consider feedback as timely and even fewer that it is helpful. Students met by the team had varied experiences of the timeliness of feedback, with some citing substantial delays in receiving feedback on assessments. Staff reported that compliance with the feedback deadlines is monitored locally; that delays are communicated to students and that issues can be raised by students through module evaluations and Staff Student Liaison Committees.

2.52 Assessment in a language other than English is undertaken in two of the University's partnership arrangements, one of which is being phased out and the second moving to all-English assessment in the near future. In both cases, bilingual external examiners are used to confirm comparability of standards, and, in the latter case, the modules do not count towards degree classification. The arrangements in place are considered appropriate to the level of risk presented.

2.53 The University takes active steps to encourage good academic practice and has materials and support available to students. Plagiarism-detection software is widely used where electronic submission is practised, and the Academic Quality and Standards Committee receives an annual report on its operation. While the approach emphasises prevention, there is a formal procedure for dealing with academic integrity issues. Recent student feedback indicates widespread understanding of the University's rules on good academic practice.

2.54 The review team considers that the University's approach to assessment is appropriate and that the processes are effective in allowing students to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the learning outcomes. The team notes some minor inconsistencies in practice across the institution, particularly in the area of assessment feedback, but overall the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining

Findings

2.55 The policy and procedures for external examining are made available through the Quality Handbook. External examiners are responsible to the Senate via Faculty Programmes Committees, and are required to report on alignment with key external reference points, assessment processes, equivalence of standards, good practice and innovation. At least one external examiner must be involved in the examining process, and external examiners are full members of the relevant Board of Examiners. For postgraduate research degrees, external examiner nominations are approved at faculty level by the Director of the Faculty Graduate School, and the use of externals is recorded on an online web-based workflow management tool referred to as Post Graduate Research (PGR) Tracker.

2.56 External examiners are required to report using a standard template and may also make a separate confidential report if necessary. Where there are partnership arrangements, external examiners are asked to confirm consistency of standards across all delivery locations. External examiners' reports feed into Annual Programme Reports as part of the annual monitoring process and are responded to by Directors of Programmes, via Faculty Associate Deans (Education and Student Experience) and the central Quality, Standards and Accreditation Team. A log of issues raised by external examiners is maintained at faculty level, and a summary report is discussed at Faculty Programmes Committees and the Academic Quality and Standards Committee. A separate analysis of issues is undertaken centrally and reported to this Committee. Students are notified of the name of their external examiner via the programme specification; external examiner reports should be made available to student representatives through Faculty Programmes Committees and Staff Student Liaison Committees. The Students' Union Vice-President (Education) also receives all reports.

2.57 The review team considered the approach by analysing key policies and procedures, and scrutinising examples of the policy in action, including external examiner reports and responses. The team also met students and staff during the visit to discuss the operation of external examining.

2.58 The review team considers that the procedures for the appointment of external examiners are sound. There are clear criteria for nomination and appointment, which refer to national criteria relating to expertise and independence. If any appointment does not meet the criteria, there is a procedure for evaluating the rationale for the appointment, which would be reported to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee. Letters of appointment clearly set out the conditions and expectations of external examiners, and the Quality Handbook provides further guidance. Faculties are responsible for induction, with a system providing a central repository for document storage under development to support this.

2.59 The standard report template covers all the key issues related to standards and procedures. There are clear processes for dealing with and following up reports, which demonstrates that reports feature prominently in the annual monitoring processes. Reports are responded to in a thorough manner, and there are checks on this process at faculty level and overview reports at the Academic Quality and Standards Committee. The review team saw evidence of how a report that had raised concerns had been thoroughly investigated and addressed. Feedback to external examiners includes details of

any necessary actions, and any proposal not to act on a recommendation must be cleared by the relevant Associate Dean.

2.60 The review team confirmed that external examiners are named in programme specifications and some students met by the team were familiar with the role. The Academic Student Representation Policy clearly states that external examiners' reports should be shared with students through Staff Student Liaison Committees, and the team also heard of additional ways that these could be provided. However, the evidence available to the team did not indicate that reports are routinely shared with students; Staff Student Liaison Committee minutes reviewed by the team are inconsistent in demonstrating that reports had been considered. Furthermore, the University's own faculty audits failed to find evidence in some cases. The review team therefore **recommends** that the University takes action to make external examiner reports systematically available to all students.

2.61 The review team considers that the University has robust procedures for external examining and makes good use of these reports, although greater consistency is required in sharing these with students. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review

Findings

2.62 The University's approach to programme monitoring and review is set out in the Quality Handbook. As outlined in section A3.3 of this report, annual monitoring is undertaken at module, programme and faculty level with Faculty Programmes Committees receiving Annual Programme Reports. Central oversight is exercised through the Academic Quality and Standards Committee, through Faculty Programme Reports, risk registers and action plans. The Academic Quality and Standards Committee produces an overview report of institutional issues arising from annual monitoring and maintains a central action log. In addition to the standard module and programme monitoring reports, there is an institutional-level Collaborative Provision Annual Report Form, which is considered by the relevant Faculty Programmes Committee and by the Collaborative Provision Subcommittee of the Academic Quality and Standards Committee. Processes for the approval of programme modifications and for the closure of programmes are detailed in the Quality Handbook. As outlined in section A3.1 of this report, periodic review follows the same process as for validation of a new programme.

2.63 The review team considered documentation relating to the procedures for programme monitoring and review, and case studies for both validations and the discontinuation of programmes. The team also met staff and students during the review to discuss their experience of monitoring and review.

2.64 The review team observed variation in the detail provided through both module and programme-level monitoring. The same was observed in the extent to which minutes of the Faculty Programmes Committee reflect scrutiny of the annual monitoring documentation, which partly reflects the 'by exception' reporting approach undertaken above module level and the different subcommittee structures within faculties. The annual monitoring templates require areas for enhancement to be explicitly outlined, and the team saw illustrative examples demonstrating the response of programmes and faculties to this approach. Students inform the monitoring process through the completion of module evaluations and through student representation on key committees, although, as noted in section B5, there is inconsistency in the extent to which students are informed of the outcomes of their feedback.

2.65 The overview report and complementary risk register produced for the Academic Quality and Standards Committee's consideration are detailed and thorough, drawing out themes of risk and good practice from the faculty reports. The approach to the monitoring of partnership provision is largely discursive and the template is flexible to support different types of arrangement while allowing for robust monitoring.

2.66 The Quality Handbook sets out the process for managing modifications to modules and programmes, defining what constitutes minor or major changes. Faculties are responsible for approving and maintaining records of minor modifications. While these records vary between faculties in the level of detail and completeness, programme specifications normally record all points of validation, re-validation and modification. Thus, the University is assured that Faculty Programmes Committees have sufficient information to judge the point at which cumulative modifications affect overall programme aims. Although the precise responsibilities and process for modification approval are not clear from the Faculty Programmes Committee minutes provided, the review team

considers that programme specifications provide sufficient information to support a reasonable decision and that key staff are cognisant of their responsibilities.

2.67 The annual monitoring system and programme validation process are relatively new in the current form and both have been reviewed by the University following 12 months of operation. The University also instigated a cross-faculty audit process following the first year of operation of the new QMEF to check compliance with the new approach. While this identified a number of gaps in documentation, the University confirmed that this was due to the move to a central repository for document storage, rather than an absence of documentation, and that this has now been addressed. The University is considering a number of different models for faculty audit moving forwards.

2.68 The decision for programme closure is delegated to faculties, with notification to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee, although the review team noted a number of discontinued programmes that had not been formally recorded as such in the relevant minutes of the Academic Quality and Standards Committee in 2013-14. The team heard that the programme closure process is not applied to situations such as the suspension of recruitment. As such circumstances are likely to present the same, or similar, risks to the student experience as a programme closure, the team considers that the University could not therefore be assured that adequate planning and support for the enrolled cohort is always in place. Furthermore, evidence from the formal documentation relating to programme closure did not always follow the spirit of the procedure in terms of timeliness and the extent of consideration. The review team heard of a case where the planning of a programme closure had been timely and included regular consultation with the students affected. However, this was not supported by the formal documentation presented and the extent to which students are routinely consulted on the implications for their experience was not clear. Although standard templates are in place, such as notification to applicants, these are not used consistently. While the team was reassured by the evidence supporting programme closure at a partner, reservations remained as to the robustness of the approach taken for campus provision. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that the University revises the process of programme closure to ensure that the interests of all parties are adequately protected, both for programme closure and situations such as recruitment suspension, which have similar implications for the enrolled cohort during the period of suspension.

2.69 The review team considers that the procedures for annual monitoring and review are generally secure, with clear and robust policies in place to govern implementation and monitoring. However, concerns remain regarding the robustness of the approach to, and oversight of, the security of students' academic interests in the event of proposed programme closures and suspensions. In particular, the review team considers that there is insufficient emphasis given to ensuring that the process is timely and comprehensive in its coverage. The review team therefore concludes that while the Expectation is met overall, there is a moderate risk to the student experience for students on discontinued programmes.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Moderate

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

2.70 The University has regulations and procedures in place for managing academic appeals and student complaints, which are set out in the University Calendar. The University website outlines the two processes and offers guidance to students and staff in making, and dealing with, appeals or complaints. Both processes provide criteria on eligibility to make a complaint and/or appeal. Information is also available for applicants, research students and for students studying at a partner provider.

2.71 Both the academic appeals and the student complaints procedures have three stages, including an informal stage intended to enable early resolution. Each stage has timescales drawn up in consultation with the Students' Union as part of a review in 2012-13. Adherence to these timescales is monitored by members of the Quality, Standards and Accreditation Team. Independent advice and guidance is provided through the Students' Union Advice Centre. In addition, the University provides training to those responsible for Chairing panels, and administering complaints and appeals, and the Students' Union Student Advisers. The Academic Quality and Standards Committee receives an annual report and a further report is considered by the Senate, which summarises academic appeals that have progressed to the third and final stage of the appeals process. An annual report of complaints, appeals and academic integrity is also received by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee for postgraduate research programmes.

2.72 The review team considered documentation relating to the regulations and procedures for appeals and complaints, including the information available through the website and reports to committees. The team also met staff involved in considering, resolving and supporting students in the appeals and complaints process, and spoke to current students.

2.73 The University has worked closely with the Students' Union to improve both the accessibility of the procedures and the monitoring of actions resulting from an appeal or complaint. As a result, dedicated website pages are now in place for staff and students that clearly differentiate between the appeals and complaints information to make clearer the circumstances in which each should be used. Clear guidance notes, specific to appeals and complaints, are also provided for staff to complement the formal procedures, providing quick reference points and including templates for correspondence. A Complaints and Appeals Forum has also been established to provide a platform for sharing experiences although this is still at an early stage.

2.74 Efforts are made wherever reasonable and possible to benefit students, such as allowing students to elect for the most advantageous version of the regulations if these have been changed during their studies. This option is made clear to students on the relevant forms, and regulations are accessible on the website through archived versions of the University Calendar. Staff and students met during the review confirmed that information was easy to access and understand.

2.75 The University places a particular emphasis on early resolution, with a high percentage of complaints and appeals resolved at the first, and least formal, stage. Once the formal procedures have been invoked, the process continues to allow for flexible formats

such as video/telephone conferencing in addition to face-to-face meetings. The University also has a mediation service, which is explicitly referenced at each stage of the complaints procedure, and website information on this service is comprehensive. The review team confirms that mediation has been used successfully to resolve complaints and is also available to support all parties following completion of a complaint. The team considers the clarity, scope and effectiveness of the complaint and appeals procedures and the emphasis on early, and alternative forms of, resolution to be **good practice**.

2.76 The annual report to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee is detailed and includes reflection on any areas in which practice might be improved. The University also monitors complaints and appeals received from different categories of students, such as students studying for postgraduate research degrees. Furthermore, the annual review of the Admissions Policy includes reflection on any complaints received during the previous year that relate to admissions.

2.77 The review team considers that the University deals with complaints and appeals effectively, and particular efforts have been made to ensure that the procedures are clear and easily accessible to both staff and students. There is an emphasis on early resolution and alternative forms of resolution, and evidence that this approach is successful. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.78 The University's International Strategy reflects the strategic approach to partnership working and demonstrates an aspiration to build strong global partnerships in research, enterprise and educational collaborations. The University manages a risk-based portfolio of partners, learning, codifying and managing this activity within the framework of the Collaborative Provision Policy. This policy was revised in September 2013 to be aligned with changes to the Quality Code, which facilitated the streamlining of a number of previous policies and procedures. A further review after one year of operation introduced further revisions regarding the typology and approval arrangements. Arrangements with partnerships are managed and monitored through Faculty Programmes Committees, with oversight being exercised by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee. Since autumn 2014, the Academic Quality and Standards Committee has established a Collaborative Provision Subcommittee to handle delegated partnership business.

2.79 The review team explored the partnership approval process, programme approval and monitoring, assessment processes and the management of learning opportunities by analysing relevant documentation and discussing these with staff who work with partners. The team also met students who are currently studying at, or had progressed from, partnerships, and students with different experiences of placement.

2.80 The University operates a proportionate approach to approving collaborative provision, in line with the principles defined in the Collaborative Provision Policy, ensuring that all provision is financially viable and fully costed. There is a well-defined distinction between consideration of the business case and academic approval, with the latter being undertaken through the standard validation process. Both the business and the academic case are thoroughly checked at the inception of the partnership and regularly thereafter, through the Collaborative Provision Annual Report Form, which checks the business aspects of the partnership and through annual monitoring of each programme.

2.81 Risks are handled effectively at the initiation of a relationship. A risk assessment form is completed and the faculty works with the Quality, Standards and Accreditation Team and Legal Services to undertake due diligence. Risk is considered throughout the relationship with a due diligence check at five-yearly intervals, and in the interim if issues are raised in the annual report. Memoranda of Agreement have due authority and are signed by the Vice-Chancellor or authorised substitutes.

2.82 There is a clear and useful typology of collaborative arrangements in the Collaborative Provision Policy and the stages of approval are well-defined. The current list of 45 collaborative partners includes a large number of split-site PhDs, doctoral training centres and Erasmus Mundi Master's and PhD programmes. Erasmus Mundus programmes have annual joint boards, and the split of responsibilities for joint PhD degrees is clearly captured in implementation agreements.

2.83 All standard University procedures for validation, admission and assessment of students, external examining processes and annual monitoring are applied to partnership provision, thus ensuring consistency and comparability. Collaboration Sponsors for each

partner also complete a Collaborative Provision Annual Report Form. This is an effective approach that enables risks to be assessed on a regular basis and prompt action to be taken where necessary. The University manages overseas relationships effectively, including a branch campus in Malaysia and a partnership with a university in China, and with institutions in Spain and Singapore. A new Collaborative Provision Subcommittee of the Academic Quality and Standards Committee has been established to enable closer oversight and foster consistency, although it was too early at the time of the review to gauge whether this had been effective in this regard.

2.84 There is a robust moderation system, and wherever possible internal moderators and external examiners are responsible for sampling module assessments that operate on the home campus and at the partner institution, although reporting is undertaken separately for each delivery point. Where modules operate only at a partner they are moderated in the standard manner. As outlined in section B6 of this report, moderation procedures are in place for the few modules at partnerships that are assessed in a language other than English.

2.85 Comprehensive definitions of roles within a partnership are provided in the Collaborative Provision Policy, and role holders provide the proper oversight and support. The faculty that owns a programme designates a Collaboration Sponsor to lead the approval of a new partnership and programme, and the Quality, Standards and Accreditation Team provides the necessary support to this sponsor. An Academic Link Tutor identified for the partnership manages day-to-day liaison with Programme Leaders at the University and at the partner, and the review team heard of appropriate variations to this in the case of small volume and cross-faculty partnerships. Flying faculty staff visit overseas partners and USMC to supplement subject expertise in programme delivery and also serve as an additional link with the partner.

2.86 The responsibilities and requirements for admission are unambiguously specified in the approved programme specification and the Memoranda of Agreement. The review team heard that with new initiatives, like the inauguration of USMC, the University took a phased approach to devolving responsibilities for admissions based on levels of confidence and supported by the necessary training.

2.87 Memoranda of Agreements refer to the use of logos and intellectual property, and the need for approval of published information by both the University and the partner. Faculties have delegated responsibility for checking the accuracy of public information for partner providers and there is evidence that regular monitoring of information is taking place. The University produces all certificates for collaborative provision with the exception of one joint Erasmus Mundus programme where the University is not the lead partner.

2.88 The University has effective policies and procedures for placement and study abroad, which are described in the Quality Handbook. In addition to a Placement and Study Abroad Policy there is a Fitness to Practice procedure that covers health professionals and teacher education, and addresses issues such as health, academic progress and professional behaviour. A Placements Forum, set up in May 2014, effectively promotes the new policy and enables experiences to be shared. Faculties have robust mechanisms to support students on placement and there are designated staff to manage the process properly and maintain up-to-date records. Students met during the review reported a predominantly positive experience of placement, covering a very wide range of placement types, lengths and locations. Those students who had studied abroad felt well prepared and supported by the University.

2.89 Faculty or programme documents are appropriately adapted to the specific needs of the discipline, with PSRB requirements captured and mapped against standards.

Information is available to students on the website and through handbooks. Where appropriate, there is one placement handbook, while some subjects publish multiple tailored documents. Examples include the detailed and comprehensive guidance provided to medical students and trainee teachers, and also to their mentors. Faculties energetically monitor the quality of work-based learning. For each new placement provider there is a legally binding agreement setting out the rights and responsibilities of the University, the partner and the student. One partner coordinates their own placements, and the University affords rigorous oversight by providing the placement handbook and assessing the learning outcomes.

2.90 The review team considers that the University has thorough processes for the management of provision with others and that these are operated effectively by staff across the institution. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Findings

2.91 The University Calendar sets out the regulatory framework for research degrees. The Code of Practice for Research Candidature and Supervision and associated guidance is provided in the Calendar and linked to from the Quality Handbook. Directors of Faculty Graduate Schools are responsible for oversight and monitoring of research degree programmes, reporting annually to Faculty Programmes Committees and the Academic Quality and Standards Committee. The University has a Researcher Development and Graduate Centre, which is supported by a Researcher Development and Graduate Centre Advisory Group Chaired by the University Director of Graduate Studies, who reports to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee. The Researcher Development and Graduate Centre acts as a pan-institutional forum for the monitoring and enhancement of research degree programmes. An external examiners system is in place to secure academic standards.

2.92 The review team considered a range of documentary evidence, including online resources that support the management and implementation of research degrees. In addition, the team met staff responsible for programmes, supervisors of research students, and a group of postgraduate research students.

2.93 The regulatory framework for research degrees and Code of Practice for Research Candidature and Supervision provide a secure framework in which to operate research degree programmes. The Code of Practice is reviewed annually to ensure that it reflects developing practice in supporting research degrees and that it remains consistent with external reference points. Students are involved in the membership of the review group. As a result of the most recent review, the University introduced the requirement for each academic discipline to develop a doctoral profile, which clearly sets out programme aims, structure, processes and the opportunities provided in each department.

2.94 The Code of Practice for Research Candidature and Supervision sets out characteristics expected from an environment where research students would be admitted. Directors of Faculty Graduate Schools ensure that an appropriate environment is in place as part of the admissions process. Postgraduate research students are regarded as integral to the University research community and to the achievement of its mission and intentions in research and education. The review team heard views from research students that confirmed that this principle was a fair representation of the research environment offered by the University.

2.95 The operation of the procedures for research students is managed through an online web-based workflow management tool referred to as PGR Tracker. The tool was developed in one faculty, has been implemented in six faculties and will be used across the whole institution by September 2015. The tool is designed to track progress against milestones, capture completed documents, log training undertaken and record important interactions between students and supervisory teams. The system also enables systematic monitoring of progression, submission and completion rates. The University has plans to extend data to cover employment and destination data. Supervisory teams, research

students and Directors of Faculty Graduate Schools reported that this is a valuable tool which allows for effective oversight of student progress and the operation of supervisory teams. The team therefore concludes that the development and implementation of PGR Tracker is **good practice** for the benefits it brings to supervisory teams, students and senior academic staff in the monitoring of postgraduate research student progress.

2.96 Admission procedures are described in the Code of Practice for Research Candidature and Supervision, and the University has recently introduced a revised training programme for those involved in admissions, to ensure staff are informed about diversity issues and other developments. As part of this process, each academic area is developing a person specification for research degree candidates to allow a more consistent interview process across the institution. New students are provided with an induction at central, faculty and academic unit levels, the latter including information on entitlements and resources, and the provision of faculty handbooks. A considerable volume of information is also available online. The students met by the review team reported a broadly positive experience of admission and induction, and confirmed that relevant information on programmes of study is readily available.

2.97 Team supervision is a formal requirement of the Code of Practice for Research Candidature and Supervision, and there is a mandatory programme of supervisor training for all staff new to supervision, supplemented by local mentoring within supervisory teams. Academic staff reported that the training adequately prepared them for their role as supervisors. From 2014-15 supervisors taking on new research students are required to attend mandatory refresher training. Allocation of supervisors and workload is monitored effectively using PGR Tracker. Faculties provide handbooks for all supervisors based on an institutional template. There is a clear policy on minimum contact between supervisory team and research students, which also specifies the roles and responsibilities of all parties; students met by the review team confirmed that their experiences were in line with this framework.

2.98 The Code of Practice for Research Candidature and Supervision sets out two elements for reviewing progress of research students: firstly, a formal annual review, and secondly, a formal transfer/upgrade to PhD. These milestones are recorded in PGR Tracker. The Code of Practice allows for variation in the timing of the transfer/upgrade, provided that it happens more than six months before the submission of the final thesis. The review team heard from staff and students that the timing of upgrades varies significantly in practice, with a commensurate variation in the amount of material expected in the upgrade/transfer report. The team also observed that in both policy and practice, the composition of the transfer/upgrade panel included one of the supervisory team as a full member alongside an independent assessor. The team considers that this upgrade/transfer approach is at variance with the stated purpose of the process in ensuring that students are suitably prepared for final assessment. The team also considers that this is not appropriately aligned with the Quality Code, *Chapter B11*, which states that individuals involved in the review of students' progress should be independent of the supervisors and the research student. For these reasons the review team **recommends** that the University ensures that the composition of the transfer/upgrade panel is independent of the supervisory team and that a consistent approach to the timing of the transfer/upgrade panel is adopted.

2.99 The Code of Practice for Research Candidature and Supervision requires all students to have access to suitable research and transferable skills training. Each student must complete an Academic Needs Analysis, which is subsequently reviewed annually and is systematically monitored through PGR Tracker. Training is delivered by a number of central units (Researcher Development and Graduate Centre, careers, library) together with faculties and external providers, and was described as effective by research students. The Researcher Development and Graduate Centre Advisory Group plays a coordinating

role ensuring that the University's obligations as a signatory to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, and as a holder of the HR Excellence in Research Award, are met. The training programme is also mapped onto the Vitae Researcher Development Framework. There is separate compulsory training for students who contribute to teaching and learning, as described in section B4. Meetings held with students and staff confirmed that these arrangements are effective in providing training and support for research students and operate as described.

2.100 The monitoring framework requires faculties to complete an annual report on research programmes. These are considered by the University Director of Graduate Studies, who reports to the Academic Quality and Standards Committee. This Committee also considers annual reports on management information related to research degrees. The review team concludes that these processes provide effective institutional oversight of research degrees. The new periodic review process for research degree programmes mirrors the taught programme review process, and, although this process was in its infancy at the time of the review, the team considers that this development has the potential to have a positive impact on the management of research degree programmes.

2.101 Assessment of research degrees includes an external examiner, whose appointment must be confirmed by the relevant Director of Faculty Graduate School. Clear criteria for the award are set out in the Code of Practice for Research Candidature and Supervision. Doctorates with a taught element have additional assessment requirements, as specified in the University Calendar, and a programme specification. The eligibility and appointment of external examiners is monitored through PGR Tracker and external examiners' reports are considered by the Faculty Graduate School Director. Any concerns raised by external examiners are logged and included in an annual report to Faculty Programmes Committees, and subsequently to the Researcher Development and Graduate Centre Advisory Group and the Academic Quality and Standards Committee. A separate External Research Degrees Committee is responsible for considering the assessment of research degrees at accredited partner institutions. The review team discussed these processes with staff and are confident that they operate effectively.

2.102 Overall, the review team considers that the University has an effective approach to the management and operation of research degrees, and identified an example of good practice in this regard. However, the review team considers that the significant variation in timing and the composition of the formal upgrade panel could potentially present a risk to the student experience, particularly in the preparation for final assessment. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met overall, although the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.103 In determining its judgement on the quality of student learning opportunities at the University, the review team considered the findings against the criteria as outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All expectations in this area are met and the level of risk is considered low in all cases, with the exception of Expectations B8 and B11, where the review team considers there is a moderate risk to the quality of learning opportunities.

2.104 Recommendations for action are identified by the review team in the areas of student engagement and external examining, where a more consistent and systematic approach is required, respectively, to ensure that the outcomes of module feedback, and external examiners reports, are shared with students. Such actions require minor amendments to current procedures and therefore are considered to be of low risk. The review team makes further recommendations regarding the programme closure process and the operation of the transfer/upgrade panel for postgraduate research degrees. In both areas there was concern that insufficient emphasis or priority was given to ensuring that the approach fulfilled its stated purpose. While both procedures were considered broadly adequate, there were some shortcomings, particularly in the rigour exercised by the University in enacting the approach. The review team therefore considers that these areas present a moderate risk to the quality of student learning opportunities.

2.105 The review team noted a number of aspects of the institutional approach that make a positive contribution to ensuring the quality of student learning opportunities. These features of good practice relate to examples of pan-institutional developments that have had a beneficial impact on the student experience, namely the Curriculum Innovation Programme, the Southampton Welcome Project and the use of PGR Tracker for postgraduate research degrees. In addition, good practice is noted in the engagement of students in such enhancement projects, and in the definition and operation of procedures for complaints and appeals.

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

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Findings

3.1 The University's website contains detailed information about the organisation. This includes its strategy; organisational and governance structures; financial information; and the University's Equality and Diversity Policy. The Communications and Marketing team is responsible for the leadership and strategic direction of University communications, and its web presence. Before publication, website information is subject to faculty-level checks and submitted in draft form to the Communications and Marketing team to ensure accuracy. A protocol exists to track responsibility and accountability for published information, which is reviewed and monitored by the Information Governance Group. The University produces print prospectuses for its undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, with further details on programme structure and module content listed on relevant pages of the University's website. Programme specifications provide the definitive source of information published in prospectuses and on the website. The Collaborative Provision Policy sets out responsibilities for the management of information published by partners. The Student Charter is accessible to all students and was jointly developed by the University and Students' Union.

3.2 The review team scrutinised the approach to the management of information through consideration of policy documents, procedures and relevant minutes of meetings. The team also considered the accessibility and accuracy of information produced by the University through the website, prospectuses, student handbooks, programme specifications and policy documents. Discussions were held with staff and students during the review to explore the approach to the provision of information.

3.3 Information for current students is provided at the point of enrolment through the Southampton Welcome Project, through the VLE and through the SUSSED online portal, which provides a central point of access for a range of programme information. In addition, full information on modules and programmes of study is provided through the Student Record Systems and in student handbooks. A mobile application provides access to frequently needed information such as timetables, library opening hours and maps. Students met by the review team confirmed that the information provided prior to entry and during induction was accurate and helpful. Students cited a range of sources used for information about their studies, including the online portal and the VLE. The Southampton Welcome Project was particularly praised by students as a vehicle for providing a coherent approach to the provision of pre-entry information. Upon completion, undergraduate and postgraduate taught students receive a transcript detailing their module and programme results. Students who do not complete their programme are also provided with a transcript at the relevant exit point.

3.4 The University publishes a general statement on additional programme costs on its website and within its prospectus, and students are signposted to faculties for more detailed information. Some information on the costs associated with modules is published within the module profiles, which are available online, although the review team saw inconsistencies in approach across faculties and academic units. Additional costs are not routinely published at programme level, meaning that information about any extra costs to be incurred is not easily

accessible to prospective or current students. The team met some students who were unaware of the full extent of additional costs prior to entry. Furthermore, the team identified a case where pre-entry information about the financial support provided to purchase required materials had been inaccurate. The review team therefore **recommends** that the University adopts a coordinated approach for providing information on additional course costs at programme level.

3.5 The University's regulations are accessible to all staff and students via the University Calendar. Information about procedures for assuring academic standards, quality assurance and enhancement is hosted online within the Quality Handbook, which is aligned to the Quality Code and updated on a rolling basis in line with policy revisions. The University publishes a Collaborative Provision Register and a Register of Enhanced Progression Agreements on its website. The Collaborative Provision section of the Quality Handbook establishes the framework under which Collaborative Provision operates at the University and acts as a guide for faculties in the development, approval and ongoing operation of partnership arrangements. Information provided in the University Calendar and Quality Handbook is written in clear, accessible language. The University has worked with the Students' Union in this regard, particularly in relation to complaints and appeals. The review team considers the clarity, availability and accessibility of University regulations, policies and procedures to be **good practice**.

3.6 Overall, the review team considers that the University takes a considered approach to the provision of information to ensure that material is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy and the review team identified both strengths and areas for improvement. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

3.7 In determining its judgement on the quality of information about learning opportunities the review team considered the findings against the criteria outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

3.8 The review team considers that the overall approach to the provision of information is sound and that the institution produces information for its intended audiences that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The team recommends that a minor operational change be undertaken to ensure that information on additional programme costs is consistently provided at programme level to prospective and current students. The review team also notes good practice in the clarity, availability and accessibility of information on the University's regulatory and procedural frameworks.

3.9 The review team concludes that the quality of information about learning opportunities produced by the University **meets** UK expectations.

4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1 The University considers the six strategic priorities identified within the University's Vision 2020 statement to be the basis of its enhancement strategy, which is pursued in practice through a number of strategic initiatives. The QMEF sets the pattern for the University's enhancement strategy, and monitoring mechanisms are designed to have an enhancement ethos. An annual enhancement theme is used to provide a common focus for activities, with themes identified from annual monitoring following discussion in the Education and Student Experience Executive Group. Annual monitoring at module and programme levels is designed to encourage reflection, and the outcomes of this feed into Faculty Programme Reports, which in turn inform the Academic Quality and Standards Committee on progress. The quality assurance processes for postgraduate research degrees similarly ensures that opportunities for enhancement are identified and disseminated through the Researcher Development and Graduate Centre Advisory Group.

4.2 Enhancement activity is also captured through central initiatives and projects that can arise from annual monitoring or from horizon scanning activities. An Education Enhancement Fund is available. Emphasis is given to the work in developing learning technologies by the Centre for Innovation in Technologies and Education and the subsequent launch of the ILIaD, whose role is to spearhead new developments, identify future priorities, facilitate the dissemination of good practice in teaching and learning, and oversee the development of the Southampton Opportunity initiative (see section B4).

4.3 The review team analysed the approach to enhancement by reviewing the relevant documentation outlining the intent, operation and impact of enhancement activity within the institution. The team also met staff and students during the review to discuss the approach.

4.4 Enhancement themes are chosen annually with staff involved in the selection of the theme. A focus on the enhancement theme is built into routine quality assurance processes with commentary on actions taken required through annual monitoring reports. These then inform the selection of the next enhancement theme. The most recent enhancement theme has been feedback to students on assessment, which has been reinforced by a conference organised by the ILIaD in February 2014. Good use has been made of students in taking forward the theme, both as Feedback Champions and in related projects, such as developing a website of support materials for students. The review team heard of a number of innovations in assessment, although students met by the team were less aware of improvements, and NSS results have yet to show the impact. Nevertheless, the enhancement theme demonstrates a deliberate institutional strategy, which has been implemented and has made imaginative use of students as partners in development (see also the good practice noted in section B5).

4.5 Further examples of strategic, pan-institutional initiatives introduced to enhance student learning opportunities are the Southampton Welcome Project, the Curriculum Innovation Programme and the Southampton Opportunity initiative. As outlined in section B4 of this report, the Southampton Welcome Project has provided a more coordinated and coherent transitional experience to studying at the University and has been well received by students. This project was evidence-based, identified priority areas for development in each year of implementation, and has made incremental enhancements from year to year across

the University. An end to the project is now foreseen, as it becomes embedded into normal practice. The Curriculum Innovation Programme is outlined in section B3 of this report and is intended to broaden the offering to students by allowing access to modules based on research strengths, as well as introducing the option of taking a minor pathway in particular areas. Although this is not available to all students, such as those on programmes linked to PRSBs, the student demand has been considerable. Furthermore, the management of the project has facilitated innovation by staff in teaching, learning and assessment practice. The Southampton Opportunity initiative outlined in section B4 of this report demonstrates a similar approach with respect to a centrally led project designed to enhance access to, and awareness of, student learning opportunities. This is a more recent initiative and therefore less evidence is available regarding impact to date, although student champion interns have identified, profiled and recently published curricular, co and extracurricular based opportunities through an new website.

4.6 Although relatively new, the ILIaD has a role in the approach to enhancement in providing a teaching-research-technology nexus, providing a more rounded approach to supporting the development of staff practice. The ILIaD disseminates good practice through its workshops and evidence from staff and students confirms that this is effective. The Centre for Innovation in Technologies in Education special interest groups on topics related to technology-enhanced learning, and support for the development of massive open online courses (MOOCs), are examples of such activities. Expertise developed in the process is expected to feed through into normal practice.

4.7 The University has also taken steps through its Academic Reward and Recognition scheme to ensure that research and teaching are valued equally, and that staff can be rewarded for excellence and innovation in teaching through professorial titles. Eight such promotions have been made to date. Further strategies to reward teaching excellence and innovation are provided through the Vice-Chancellor's Teaching Awards, through engagement with the UK Professional Standards Framework and through student-led awards. The Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice explicitly addresses enhancement, and the Peer Development of Teaching Policy aims to engage all staff in enhancement activities.

4.8 The University has in the past two years undertaken a wide review of policies and structures within the new QMEF. Examples are the review of annual monitoring and the introduction of periodic review for postgraduate research provision. The University adopts a systematic approach to reviewing the operation of new policies after the first year of operation and evaluating the impact of the changes. This approach to policy development demonstrates a deliberate and systematic effort to enhance processes and to engage staff.

4.9 As outlined above, the University adopts a strategic approach to embedding enhancement in routine processes such as annual monitoring and staff reward structures, and supplementing these through time-limited projects and initiatives. These projects involve students in the design and delivery, and have had an impact on the quality of learning opportunities provided to students, and on the teaching and learning practice of staff. The review team saw evidence that this approach successfully engages staff and students and therefore considers the strategic approach to cross-institutional enhancement through projects and activities to be **good practice**.

4.10 The review team considers that the University takes deliberate steps to enhance the provision of learning opportunities, and the strategic approach is good practice. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.11 In determining its judgement on the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the University, the review team considered the findings against the criteria as outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

4.12 The review team considers that deliberate steps are taken to enhance student learning opportunities. The University adopts a systematic and strategic approach based principally on embedding enhancement activities into routine quality assurance procedures and supplementing these through centrally driven initiatives and projects. The establishment of routine approaches to identify and evaluate development opportunities creates an enhancement culture at module, programme and faculty levels, and a shared understanding of the channels for improvements. Enhancement projects and initiatives are approached in a planned manner and good use is made of student and staff engagement in these activities. The strategic approach to cross-institutional enhancement is considered good practice.

4.13 The review team therefore concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the University is **commended**.

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

Findings

5.1 The University and Students' Union have articulated their relationship and approaches to student consultation within their published Relationship Agreement. It outlines the key features of the relationship, including a commitment to strategic partnership; ensuring the Students' Union is consulted on key decisions; adopting a student-centred approach to the development of academia; and a principle of openness and trust. The document is signed by both the Vice-Chancellor and Students' Union President and is publicly available to students via the website.

5.2 Students are members of most key teaching and learning committees within the University, including at the academic unit and faculty level. Staff Student Liaison Committee meetings are operated under a co-chairing system, with students and staff sharing this role to encourage meetings to be conducted in partnership. The Students' Union provides training and support for student representatives so they can operate in this co-chairing role effectively, although the extent of co-chairing was variable.

5.3 Students are involved at all stages of the programme approval process. The process allows for broad initial consultation with students as stakeholders; a student panel member on the Faculty Scrutiny Group that provides academic scrutiny of new programmes; and student representatives on Faculty Programmes Committees that make the final decision on programme approval.

5.4 The University facilitates a range of student buddy schemes via the Southampton Opportunity project. While faculties operate varying models, the principle of the buddy scheme is for current students to support new students entering the University for the first time. It creates networks of peer support for students when they first arrive, and allows students from different years of study to build relationships. One faculty operates a specific programme of student buddying for students arriving in Southampton after completing the first two years of their study at the University's Malaysia campus.

5.5 The aforementioned student champions scheme within the Southampton Opportunity project (section B5) is an innovative example of students fronting learning enhancement within the University. The champions cover areas such as learning technology (iChamps) and assignment feedback (Feedback Champs). The review team met students involved with these projects, who spoke highly of the initiative and the skills it had enabled them to develop. Staff were equally positive, citing benefits to their own practice that they had derived from their work with the student champions.

5.6 A number of cross-institutional projects have also arisen from student feedback and have involved students in their development. Examples of this are the Southampton Welcome Project, which offers new students a comprehensive approach to induction and transition into higher education. This project was developed in consultation with the Students' Union and used feedback from students to identify priority areas. There is clear evidence of evaluation of the project by students, and students reported that they felt induction was improved as a result of the project. A further example was the Curriculum Innovation Programme, which offers students flexibility and interdisciplinary options within their studies. Again, this project was developed in consultation with students and included focus groups with students to evaluate the impact of the provision.

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 29-32 of the [Higher Education Review handbook](#).

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

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

Academic standards

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

Award

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

Blended learning

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

Credit(s)

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

Degree-awarding body

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

Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

Dual award or double award

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

e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning

Enhancement

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

Expectations

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

Flexible and distributed learning

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

See also **distance learning**.

Framework

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

Framework for Higher Education Qualifications

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

Good practice

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

Learning opportunities

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

Learning outcomes

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

Multiple awards

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

Operational definition

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

Programme (of study)

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

Programme specifications

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

Public information

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

Quality Code

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

Reference points

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

Subject Benchmark Statement

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

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)

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

Threshold academic standard

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

Virtual learning environment (VLE)

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

Widening participation

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

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Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB

Tel: 01452 557 000
Email: enquiries@qaa.ac.uk
Website: www.qaa.ac.uk

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