



# Higher Education Review of the University of Wolverhampton

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 Wolverhampton. The review took place from 2 to 5 February 2015 and was conducted by a team of five reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Sue Bloxham
- Mr Hugo Burchell
- Ms Claire Morgan
- Mr Anthony Turjansky
- Ms Rebekah Mahon (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by University of Wolverhampton 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)<sup>1</sup> 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 Wolverhampton 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,<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> A dedicated section explains the method for [Higher Education Review](#)<sup>4</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code).

<sup>2</sup> Higher Education Review themes: [www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106).

<sup>3</sup> QAA website: [www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us).

<sup>4</sup> Higher Education Review web pages: [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review).

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about the University of Wolverhampton

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

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

### Good practice

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

- The closely aligned range of strategies and initiatives to raise aspirations and achievement at all stages of the student lifecycle (Expectations B4, B2 and Enhancement).
- The comprehensive range of strategic initiatives to enhance student employability (Expectations B4, B3 and Enhancement).
- The embedded culture of enhancement, which fosters the creation of staff networks to promote the exchange and dissemination of effective practice (Enhancement).

### Recommendations

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

By February 2016:

- ensure that intended learning outcomes for intermediate qualifications are positively defined in course specifications (Expectation A1)
- promote existing opportunities for participation in committees, and on course validation and review panels to the full student body (Expectation B5).

### Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The review of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Sub-Strategy to clarify institutional priorities in this area and promote clearer understanding among stakeholders (Expectation B3 and Enhancement).
- The action being taken to identify and address the causes of high academic misconduct cases among international students (Expectation B6).
- The action plan in progress to address inconsistencies in the implementation of the course monitoring process (Expectation B8).

## **Theme: Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement**

The University employs a wide and diverse range of mechanisms to ensure that the student voice is an integral part of decision-making processes, particularly at the most senior level. The University works in close partnership with its Students' Union to elicit and respond to student feedback, and this has been instrumental in initiating institution-wide improvements that are either led or contributed to by students. There have been several enhancement-related projects and students have been actively involved in their development, implementation and review. Noteworthy innovations in this area include the use of social media to gather student feedback, student-led teaching awards for recognition of excellence in teaching practice, and outreach activity to increase student engagement in under-represented groups.

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 Wolverhampton**

The University of Wolverhampton (the University) gained University title in 1992, having developed from a number of predecessor institutions dating back to the early nineteenth century. Its mission is 'to be an employer-focused University connected with our local, national and global communities delivering opportunity and academic excellence'. This is set against the overarching vision to be a 'university of opportunity' - fostering enhancement through creativity and innovation, while ensuring risk is managed carefully.

The University has over 21,000 students, three-quarters of whom are studying at undergraduate level, and a large proportion gaining entry to higher education through non-traditional routes. There are four main campuses based in and around the city of Wolverhampton as well as smaller centres located in the surrounding region. The University's mission and Strategic Plan 2012-17 place an emphasis on serving the needs of the local community. This is evidenced by the University's strong regional presence, with 80 per cent of its student body coming from within a 25-mile radius, and multiple partnerships with local employers.

The University has been through a period of significant change since the last QAA review. A new Vice-Chancellor was appointed in 2011 followed by a number of other appointments to the Senior Management Team. The University has undertaken several internal reviews over the last six years, the outcomes of which have been used to inform changes to both the organisational and academic infrastructure, with a view to ensuring the University continues to remain fit for purpose and able to adapt to developments in the sector.

Between 2012 and 2014 the University restructured its provision from ten academic schools to four faculties to provide a more streamlined management structure through larger academic units. Curriculum-related changes, initiated as part of the institution-wide Learning Works project in 2008-09, include the move from 15-credit modules to 20-credit modules (or multiples thereof), and restricting the number of learning outcomes for most awards to six in an effort to rationalise the volume of assessment. Other developments include investment in resources and improvements to quality assurance processes, and these are dealt with in more detail under each of the relevant sections of the report. The University continues to evaluate the impact of recently introduced changes, through close consultation with the student body, to assure itself that the intended outcomes of revised structures and processes are being achieved. This self-reflective and careful approach has been instrumental in managing change successfully while minimising any potential disruption to the student experience.

The University is located within a region that is characterised by average or below average school attainment results and low higher education participation rates. As a regional recruiter the University recognises the challenges of working with the local population and has put in place a number of strategies for engaging local communities in higher education and, once recruited, to support progression and achievement. While the University has maintained recruitment, it is aware of the need to adapt and respond to sector-wide changes to higher education which are likely to impact on particular subject areas.

The University's previous QAA review took place in 2008 and resulted in a positive outcome, with seven features of good practice and six recommendations. The present review team found that the University has generally taken effective action in addressing the recommendations, and further embedding the areas of good practice, from the previous review. In particular, a number of the recommendations related to the University's research provision and significant improvements have been made to both the physical resources and support structures available to students undertaking a postgraduate research degree.

## **Explanation of the findings about the University of Wolverhampton**

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Findings

1.1 The University secures threshold academic standards through its processes for course approval, assessment and monitoring. Academic Regulations describe the qualifications and credit that are awarded to students in accordance with nationally recognised external reference points as contained within the Quality Code. The University byelaws contain a full list of qualification types approved for award by the Academic Board.

1.2 The University has adopted a modular structure for its taught courses based on a combination of core and option modules with a standard module size of 20 credits. The number of module learning outcomes for a standard 20-credit module is limited to four, and of course-level learning outcomes to six, to promote a consistent assessment volume across courses. The Academic Regulations have informed the production of an operational Assessment Handbook that is used for course delivery.

1.3 The review team examined how the procedures for the award of qualifications and credit operated in practice by reviewing course and module documentation, committee minutes, course approval documentation and external examiner reports. The team tested its findings through discussions with members of academic and senior staff.

1.4 Course and module specifications describe alignment with FHEQ levels and Subject Benchmark Statements and list the intended learning outcomes at the level of credit

to be awarded. Module learning outcomes are aligned with course learning outcomes and course specifications contain a matrix that demonstrates how modules at all levels contribute to the achievement of the target qualification. However, while course specifications list the qualifications available to students who exit their course prematurely, for example a Level 4 Certificate of Higher Education on completion of the first year of an honours degree, the learning outcomes for such intermediate qualifications are not positively defined. The review team therefore **recommends** that the University ensures that intended learning outcomes for intermediate qualifications are positively defined in course specifications.

1.5 The University's course approval and validation process tests alignment with the relevant external reference points to ensure that credit is of the appropriate level and volume for the qualification being awarded. The review team met academic and senior staff who demonstrated appropriate knowledge and understanding of the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements, and their application within course design and approval. These staff also confirmed that changes to the national frameworks are communicated systematically by the University's Academic Standards and Quality (ASQ) Unit, and that they are encouraged to contribute to national consultations on the development of Subject Benchmark Statements.

1.6 The University takes into account the standards and requirements of Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) for courses that contain their accreditation or qualifications. Since the previous QAA review in 2008, 54 external reviews, accreditations and re-accreditations have been completed where alignment with PSRB standards was confirmed.

1.7 External examiners' reports confirm that national threshold standards are being achieved and comment on comparability with the standards of other providers.

1.8 The University recognises the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) through its Academic Regulations which state that transcripts display both Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS) and ECTS credits, although the sample transcript received by the review team specified CATS credits only.

1.9 Overall, the review team concludes that due account is taken of national qualification and credit frameworks in setting and maintaining academic standards. The recommendation in this area will enable the University to meet the Expectation more fully, but does not impact on the security of academic standards. Therefore the review team concludes that Expectation A1 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**

1.10 The University has developed 'flexible and enabling' academic and regulatory frameworks to support students in achieving their full academic potential. There are comprehensive academic regulations in place to govern how qualifications are awarded to students on completion of, or exit from, their studies. These, accompanied by associated policies and guidelines, define the rules for the award and transfer of credit including grading, progression and classification; re-assessment and compensation; recognition of prior learning; and regulations governing academic misconduct and appeals. In addition to the General Regulations, specific regulations govern the award of foundation degrees, master's degrees and research degrees.

1.11 The University's governing body vests authority and responsibility for academic governance in the Academic Board which delegates specific functions and authority via its deliberative committee structure. While ultimate responsibility for academic standards resides with the Academic Board, delegated responsibilities are shared between the University Quality Enhancement Committee (UQEC) which oversees the operation of course approval, monitoring and review, and the University Research Committee (URC) which is also the progression and award board for research degrees. Both committees are advised by their respective subcommittees in the application and development of the regulations. University-level committees are complemented by faculty committees which report to them.

1.12 The review team examined the content of the regulations and the records of course validation panels, assessment boards and committees with responsibility for applying and evaluating them. The review team tested its findings through discussions with a range of academic and senior staff across all faculties.

1.13 Operational responsibility for the Academic Regulations and the quality processes that support them resides with Academic Registry. Quality officers based in the Academic Standards and Quality (ASQ) Unit of the Registry are assigned to faculties and come together with associate deans, principal lecturers (quality) and faculty quality administrators to form a Quality Community of Practice. The ASQ Unit provides development and training for course approval, monitoring and review as part of the University's Corporate Staff Development Programme, and staff whom the review team met indicated a high level of awareness of these processes and where to seek advice and guidance. An annual overview of standards-related issues is produced by a subdivision of the Academic Registry for the consideration of the Academic Board.

1.14 The validation process requires explicit confirmation that courses conform to the University's regulatory requirements. Faculties operate course validation according to an agreed University process and an annual summary of approved awards is received by UQEC. Course amendments, which are also managed by faculties, are similarly reported to UQEC and minor amendments are differentiated from major changes by the volume of credit and changes to learning outcomes.

1.15 Faculty assessment boards operate at module and award level and are responsible for applying the University's regulations for the award of credit and qualifications. External

examiners comment on the operation of assessment and confirm that the regulations have been applied appropriately by University assessors and assessment boards.

1.16 There is appropriate evidence that updates, exceptions and changes to Academic Regulations are overseen by UQEC, and referred for final approval by the Academic Board. These include any variations for professionally accredited courses or to meet the requirements of overseas regulatory bodies.

1.17 A review and evaluation of the University's Academic Regulations is taking place during 2014-15 with a view to changes being implemented in 2015-16. Senior staff explained that this was to ensure continuing alignment of the regulations with the national frameworks and was being informed by benchmarking with other providers. Specific areas of focus were the algorithm for calculating degree classifications, the rules governing compensation and mitigating circumstances and, more broadly, how the regulations could support flexibility in curriculum design while ensuring consistency of standards.

1.18 The review team concludes that the University's academic frameworks and regulations are comprehensive and transparent, are evaluated through the academic governance structure and are applied appropriately by course approval panels and assessment boards. Therefore the review team concludes that Expectation A2.1 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**

1.19 The University produces course and module specifications which provide the definitive record of each module and programme of study, and are developed as part of the course design and approval process. Specifications are created online using the University's student information system which provides secure access and document control. Following validation, they become the principal reference points for course delivery, assessment, monitoring and review. Changes to course and module specifications are made only on completion of formal faculty modification procedures that are overseen by UQEC.

1.20 The review team considered the format and content of course and module specifications, their use within quality assurance procedures and the processes for creating and updating them. The team also met staff and students to discuss the use and availability of specifications.

1.21 Course specifications contain information on awards including intermediate (exit) awards, alignment with FHEQ levels, Subject Benchmark Statements and any professional body requirements, course structure and course-level learning outcomes, and alignment with the University's Academic Regulations. The course learning outcomes are mapped to assessment within modules. While course specifications are not published externally, they are used in the production of Course Guides which are available to prospective and current students, alumni and other stakeholders via the University website.

1.22 Module specifications describe the FHEQ level and volume of credit to be awarded; module content, including alignment with Subject Benchmark Statements and any professional body requirements; pre-requisite modules and prohibited combinations; module learning activities and resources; and assessment mapped to intended learning outcomes. Module specifications are used to create module guides which are available to students via the course section of the virtual learning environment (VLE) and contain additional information about coursework submission and examination.

1.23 The review team concludes that the University produces, approves and maintains definitive records of its validated courses that are publicly available and controlled by formal academic approval and quality processes. Academic staff the review team met demonstrated awareness of their purpose and use within course design and approval, although their use in course monitoring and periodic review was less explicit. Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation A2.2 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**

1.24 Threshold academic standards are set through a documented course approval process. Processes, requirements, the responsibilities of participants and timeframes for the approval of new courses, including those delivered in partnership with other institutions or accredited by PSRBs, are outlined in an institutional Validation, Accreditation, Approval and Deletion Handbook.

1.25 The University's approach to validation has been revised since the last QAA review and now takes the form of an online discussion supported by a 'blog' on the VLE, with an independent external adviser involved throughout a course's iterative development. End-point validation meetings are normally only convened in exceptional circumstances, for example if they are a PSRB requirement.

1.26 Academic Board exercises its responsibility for the approval of new, or re-approval of existing, awards through UQEC. The latter has delegated authority to validate, approve and accredit new provision; this process is in turn delegated to either Faculty Quality Enhancement Committees (FQECs) or the University Quality Panel, depending on the level of risk.

1.27 The team reviewed the effectiveness of the course approval process through a review of approval documentation, reports of course validation events and minutes of relevant committees. The team also explored the way in which academic staff engage with the process and the support provided to them for participating in course validation.

1.28 There is appropriate evidence that academic standards and external reference points, including national frameworks, are formally endorsed by both the external adviser and, on behalf of the validating panel, by the Validation Chair. Their reports form part of a Validation Process Record which also includes a template of the Course Specification. These records are reviewed by a Validation and Approvals Sub Group comprising staff from the central ASQ Unit. Through a standard feedback template, designated readers from the Group confirm that due process has been followed and threshold standards confirmed. Responses are collated and a summary report is then submitted to UQEC and the Academic Board.

1.29 Course development teams make effective use of independent external advisers who have an important role in providing specialist and subject knowledge and affirming academic standards. There are clear criteria for nominating advisers which highlight subject knowledge and independence, and there is a clear flowchart outlining the stages of the appointment process. In addition to the detailed institutional handbook on course validation, external advisers receive an overview of the process and its requirements, stating that their role is to confirm that standards have been set at the appropriate levels and the course structure, content and available resources are such that these standards can be met.

1.30 Staff development on curriculum design and how to take a course through validation is provided through an in-house Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice in

Higher Education. Additional staff development on the University's quality processes is provided through a corporate staff development programme. Academic staff who met the team confirmed the efficacy of these and other sources of institutional support with regards to addressing national expectations and associated reference points in course design and approval.

1.31 Overall, the review team concludes that the University has in place an effective process for approving awards and confirming that academic standards are set at an appropriate level. Therefore Expectation A3.1 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**

1.32 The University's Academic Regulations and committee structure governing the award of credit are the same as those described in paragraphs 1.10 and 1.11. These documented processes and frameworks address the management of assessment including extenuating circumstances and the operation of assessment boards. Requirements that are outside the University's regulations, for example for PSRB-accredited courses, lead to requests for exemptions approved by the Academic Regulations Sub-Committee.

1.33 The course approval process gives consideration to the assessment methods to be used in testing the achievement of relevant learning outcomes, and these are subsequently specified in course and module specifications. Following initial approval, minor changes to assessment methods are made through a formal modification procedure whereas more significant changes may trigger a full revalidation of the award.

1.34 Staff involved in marking assessed work are expected to adhere to defined assessment criteria. Consistency and fairness in marking is then assured through internal and external moderation processes. Decisions on the achievement of individual modules or whole awards occur through a two-tier examining board structure, with oversight from the Academic Board. Module Results boards consider the performance of students, individual modules and module groups, and confirm module results. Progression and Award Boards are responsible for confirming that University regulations have been correctly applied in determining the qualification and classification of finalists and a student's right to continue study. University-wide awards boards also exist for certain types of provision, for example awards delivered through collaborative partners.

1.35 The review team reviewed a range of documentation to test how the University's processes for awarding credit operate in practice. This includes the Academic Regulations, minutes of assessment boards, course approval records, course and module specifications and external examiner reports. The team also held meetings with a range of academic and senior staff to discuss the assessment of academic standards.

1.36 Through the course approval process, the University assures itself that assessment is closely aligned to the academic standards of the award, and that the design of assessment is sufficiently robust in testing the achievement of relevant learning outcomes. Course and module guides map assessment to learning outcomes at appropriate levels.

1.37 The University has recently moved from an alpha-numeric to a percentage-based marking scheme, and this has been carefully managed through the application of a standard conversion table to maintain the security of academic standards. There are institutional-level assessment criteria which align with the new percentage marking scheme, and these are made available to staff and students in relevant course documentation.

1.38 A review of external examiners' reports and associated actions plans confirms the appropriateness of assessment in maintaining the University's own academic standards and comparability with UK threshold standards. Staff whom the review team met, including those at collaborative partners and placement providers, demonstrated a thorough awareness of the processes for assessment and the importance of their proper application in upholding standards.

1.39 Records of assessment boards confirm that decisions for the award of credit, at both module and course level, are made in accordance with the University's defined processes. Appropriate externality is achieved through the participation of external examiners who are invited to both tiers of the assessment board. The Academic Registry is responsible for the administration of all board activity, ensuring consistency in practice across the University.

1.40 In summary, the University has clearly defined learning outcomes at course and module level with appropriate alignment to assessment. Measures are in place to ensure that learning outcomes are appropriately assessed, and results moderated. External examiners are fully involved in assessment processes and in confirming the achievement of learning outcomes. Therefore the review team concludes that Expectation A3.2 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**

1.41 The University undertook an institution-wide review (Learning Works project) in 2008-09 involving an extensive review of all curriculum areas and it was deemed that this would be considered equivalent to a periodic review. Since then periodic reviews have been undertaken on a six-yearly cycle at departmental level, or as a review of a whole school or institute within a faculty. Periodic reviews involve the submission of a self-evaluation document that explicitly confirms that threshold standards are met, periodic review panels contain external subject expertise, and that the reports from reviews contain reference to discussions around alignment with external reference points including Subject Benchmark Statements and PSRB requirements.

1.42 In 2010-11, the University inaugurated a new process of course monitoring, replacing an annual 'end-point' report on course performance with Continuous Improvement Monitoring in the form of a course journal. All courses, including those delivered by a collaborative partner, are expected to keep a course journal unless a faculty chooses to cluster courses together for reporting purposes. This electronic repository serves as the basis for ensuring courses' currency and validity through an ongoing reflection on a range of management information including external examiner reports, student feedback and recruitment, progression and attainment statistics. Journals are discussed and updated at course committees which include student representation. They are then monitored at faculty level, and each submits a summary report annually to UQEC confirming the maintenance of academic standards and the effective operation of the review process. Summary reports are collated to inform the production of an overarching summary for reporting to the Academic Board.

1.43 The review team tested the University's approach to meeting this Expectation through a review of sample course journals, minutes of committees and external examiner reports. The team also held meetings with a range of staff and students who had been involved in the course monitoring process.

1.44 Course teams and course leaders have a pivotal role in ensuring the effectiveness of the continuous course monitoring process. Course journals provide appropriate assurance that academic standards are monitored and there is evidence that standards are being maintained at the appropriate level. Course committees are used to update course journals and monitor progress against identified actions. There are some inconsistencies in the way in which the process operates across the University and these are currently in the process of being addressed (see Expectation B8).

1.45 There is provision to propose changes to courses through continuous monitoring, which can be addressed through the modification process. Proposed modifications are scrutinised at faculty level, via a Working Group that reports to the relevant FQEC, and then a summary is produced each year for UQEC. An institutional handbook on the modification of existing provision provides a clear and comprehensive account of the process for progressing proposed minor and major changes. The Faculty Working Group has a role in monitoring significant cumulative change to courses which triggers a full revalidation.

1.46 Actions arising from periodic review are addressed in an action plan which is monitored at faculty level. A summary report on periodic review outcomes is produced annually for the Academic Board to enable identification of themes (including good practice) or matters that require strategic action.

1.47 The review team is satisfied that the University implements appropriate processes for monitoring the achievement and maintenance of academic standards. Therefore Expectation A3.3 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation:** Met

**Level of risk:** Low

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

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

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

### **Findings**

1.48 The University has clearly defined processes for the involvement of independent and external advice in both the setting and maintenance of academic standards. An independent external adviser is appointed for the approval and periodic review of each course (or cluster of courses) and has a role in confirming the setting of academic standards. External examiners are used as the main mechanism for providing assurance of the ongoing maintenance of academic standards. There are processes for the appointment of external examiners, their participation in assessment boards, and responding to actions identified in the reports they produce.

1.49 In addition, for those programmes that are accredited by a PSRB, there is engagement with other stakeholders, for example representatives of PSRBs, employers and service users to ensure that the standards of programmes reflect professional as well as academic requirements.

1.50 The review team considered validation and periodic review documentation, including external advisers' reports and development plans. External examiners' reports were reviewed along with subsequent action plans developed by the University. The team also met academic staff including those from partner institutions and placement providers.

1.51 The extensive involvement of an external adviser throughout the iterative course approval process has enabled academic staff to engage in a richer and more meaningful dialogue than the previous process allowed, where an external would only be involved during the final validation event. At the same time staff were clear about the external's role in confirming that academic standards had been set at the appropriate level, and this is confirmed in reports produced by advisers.

1.52 External examiners are involved in the scrutiny of assessment briefs and samples of all assessed work, and they attend assessment boards. Actions or areas for improvement identified by external examiners, as well as areas of good practice, are effectively dealt with at course level and reflected in course journals. Issues are then channelled up through the faculty structure for the identification of common themes and dissemination of good practice. The University also draws on its pool of external examiners to undertake health checks at its collaborative partners. This is distinct from their role as an external examiner and the checks they undertake are concerned with providing an independent view on the partner's adherence to University processes.

1.53 There is a high level of engagement with PSRBs and this activity is monitored by the PSRB Sub-Committee, reporting to UQEC. For courses that require some form of accreditation good use is made of a wide range of stakeholders including those involved in providing placements and service users. This is evidenced by the large number of successful PSRB (re)accreditation events since the last QAA review.

1.54 Students (either prospective or current) and employers are consulted in the development of courses, though it is not a requirement for them to be a panel member for validation events. Scrutiny of validation documentation shows evidence of employer engagement in curriculum planning stages and the process record for validation comments on the student engagement that has taken place. Where the on-campus courses are also delivered by collaborative partners, staff at the partner institution are actively involved in the revalidation process. Appropriate training and support is provided to students, staff and employers who take part in such processes.

1.55 The University has also commissioned a number of reviews that have involved external advice, and while these reviews are not directly related to academic standards, they have helped shape many of the University's core quality assurance processes and curriculum structure.

1.56 The review team concludes that the University seeks external input from a wide range of stakeholders at key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards. Therefore Expectation A3.4 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**

1.57 In reaching its judgement about academic standards, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All Expectations in this area are met and the level of risk is low in each case. There is one recommendation under Expectation A1 and this relates to the need to positively define learning outcomes for intermediate qualifications. This recommendation relates to a small part of the University's provision; it does not pose a risk to the setting or maintenance of standards but will enable the University to meet this Expectation more fully. Therefore, the review team concludes that the setting and maintenance of the academic standards at the University **meet UK** expectations.

## 2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

### Findings

2.1 The University's processes for course approval are described in paragraph 1.24. The procedures for course design and development are an integral part of the iterative course approval process, and these are clearly defined in the Validation, Accreditation, Approval and Deletion Handbook. This handbook addresses the processes for the validation of new provision, the accreditation of externally delivered provision and the deletion of courses.

2.2 The team reviewed the operation of the University's design and approval procedures through consideration of course development records and reports of approval events. The review team also held meetings with staff and students involved in the development and approval of a course.

2.3 Plans for new course developments, and for courses to be deleted in the following academic year, are identified through Faculty Performance Review. Every new proposal requires the completion of an Academic Development Proposal Plan (ADP) addressing strategic fit, market demands, graduate prospects, resource requirements and, where applicable, PSRB involvement. The proposal is signed off initially by the Dean of the sponsoring faculty before it is uploaded to the University's VLE, where central service departments (for example, staff involved in finance, quality, admissions and learning resources) have the opportunity to scrutinise it, although the team was informed that professional support staff are typically involved at an earlier stage of a course's development. Final approval of ADPs is undertaken by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic).

2.4 The initial proposal requires a risk assessment to be undertaken, the outcome of which determines the intensity of the approval process (both in terms of the documentation demand and the level of institutional scrutiny required). The team examined documentation relating to the approval of proposals identified as high, medium and low risk, including those where approval had been delegated to a faculty or school. Documentation was in all cases equally thorough.

2.5 An independent external adviser is involved throughout a course's iterative development, and where an end-point validation event is convened the adviser is a member of the panel. The external adviser's consultative and judgemental roles are carefully managed by the University, and their independence from the course being developed is maintained throughout the process. Staff involved in curriculum design are provided with a range of support from the University (see paragraph 1.30).

2.6 Students also have the opportunity to be members of curriculum development and validation panels, although this is not a requirement of the process. There are sometimes challenges in engaging students in this role but student sabbatical officers who had been involved confirmed that they were adequately briefed and supported by the University.

2.7 Approval of collaborative programmes takes a similarly risk-based approach, with partner approval and due diligence preceding ADP approval. Partner approvals include a visit for meetings with staff and students and consideration of the partner's resources.

2.8 Staff the team met found the new developmental approach to course design and approval more engaging and transparent for those involved, and more exhaustive in terms of the scrutiny given to new course proposals; they also perceived it to have led to demonstrable improvements in the quality of course curricula. External advisers have been similarly affirmative. While noting participants' support for the process, the team found that the documentation of the online discussions sometimes lacks, for audit purposes, evidence of the comprehensive debates that were held.

2.9 If approved, courses, including those identified as high risk at the ADP stage, normally receive an initial validation period of six years although this is shortened in the case of PSRB requirements or when a course represents a very new subject area for the University. New courses at collaborative partners receive interim 'health checks' and are then subject to ongoing monitoring and review.

2.10 Although course approval documentation does not always provide detailed records of the discussions that contribute to course development, the review team is satisfied that the process enables an appropriately thorough consideration of new proposals. Staff support in curriculum design and development is also effective. Overall, the team concludes that the procedures for the development and approval of new courses meet Expectation B1 and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation:** Met

**Level of risk:** Low

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

**Quality Code, Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission**

**Findings**

2.11 The University has positioned itself as an institution that encourages entrants to higher education from a wide and diverse range of backgrounds, in particular from traditionally under-represented groups. This commitment is explicitly articulated in the University's mission and Strategic Plan, and is embodied in its vision to be a 'University of Opportunity'. The Student Recruitment Sub-Committee is the body responsible for taking forward this agenda and has a specific remit to develop policies and strategies for widening participation. This Sub-Committee also has oversight of recruitment activity and ensures a coordinated approach to setting entry criteria for the forthcoming academic year.

2.12 University-wide principles for recruiting, selecting and admitting students to taught courses are set out in the Admissions Regulations, and to postgraduate research awards in separate regulations for research degrees. These regulations take appropriate account of the Quality Code and are published on the University website. The Student Charter, which is published on the University's website, sets out what applicants may expect in respect of fair and prompt consideration of their applications, programme information and instructions for enrolment.

2.13 All applications are now made through an online system and administered centrally through the Academic Registry with appropriate involvement from relevant academic departments in the selection of students according to stipulated entry criteria. Applications from students at overseas collaborative partners and from students applying to undertake a research degree are handled separately by the Student Transnational and Research Office (STaR) to provide tailored advice and support. All other applications, including those from students studying at UK collaborative partners, are managed by the Admissions Unit. While the two types of application are administered by separate teams, both departments sit within the Academic Registry, enabling University-wide oversight of the process.

2.14 In reviewing the University recruitment and admissions practices, the team considered relevant policies and procedures and minutes of the Student Recruitment Sub-Committee, and met a wide range of staff and students.

2.15 There is appropriate oversight of admissions at institutional level and changes to admissions are managed through a coordinated approach, with any policy changes reported to Academic Board. Entry criteria are reviewed annually for the forthcoming academic year and information on changes is disseminated to staff for appropriate action. The University has been proactive in closely monitoring and adjusting its strategy for admissions in response to external challenges that are likely to impact recruitment.

2.16 There is a shared understanding among staff of the University's strategic priorities for widening participation, and the challenges this brings in terms of providing support to students who may not be in possession of traditional entry qualifications. The University engages in significant outreach activity to raise aspirations of local residents and to encourage entry into higher education (see Expectation B4). This includes progression partnerships with regional schools and colleges to promote the benefits of access to higher education. The School Engagement Strategy aims to provide a 'more joined up, and

'coherent approach' to outreach activity across the University and comprises sponsorship of several academy schools and two-way visits with local schools including 'taster' activities provided through the Black Country Children's University.

2.17 Entry criteria are clear and the University operates a fair system of admissions which is intended to minimise barriers for prospective students. The separate management of applications from overseas and research degree students has enabled a more tailored support package to be put in place for these students who often have additional and specific needs. The University also employs eight Graduate Interns as part of the admissions team who are able to deal with queries from individual students and support them in completing their application through 'nurturing activities'. Open days provide opportunities for applicants to receive advice directly from academic and support staff and to view the University's learning and other facilities. Overall, students the team met were positive about their admissions experience and were able to access appropriate advice and guidance at key stages of the process.

2.18 While admissions are managed centrally, admissions tutors located within each course team are involved in the selection of students. This helps ensure reliable decision making, particularly for difficult cases where academic expertise is required in judging whether an applicant has the potential to achieve a particular qualification. The University has also developed a guide for evaluating the equivalence of international qualifications and to support consistency in decision making for holders of foreign qualifications.

2.19 Both administrative staff working within the Academic Registry and admissions tutors the team met felt appropriately supported to undertake their roles. Formal training is provided through corporate staff development sessions delivered as part of an annual programme of events, with more bespoke support identified through the appraisal process for all staff. Heads of the Admissions Unit and STaR office also attend various multidisciplinary meetings, providing an opportunity to exchange practice and keep abreast of developments in other areas of the Registry's services and academic developments in faculties.

2.20 The review team concludes that the University's recruitment and admissions practices align to this Expectation. In particular, the University is engaged in raising aspirations within the region by encouraging those that may not otherwise do so to access higher education. Therefore Expectation B2 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation:** Met

**Level of risk:** Low

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

**Quality Code, Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching**

**Findings**

2.21 The development of learning and teaching is signalled in the goals of the University through its Strategic Plan 2012-17. There is a high-level Learning, Teaching and Assessment Sub-Strategy which is communicated via the website, committee structure and staff development, and which is monitored by the University Student Experience Committee (USEC). The Sub-Strategy is being operationalised in the new faculty structure through the development of action plans which are tailored to faculty priorities and scrutinised as part of the Faculty Performance Review process.

2.22 Learning, teaching and assessment activities and resources for new courses are considered and agreed through the Academic Development Proposal Plan and the iterative course approval process. Resources, along with other aspects of the students' learning experience, are then systematically reviewed through the annual and periodic course monitoring processes. The People Enabling Strategy sets out the University's strategic priorities for recruiting staff who have the appropriate subject-specific and pedagogical knowledge and skills, and for supporting these staff in achieving excellence. A corporate staff development programme addresses the generic needs of University staff with more tailored support available on request, along with the opportunity to access and undertake formal qualifications.

2.23 The review team tested this Expectation through scrutiny of relevant strategies and policies that address learning and teaching, records of staff development, course journals and minutes of committees. The team also held meetings with a wide range of students, academic and professional services staff, and those in the Senior Management Team.

2.24 The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Sub-Strategy identifies institutional priorities in this area. The Strategy was subject to a mid-point update of the action plan in May 2014 and it is clear from much of the evidence considered by the review team that progress has been made in many of the Strategy's goals. However, while the staff the review team met expressed clear priorities for enhancement in learning and teaching, these did not always clearly align with the Sub-Strategy. A clearer statement of aims and action in this area is a planned outcome of the full review of the Sub-Strategy currently underway, involving appropriate consultation with staff and students. The team **affirms** the review of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Sub-Strategy to clarify institutional priorities in this area and promote clearer understanding among stakeholders.

2.25 Appropriate consideration is given to pedagogical approaches during course development and approval. Constructive alignment between learning outcomes, learning and teaching activities and assessment is required in module design and supported by staff development. There is also an emphasis on embedding graduate attributes into the curriculum, and this is reflected in learning outcomes, the design of assessment tasks and the extensive range of opportunities for undertaking work-based learning (see feature of good practice under Expectation B4).

2.26 Staff new to teaching must complete the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice in Higher Education and all staff are involved in learning and teaching development as necessary, following discussion at annual appraisal to ascertain continuous professional development (CPD) needs. The Postgraduate Certificate meets the requirements of the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) and is delivered online as a method of modelling the use of learning technology and distance learning. The University is in the advanced stages of establishing a Higher Education Academy-accredited CPD framework and established academic staff are supported in various ways to achieve recognition within UKPSF. Currently, 36 per cent of staff have achieved recognition and there are plans to increase the number of Senior Fellows of the Higher Education Academy.

2.27 The University is effective in providing for the professional development of its staff. There are many creative, formal and informal opportunities for professional development organised centrally and through faculties. The Centre for Academic Practice, and faculties, organise a wide range of development opportunities, including web resources which are organised centrally. Implementation of learning and teaching practices and enhancements is supported by networking through a 'community of practice' comprising associate deans and principal lecturers in each faculty with pan-faculty learning and teaching roles.

2.28 Following a generic induction, bespoke development for staff in collaborative partners is provided in response to need. Staff from local partner organisations can access campus-based staff development as well as web-based material. Systematic bespoke induction and training for overseas collaborative partners is provided by visiting faculty, and staff in these institutions are able to spend short periods at the University for professional development purposes. Informal teaching development is fostered by the opportunity for overseas partner staff to observe the work of visiting faculty from the University. Likewise, formal and informal training and support are offered to University link tutors, including mentoring by experienced staff and training days provided by the Partnership Unit. There is a teaching development programme for postgraduate research students and those who teach are eligible to undertake the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice in Higher Education. There is a Students' Union teaching award scheme to recognise and reward good teaching. Resources for supporting staff scholarship are delegated to faculties, and activities include educational scholarship and cross-institutional activity. Opportunities for a part-time degree or postgraduate professional qualifications are available through a staff scholarship scheme.

2.29 The University has placed an increased emphasis on enhancing pedagogical practices, particularly through research, and this has led to the creation of specific roles within each faculty to take responsibility for learning and teaching. Peer review of teaching is mandatory and considered important in encouraging pedagogical development and staff reflection on teaching practices. The outcomes of peer review are monitored through Faculty Performance Review, enabling the dissemination of good practice as well as allowing the University to identify areas requiring further staff development. Further developments are in train through the establishment of a College of Learning and Teaching to increase staff pedagogical scholarship and to embed further academic staff development in the new faculty structure. This new College is an investment in academic support and development, harnessing existing investment and achievements by the University in areas such as technology-enhanced learning. It will subsume the Centres for Academic Practice and Technology-Enhanced Learning.

2.30 There is clear evidence that the University makes strategic use of data which is structured, deliberative and monitored. The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Sub-Strategy and its associated key performance indicators emphasise the use of evidence-informed activity, and faculty performance reviews provide a biannual check of all performance data. Examples of the strategic use of data include a systematic employability

strategy leading from a review of data provided by the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) Survey and initiatives taken to address attainment disparities between Black and Minority Ethic (BME) and other students following data analysis. In the latter case, intervention includes increased resources, faculty-based action plans and attainment champions. Action planning also takes place in relation to student feedback obtained through annual National Student Survey results and internal student surveys.

2.31 There has been significant development of the learning environment including extended library opening hours and social and simulated learning spaces, and further investment is planned. The University has a well-developed VLE and e-Portfolio systems, although work to review the 'digital campus' is ongoing as part of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Sub-Strategy. Through the VLE and University website, students are provided with module-related information, a personal record and other information and resources. The VLE has a range of resources embedded to assist students in using its functions.

2.32 Students are supported in monitoring their own progress through feedback on assessment, personal tutors and a personalised student profile. The personal tutoring policy was recently revised with there now being a requirement for a minimum of three interactions a year. The University is seeking to further enhance personal tutoring and respond to the National Union of Students' Charter on this area of provision. In this regard, it is introducing booking and recording software to assist the reporting of tutorials and is planning to pilot 'student insight' software in the near future. The latter provides extensive individual student data to students and their personal tutors to inform tutorial discussion and support personal development.

2.33 In conclusion, the review team is assured that the University works with its students, staff and other stakeholders to set out, review and enhance the learning environment, learning opportunities and teaching to enable all students to realise their potential as higher education learners in their chosen subjects. The team has made an affirmation under this Expectation but this essentially relates to updating an existing Strategy and is an area the University is currently addressing. Therefore Expectation B3 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**

2.34 The University has adopted a strategic approach to enabling student development and achievement. This aspiration underlies its aim to be a 'University of Opportunity' for diverse students in an institution which recruits over its benchmark for under-represented groups. This area of activity is overseen by the Sub-Committees of the Academic Board and there is close work with the Students' Union to develop student voice and opportunity. Employability development is central to the University's mission and is articulated in the Enterprise and Employability Sub-Strategy 2012-2017.

2.35 Faculty performance reviews and periodic course review are used to highlight areas for development. Course monitoring processes are used to review student performance and development, and identify areas for enhancement. Students are offered an annual opportunity to evaluate services and support for student development. Resources are overseen at course, faculty and University level by the relevant committee.

2.36 The review team evaluated the University's arrangements designed to enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential through a variety of evidence. This includes information provided to students in guides and handbooks, formal policies governing student development and achievement, and minutes of relevant committees. The team also met with academic and support staff, and with students studying both at the University campus and with collaborative partners.

2.37 The University has identified disparities in attainment between certain groups of students, attributed in part to its recruitment profile, and has put in place a range of targeted mechanisms for supporting students from pre-entry to graduation. Pre-entry information and guidance on a wide range of topics is made available to students through The Gateway - a physical and online service through which impartial advice and support is provided to prospective students. Pre-enrolment guidance and resources on preparing for higher education are also made available online. In areas that are known to have higher than average attrition rates, pre-course days are used to make clear the expectations of particular courses and applicants are able to meet current students. In addition, the University offers pre-departure briefings in the home country for some groups of international students.

2.38 There is a comprehensive induction programme which takes the form of a 'welcome week' with additional pre-session programmes available for international, part-time, disabled and mature students. Link tutors often synchronise visits to overseas collaborative partners with induction week or, if this is not possible, meet with them very early on in their studies to assist in developing their understanding of university and academic requirements. Students, including those the team met with, report positively on their experience of induction and transition to higher education.

2.39 The promotion of equality and diversity is enshrined in University policies, information and guidance. The Student Enabling Centre and faculty-based disability support tutors provide personalised support to disabled students, with pre-entry support available through The Gateway. The University has established an International Academy to assist international students in making the transition to UK higher education. There are several initiatives to support English as an additional language and the University has taken a positive approach to meeting the needs of students with mental health problems. Additional

support for other groups of students is provided where needed, for example maths tutorials or English language skills. Academic skills development is integrated into module teaching and assessment with resources and skills to support it.

2.40 The University takes a systematic approach to facilitating student development and achievement both within programmes and through central services. There is a task force project focusing on improving progression from Level 4 to 5, with tailored support provided by Graduate Teaching Assistants to support transition between levels. Ongoing support for Level 4 students is undertaken by Student Support Interns who monitor attendance and provide help and advice. There are also 'attainment champions' located in each faculty with a specific remit to address disparities in attainment between different groups of students. The Attainment Champions Group brings together staff involved in this initiative across all faculties, providing an opportunity for sharing good practice and adopting a coordinated approach. Examples of activities initiated through this scheme include study skills sessions, dissertation workshops, and staff development to promote diversity and inclusivity in teaching. Consequently, the University has found that its retention and progression rates have improved since 2011-12. In the view of the team, the closely aligned range of strategies and initiatives to raise aspirations and achievement at all stages of the student lifecycle is **good practice**.

2.41 The University has developed an extensive and complementary range of in-course, cocurricular, extracurricular and post-award initiatives to enhance students' career development and employability prospects. This is undertaken through various initiatives including: strong partnerships with regional employers; embedding employability skills into the curriculum; live projects outside the curriculum; voluntary work placements; enterprise activities; and a Wolverhampton Enterprise and Employability Award. There are also a number of internal employment opportunities specifically for the University's students and graduates. The most recent is the employment of 20 Graduate Teaching Assistants across four faculties with a further 20 expected to be recruited in the next academic year. Many of these innovative employment opportunities are complemented by formal support and training, and have developed students' professional potential. Initiatives to develop entrepreneurship and consideration of post-graduation opportunities were also highlighted by postgraduate research students that the team met. Most importantly, the University has observed increasingly high rates of employment on graduation. In the view of the team, the comprehensive range of strategic initiatives to enhance student employability is **good practice**.

2.42 In recognition of the University's recruitment profile and the challenges this presents in supporting students in achieving their qualifications, a range of mechanisms have been put in place specifically to enable students to develop and fulfil their potential. The review team also acknowledges the University's successful and varied approaches to enhancing student employability. Overall, the team judges that there is evidence of comprehensive and innovative arrangements in place, and associated monitoring and evaluation, to enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. Therefore Expectation B4 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**

2.43 The Student Charter describes the values, expectations and standards that the University and Students' Union have worked collaboratively to instil. The Charter is reviewed annually by the Students' Union which recommends updates to the Academic Board via USEC. Furthermore, the development of a Transnational Education Charter was initiated by the Students' Union and piloted at the Mauritius branch campus with a view to potential rollout to all overseas partners. A separate Postgraduate Research Offer is annexed to the main Charter, and supplemented by a Research Students' Handbook.

2.44 The University seeks to engage students through a range of mechanisms including opportunities to participate in course development and approval, course monitoring, periodic review, engagement with external examiners and student surveys, as well as through representation on committees at course, faculty and University level. These opportunities are underpinned by a clear Student Voice Policy. 'Student Voice' is a joint enterprise of the University and Students' Union (SU), and is the vehicle for student representation which encourages 'the participation of students in quality enhancement and quality assurance processes, resulting in the improvement of their educational experience'. Within each faculty, senior staff are identified to take responsibility for the student experience.

2.45 The review team tested the University's approach to meeting Expectation B5 through a review of committee minutes, course journals and student survey data. The team also met staff, students, student representatives and Students' Union officers.

2.46 It is evident that the University shares a positive relationship with the Students' Union, and this has been instrumental in ensuring University-level enhancements are appropriately informed by the student voice. Many of the recent changes within the University, including restructuring from schools to faculties, have been managed in close consultation with the Students' Union, and in some cases instigated by it, such as the move to percentage-based marking. Student representation is working particularly effectively at the most senior level of decision making, where Students' Union officers attend committees on behalf of the student body. The Students' Union President attends meetings of the Corporate Management Team and officers and staff attend fortnightly Senior Staff Briefings. The officers have also participated in appointments to the University's Senior Management Team.

2.47 Participation by student representatives at course and faculty level appears to be a little more variable. Course representatives serve an important function in providing feedback on learning and teaching issues pertinent to individual courses, doing this through participation at course committees. The latter are also the forum through which the continuous course monitoring process is made operational and related course journals and action plans updated. Faculty student representatives chair Faculty Student Council meetings and matters raised through these meetings may be elevated for consideration by USEC. However, the team noted that attendance by representatives at course and faculty level committees is variable and some representatives the team met with were unfamiliar with the use of course journals.

2.48 Similarly, there are challenges in recruiting students for involvement in other quality assurance processes such as course validation and review panels. Due to the difficulty of

engaging students from the wider student body, these positions are mostly occupied by Union officers. While the team acknowledges the extensive opportunities for student involvement in quality assurance processes, more could be done to encourage participation in these processes from the wider student body. The review team **recommends** that the University promotes existing opportunities for participation in committees, and on course validation and review panels, to the full student body.

2.49 Student representatives the team met with felt well supported in their role and most had attended a training session run by the Students' Union. Academic staff are also available to provide more informal advice on what to expect when attending and participating in formal meetings. Contributions by student representatives are variously reflected in certificates, awards and letters of commendation which are the precursor to the University's development of a Higher Education Achievement Report.

2.50 The University also employs a range of surveys to capture the student voice including mid and end-of-module evaluations, institutional surveys and the National Student Survey (NSS). There is evidence that appropriate use is made of this data to inform course monitoring and wider enhancement initiatives. Analysis of survey data is an integral part of monitoring and performance review processes. For particular courses with lower than average NSS results, specific action plans are put in place to address identified issues.

2.51 Students whom the team met were able to cite several examples of action taken at course and faculty level in response to their feedback. These include the provision of feedback for exams, the introduction of more interactive teaching methods and the use of more relevant journal articles to contextualise learning. Module guides published to students via the VLE describe changes that have been made as a consequence of student feedback through module evaluation.

2.52 Feedback opportunities for students studying at collaborative partners both in the UK and overseas are similar to those on-campus. Staff-student representative meetings held at partner organisations are attended by University staff. The Students' Union has undertaken extensive work to engage students from harder-to-reach groups, including those studying at partner organisations, and in the case of UK partners this has involved visits.

2.53 Student feedback and the effectiveness of engagement mechanisms are evaluated by USEC as a means of driving improvements to quality. Actions are directed to the relevant sub-committees; for example, matters relating to physical infrastructure may be referred to the University Campus Committee.

2.54 Overall, the University has effective and systematic processes for engaging students as partners in quality assurance and enhancement. The recommendation in this Expectation relates to promoting more widely some of the existing opportunities for engagement. The team concludes the Expectation B5 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**

2.55 The University has an overarching Learning, Teaching and Assessment Sub-Strategy 2012-15 which is complemented by a comprehensive regulatory framework governing assessment of both taught and postgraduate research provision. There is a University Assessment Handbook for undergraduate and taught postgraduate courses outlining the high-level principles and expectations that staff are expected to adhere to in regard to assessment design, marking, feedback and the operation of assessment boards. There are clearly defined policies, accessible through the University website, for managing various aspects of assessment including academic misconduct, the recognition of prior learning, academic appeals and special arrangements for students with disabilities. Evaluation of assessment policies and regulations is undertaken by the Academic Framework and Regulations Sub-Committee.

2.56 Course and module guides are used to communicate course-specific information on assessment to students, along with a summary of key assessment policies. An overview of learning outcomes and assessment is also provided in course and module specifications. A student version of the University Assessment Handbook was available in the 2014-15 academic year. In addition, the Student Charter sets minimum expectations for assessment and feedback.

2.57 The University operates a two-tiered assessment board structure for confirming the award of credit, the arrangements for which are described in paragraph 1.34.

2.58 Since the last QAA review, there have been a number of noteworthy changes to assessment including: the move from an alpha-numeric to a percentage-based marking system; the transformation of almost all modules from 15 to 20 credits; and a restriction on the number of learning outcomes at module and course level in an effort to streamline assessment load.

2.59 The team reviewed key documentation relating to assessment including regulations, course and module guides, as well as records of course validation. The team also considered minutes of meetings relating to assessment and results, and scrutinised external examiner reports and their management in course journals. The review team held meetings with senior staff responsible for determining strategy and overseeing conduct of assessment, teaching staff, placement staff involved in assessment, and a wide range of students.

2.60 Clear and structured information on assessment is provided to students in specifications, guides and assessment briefs. Students whom the team met confirmed the availability of this information and in line with expectations set by the University found assessment progressively more challenging as they transitioned between levels.

2.61 Students are able to comment on assessment methods and the quality of feedback on assessed work by completing module questionnaires. The results of these surveys, along with feedback on assessment received through other channels, are responded to through the continuous course monitoring process and associated action plan. The move to

percentage-based marking was a student-led development, and the new marking system has been well received by both staff and students.

2.62 The University Assessment Handbook identifies broad principles for the provision of feedback on assessed work, with ownership of policy for individual modules and courses delegated to course teams. This level of autonomy enables staff to take account of the specific needs of particular courses although the review team noted that this can result in considerable differences in the nature and depth of feedback provided for the same assessment method across different courses. Appropriate use of external examiners is made in moderating assessment design and feedback. The University's policy for feedback turnaround time has recently changed from three to four weeks, and students the team met with confirmed that assessed work is generally returned on time. Students value the feedback they receive and in particular the opportunities available to discuss assessed work in person with staff.

2.63 Written and verbal information on expected academic conduct is provided to students at induction and at appropriate points throughout their course of studies. The penalties for academic malpractice are clearly published in course guides and in the Academic Regulations. While a range of support is available to all students in understanding and avoiding academic malpractice, there is a disproportionately high number of academic misconduct cases among international students, particularly at postgraduate level. The Students' Union has also identified this as an area requiring attention. The University, through its analysis of academic misconduct data, has acknowledged this as an area for improvement, and has established a working group to further develop the information, support and training made available to staff and students. The review team therefore **affirms** the action being taken to identify and address the causes of high academic misconduct cases among international students.

2.64 The University has an annual programme of staff development events orchestrated by the Centre for Academic Practice and which addresses assessment-related development needs. Meetings with staff confirmed support and mentoring for designing and marking assessment. The development needs of staff at collaborative partners are also taken into account and activities have included specific training on the new marking scheme, peer review, and a workshop on 'learning ideas for assessment'.

2.65 The University has in place an appropriate regulatory framework and associated processes for meeting this Expectation. The one area for improvement identified by the team in relation to academic misconduct among international students is in the process of being addressed by the University, and the team is able to affirm the action in progress. The review team concludes that Expectation B6 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**

2.66 The University's approach to external examination is set out in a handbook which addresses the appointment of external examiners and their role in moderation and assessment boards. University expectations for the involvement of external examiners in the management of standards and quality are also identified in relevant sections of the Academic Regulations. The University operates a two-tiered system with an external examiner assigned to each module and course. A module external examiner, whose scrutiny extends to the delivery of the same module at partner organisations, is expected to approve assessment tasks and review the quality of assessment practice in maintaining academic standards. Course-level achievement is confirmed at faculty-level boards, where the course external examiners provide oversight of the achievement and progression of all students enrolled on a particular award. External examiners are also expected to attend and report on assessment boards. The University has also established University-wide Award and Progression Boards in specific areas of provision, for example overseas collaborative provision, and these are also attended by a named external examiner.

2.67 External examiners are not required to visit partner organisations as part of their role in assuring the maintenance of academic standards, but some are involved in visiting partners as part of a separate health check process for managing collaborative provision. The use of the same external examiner for provision across multiple delivery sites and the addition of a separate University-wide assessment board are the main mechanisms for applying externality to collaborative provision. Standard report templates are in use for external examining and these are being developed further to enable better disaggregation of comments that are specific to partners.

2.68 External examiners' reports are received by Academic Registry for onward circulation to relevant staff, including those at collaborative partners. Course teams respond to the reports through discussions at course committees and appropriate action is taken through the continuous course monitoring process, and reflected in an updated course journal. Trends are identified for upward reporting through faculties to the External Examining Sub-Group, enabling a holistic view to be taken across the institution. There is also a process for expediting responses to reports that identify serious concerns.

2.69 The review team examined a sample of external examiner reports, minutes of course committees, records of assessment boards, course journals and overview reports of trends identified across the University. The team also held meetings with teaching and senior staff, and students.

2.70 The External Examiner Handbook provides clear information on the management of all aspects of external examining, and this is used as a definitive source of information by both University staff and external examiners. In the sample of reports reviewed by the team, external examiners confirm the appropriateness of the information and support they receive in undertaking their role. Module leaders support examiners by providing a summary form for each module, bringing together in one document key information and data to facilitate easy comparisons with previous cohorts.

2.71 The University implements a robust system for the systematic consideration of external examiner reports from course through to University level. The sample of reports provided to the review team confirms the appropriateness of the University's processes for

assuring and enhancing quality, as well as comparability with UK-wide expectations. There is good evidence that both areas for improvement and good practice inform action planning at course level, and the consideration of external examiner reports is a standing agenda item at course committees. Each resulting action taken is time-specific with a named person responsible for ensuring completion. The team was also provided with evidence of issues identified at course level being channelled up through the faculty reporting system.

2.72 A thematic analysis of issues raised by external examiners is produced for the University Quality Enhancement Committee (UQEC) via its External Examining Sub-Group. The overarching annual report summarising the main issues identified and proposing courses of action to be taken is presented annually for consideration by UQEC, enabling strategic action to be taken to address common areas for recommendation, as well as providing a forum through which good practice can be disseminated. An example of University-wide change introduced in response to a common theme identified from external examiner feedback is the use of an improved reporting format for statistical data made available at assessment boards.

2.73 Course guides contain information on the role of external examiners, including the name of the examiner for that particular course. External examiner reports are made available to all students via the VLE and student representatives attend course committees where these reports are discussed and responded to. The Students' Union also briefs student representatives on the external examining system during induction and training events. Students the team met, including those of collaborative partners, demonstrated a good level of awareness of external examiner reports and the opportunities available for them to meet examiners, although none had taken up this option.

2.74 In conclusion, the review team is satisfied that the University makes scrupulous use of external examiners in quality assurance and enhancement. The team concludes that Expectation B7 is met and the associated risk level is low.

**Expectation:** Met

**Level of risk:** Low

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

**Quality Code, Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review**

**Findings**

2.75 The monitoring and review of academic provision at the University takes place at module level (through mid-module and end-of-module evaluations), course level (through a recently implemented continuous monitoring process), and at school/institute level within each faculty (through periodic review). All monitoring and review activity, including that pertaining to course deletion, is reported to the Academic Board.

2.76 The University has produced a handbook setting out the requirements for course monitoring and some faculties have also produced their own guidance on its operation and implementation, for example where there is a particular need to integrate it with PSRB monitoring requirements. The processes for course monitoring and review are described in further detail in paragraphs 1.41 and 1.42.

2.77 The team considered a range of course journals, course committee minutes and recent reports from faculty and University quality enhancement committees on continuous monitoring. The review team also met staff and students involved in this area.

2.78 All modules are required to hold a mid-module and end-of-module evaluation by students. Although a student-led project undertaken in 2013-14 reported a lack of student engagement with regards to module evaluation, students whom the review team met spoke positively about the mechanisms in place and were able to give numerous examples of changes and enhancements to modules as a result of their feedback. A Module Task and Finish Group, involving student focus groups, has started to establish greater consistency in the University's approach to module evaluation.

2.79 Academic staff whom the team met were supportive of the new continuous course monitoring process, and commented particularly on the way in which it has enhanced the role of students in reflecting on the quality of their experience. Nevertheless, the team noted variability in course journal completion and course committee attendance among student representatives. In 2013 the University commissioned an independent review of the process. Although broadly supportive, the report from the review noted similar inconsistencies in its implementation at a local level and observed that it had yet to become fully embedded across the University. Subsequently, an action plan has been developed to address the recommendations in the report, supported by dedicated principal lecturers within each faculty. In meetings with staff, the team were able to confirm that appropriate progress is being made with the action plan, particularly with regard to ensuring greater strategic oversight of the process. Therefore, the review team **affirms** the action plan in progress to address inconsistencies in the implementation of the course monitoring process.

2.80 The University also operates an effective process for the periodic review of its courses with all provision within a school or institute normally reviewed at the same time. The team scrutinised the self-evaluation documents, review reports and associated action plans from two recent periodic reviews. In both cases the documentation demonstrated the process to be comprehensive and consistent. Actions arising from periodic review are addressed through an action plan which is then monitored at faculty level for completion. Common trends arising from periodic reviews are identified at faculty level for onward annual reporting to UQEC.

2.81 Periodic review panels are drawn from academic staff across the faculties and include a minimum of one external subject specialist and, in some cases, student and employer panellists. Review panels are required to meet groups of students as part of their deliberations. The review team was informed that the University has a low uptake among students wishing to become involved as members of periodic review panels, and that sabbatical officers will often assume this role (see Expectation B5).

2.82 The process for the withdrawal, or deletion, of courses is outlined, through a process flow diagram, in the University's handbook on the Validation, Approval, Accreditation and Deletion of Provision. Courses are identified for deletion in the following academic year through Faculty Performance Review. An Academic Development Deletion Plan is submitted to the Offices of the Vice-Chancellor for approval in each case. This addresses the rationale for deletion, any resource implications for the University and an exit strategy in cases where students are currently enrolled on the course, which details the arrangements in place to support them to completion. The review team scrutinised the deletion plans for seven recently withdrawn courses, including four that were offered through collaborative partners, and found the process to be responsibly enacted and thoroughly documented in each case.

2.83 Arrangements for the monitoring, review and deletion of collaborative courses adhere to the same processes in place for on-campus provision.

2.84 Overall, the review team concludes that the procedures for the monitoring and review of courses meet Expectation B8 and the risk is low. The University's policies and processes are clearly documented and applied. The team can affirm the action being taken to improve consistency in the implementation of course monitoring.

**Expectation:** Met

**Level of risk:** Low

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

**Quality Code, Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints**

**Findings**

2.85 The University has distinct appeals and complaints procedures which were reviewed in 2012-13 in collaboration with the Students' Union to ensure continuing alignment with the Expectation in the Quality Code. The updated procedures include a mechanism for group complaints and timelines consistent with the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) Good Practice Framework. There is a two-stage procedure ensuring independent review is always available. A new model complaints procedure is under development in consultation with the Students' Union and with the intention of greater emphasis on informal resolution and the use of conciliation at stage one. Appeals and complaints are operated through a central Conduct and Appeals unit which also deals with academic misconduct and the fitness to practise procedure for relevant professional courses. The procedures are equally available to undergraduate and postgraduate students and all students who study within partner institutions in the UK and abroad.

2.86 The review team tested the operation of the current procedures by scrutinising the guidance available to staff and students and considering minutes of relevant committees and University reports evaluating complaints and appeals. The team met staff involved in administering the appeals and complaints, and with a cross-section of students from across faculties.

2.87 The University is supported by the Students' Union in preferring to resolve appeals and complaints on an informal basis and at a local level. It enjoys an excellent working relationship with the Students' Union on these matters and it reports that many cases are resolved without the formal procedure. The revised procedures also improve confidentiality for students making an appeal or complaint.

2.88 The complaints and appeals procedures are published to students through a range of media with comprehensive information to support the appellant or complainant, including accessible web information. Detailed information is provided on whom to contact, what form the procedure takes, where to seek advice and guidance, and the timescales involved. A standardised template for appeals was developed to help students write their appeals effectively. The Union contributes to informing students about academic misconduct and also offers support and advice to those wishing to make an appeal or complaint.

2.89 A high proportion of students, compared with sector averages, escalate their complaint to the OIA, but with the OIA upholding the decision of the University in the vast majority of cases. The University attributes this pattern to the professional and vocational emphasis within its academic portfolio. The University is providing redacted copies of the outcome of OIA cases to the Students' Union to assist in drawing up recommendations and advice of benefit to all students.

2.90 The University has effective processes for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of its appeals and complaints procedures. The annual report of the Conduct and Appeals unit provides information on volumes and trends and recommendations for the University to act on. The report is considered by USEC following which an action plan is ratified by Academic Board. Alongside this report the University also undertakes an analysis of the annual statement provided by the OIA of cases submitted by students of the

University. This enables identification of any further themes which could help guide the effectiveness with which the University operates its own procedures.

2.91 It is evident that the University uses the information provided by complainants, and the outcomes, in conjunction with other forms of student feedback and survey results to identify areas for improvement. This helps to inform and improve process, policy and procedure through annual reporting, indicating areas of dissatisfaction and highlighting trends facing a wider group of students, leading to enhancement in those areas.

2.92 The review team concludes that the University has effective procedures for dealing with academic appeals and student complaints. These procedures are subject to regular review in consultation with the Students' Union, and there is evidence of ongoing enhancement in this area to continue to improve the effectiveness with which appeals and complaints are handled. Therefore Expectation B9 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation:** Met

**Level of risk:** Low

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

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

**Findings**

2.93 The University's strategic plan prioritises collaboration and internationalisation as vehicles for employability and economic and social regeneration. The University has developed a range of partnerships with UK and overseas educational institutions and regional employers for the delivery of its courses. The University proactively seeks 'preferred partnerships' with organisations that share its values and objectives and prioritises the development of fewer and larger partnerships over multiple smaller developments. In addition to course delivery and placements, other types of collaboration with partners include staff consultancy and collaborative research.

2.94 According to 2013-14 data, just under 1,000 students were enrolled on UK partner-delivered courses, and over a further 1,200 students on courses delivered with international partners. At the time of the review, 14 UK teaching organisations were approved to deliver courses using the supported delivery model of which nine were regional further education colleges. All four of the University's faculties have partnership arrangements with UK and overseas collaborative partners, with the latter totalling 27 at the time of the review. The University also accredits a small amount of low-risk employer-based training through its Validation and Accreditation Services.

2.95 The most recent development in this area is the establishment of a branch campus in Mauritius in 2012-13, delivering a small number of mostly law-related courses to around 120 students through an 'off-site' delivery arrangement.

2.96 Partnerships are categorised by risk through arrangements that comprise off-site course delivery by University staff, supported delivery by partners, accreditation of employer-based provision leading to the award of University credit, articulation and progression agreements, and work placements. Supported delivery by partners, which resembles the franchise model used across the UK higher education sector, accounts for the majority of courses while there is currently only a small amount of accredited provision. At the time of the review the University offered no dual or joint awards.

2.97 Following publication of the revised Quality Code *Chapter B10* in 2012, the University reviewed its management and monitoring of collaborative provision. Up to this time, UK-based and overseas partnerships had been managed out of academic schools with a small amount of central support and coordination. Following the review, staffing was increased, both within faculties and centrally in the University's Partnerships Unit. Executive responsibility for collaborative provision lies with the recently established post of Assistant Academic Registrar (Partnerships). An Associate Dean has specific responsibility for collaborative provision in each faculty and principal lecturers support staff in developing and managing partnerships. An International Centre supports the development of new overseas partnerships and an International Board considers their fit with the University's strategic objectives and subject portfolio. Senior staff undertake the role of 'ambassador' for different global regions, accountable both to the University's corporate management team and the Academic Board for the strategic development of partnership opportunities in their region.

2.98 In considering this Expectation the review team examined relevant University policies, strategies and procedures; partner and course approval documentation; course journals and external examiner reports; and the minutes of committees and assessment boards with responsibility for collaborative provision including practice-based learning and work placements. The review team tested its findings through meetings with University managers, academic and support staff, and separate meetings with students and representatives of partner organisations and providers of placement-based learning. The review team sampled documentary evidence of overseas course delivery, monitoring and review including the University's own campus in Mauritius. During the review visit the team met with representatives of regional further education colleges and private providers involved in the supported delivery of programmes, and from a nearby school, the Local Authority and the NHS as placement providers.

2.99 Partner approval is managed at University level and considers the rationale for the partnership including: planned course developments; the proposed partner's mission, values and organisational structure; its legal and financial status; previous experience of delivering UK higher education; staffing, learning resources and student support; and readiness to adopt the University's procedures for course administration and quality assurance. New course proposals are progressed only after partner approval has been secured although these processes may take place concurrently.

2.100 Following approval, changes to a course delivery team are submitted for faculty approval and follow-up audits are scheduled periodically. The addition of new delivery centres to existing partnerships requires separate planning and delivery approval supported by an audit of the staffing and resources at each centre. The Collaborative Handbook describes the process for approving new course developments with existing partners.

2.101 The Partnerships Unit oversees contract negotiations and conducts the necessary financial and legal due diligence for new partnerships in conjunction with the University's Governance Support Office. Partnership agreements (memoranda of cooperation) are developed by the Partnership Unit with input from faculties using a standard template which may be customised to reflect specific arrangements. Partnership agreements are signed by the Vice-Chancellor on behalf of the Board of Governors and are reviewed annually.

2.102 The University is taking a careful and closely monitored approach to developing its branch campus in Mauritius. At the time of the review, only a small number of students were studying there but the University has committed to expanding the local course offer and recruiting more local teaching staff. To mitigate any risks that may be associated with this provision, it has commissioned a review of the first year and intends to keep arrangements under close review.

2.103 The Validation and Accreditation Service manages the accreditation of employer-based courses where partners are responsible for curriculum development and delivery but the institution retains quality assurance oversight through periodic reports to UQEC. Faculties map the provider's curriculum to the national-level descriptors and subject benchmarks and identify the level and volume of University credit to be awarded. Articulation proposals use a similar mapping for credit recognition which is repeated every three years to minimise qualification drift.

2.104 The Collaborative Handbook sets out operational responsibilities and workflows for recruitment and admissions, induction, assessment and student support. An Operations Manual is developed for each course describing those responsibilities that are retained by the University and those that are delegated to the partner. They include marketing, recruitment and admissions; enrolment and induction; teaching and assessment, including the operation of assessment boards; learning resources; and quality monitoring. Partners

communicate directly with named administrative contacts in faculties and University services. The Operations Manual is appended to the Memorandum of Cooperation.

2.105 Arrangements for the termination of partnerships and courses are described in the Memorandum of Cooperation and faculties develop appropriate exit strategies. Senior staff met by the review team acknowledged the challenge of costing such arrangements at approval stage but emphasised the University's commitment to safeguarding the experience of students during any teach-out period.

2.106 A Collaborative Quality Forum consisting of University staff and UK-based partners meets three times a year to consider operational issues relating to course delivery and quality management. Partners value their participation in this forum and the support of link tutors more generally. Link tutors receive development and support within faculties and from the central Partnerships Unit. A new link tutor descriptor describes the expectations of the role and contains a checklist of responsibilities.

2.107 The University has launched a process of partner reviews, initially of overseas partners but now being extended to UK partners. Described as a health check, partner review involves a panel visit with an independent external adviser (recruited from the University's pool of external examiners) and culminates in a report and recommendations to the Partnerships and Collaboration Sub-Committee. Reviews are focused on the student experience and take place every three years although new partners are reviewed after their first year of approval. The outcomes of partner reviews are summarised in the Annual Collaborative Report which is received by UQEC and reported to the Academic Board.

2.108 Opportunities for work-based and placement learning are integrated within many of the University's courses. Placements for nurse and teacher training courses are managed by the Faculty of Education, Health and Well-being while others including sandwich placements are managed by a central Placement Unit working in association with faculties. Placements on collaborative provision are organised and managed by partners with University oversight through course monitoring. Guidelines cover the management and quality assurance of placements including site visits and support for students and workplace mentors. Course teams produce comprehensive handbooks containing information on preparation for placement; professional conduct in the workplace; assessment of work-based learning; health and safety; and sources of support and guidance. Practice learning agreements are signed by students, tutors and mentors and confirm placement arrangements and individual responsibilities. A cross-faculty Work-Based and Placement Learning Forum reports to UQEC on issues related to the delivery and quality assurance of placements and identifies good practice for wider dissemination.

2.109 The University supports students in undertaking overseas exchanges and placements including Erasmus Plus which are coordinated between the International Centre and faculties. Link tutors support students on Erasmus exchanges.

2.110 On the basis of the evidence presented and discussions with key staff and stakeholders, the review team found that the University has appropriate arrangements in place for the approval, monitoring and review of collaborative partnerships and provision, including practice-based learning and placements delivered with employers. Approval and monitoring processes pay due regard to the quality of students' learning opportunities and delegated responsibilities for standards are discharged with appropriate oversight through the University's academic governance system. Consequently, the review team concludes that Expectation B10 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**

2.111 The University Research Committee (URC) oversees the management of postgraduate research (PGR) provision drawing on the deliberations of the Faculty Research Committees (FRC) which manage this provision at faculty level. Research degree regulations were revised recently with separate regulations for the taught elements of doctoral programmes. Information on regulations is readily available to students, supervisors and examiners in research degree handbooks. There are regulations and guidance for PGR admissions with web advice for prospective applicants. There is a clear statement of the research student offer including expectations at the faculty and subject level. There are plans to expand the number of PGRs which has been growing steadily and stands at approximately 400.

2.112 The review team tested the various features of the University's research degree provision through consideration of regulations, policies, University reports evaluating its own provision, and committee minutes. The team also met research students, members of the Students' Union, supervisors, senior academic and support staff involved in supporting PGR provision.

2.113 The University research environment is enhanced by active groups of researchers across many subject areas and it entered 13 Units of Assessment in the 2014 Research Excellence Framework. PGR students are automatically members of the Doctoral College which is a key component of the research environment. The University attributes recent increases in student satisfaction to its establishment. Students the team met were generally positive about the research environment including opportunities for wider involvement in their subject research communities, for example through presenting their work at conferences. Some student dissatisfaction with access to specialist equipment, resources and facilities has been formally noted, and the University is addressing this through a significant investment in research on different sites.

2.114 A Research Operations Handbook provides clarity in the procedure for administrators involved in admissions and consistency is monitored termly by FRCs and the Research Awards Sub-Committee (RASC). Admissions decisions involve two suitably qualified and trained staff and monitoring takes place to ensure that decisions are balanced, independent, fair and consistent. Students whom the review team met uniformly affirmed the thorough yet supportive nature of the admissions experience. While these students were positive about the timeliness of admissions, the University has identified the admissions process as an area for further improvement, in particular the need for applications to be handled more speedily.

2.115 The University has developed a pre-research programme to include both English language support and assistance in developing a satisfactory research proposal. Students the team met also reported a positive experience of induction, and confirmed the appropriateness of information in helping them understand the expectations of their course of study. Responsibilities, entitlements and other information are provided to students through the 'Postgraduate Research Student Offer', the Research Students' Handbook and

workshops. The supervisory team is also a source of information as outlined in their handbook and firmly endorsed by the students whom the review team met.

2.116 There is general student satisfaction with the quality of supervision for research degrees. There is an approved list of supervisors who are selected according to criteria. They are required to be research active, trained and qualified. There is a main director of study and a second supervisor in each supervisory team. A development programme supports supervisors and enables them to share their practice. Participation in refresher training is expected every three years. Student engagement with their supervisors including agreed actions is clearly logged, and there is evidence of monitoring of student engagement with supervisors. Faculty research committees monitor staff workloads in relation to supervision using a points system. The University is taking appropriate action to ensure capacity keeps pace with growth, as monitoring identified a potential problem with supervisor capacity in at least two faculties. Likewise the University is also taking action to provide increased language support for some PGRs following identification of this need through its review processes. To this end, a pre-research programme has been established, and extensive language support is offered through the International Academy.

2.117 There is a procedure for the regular review of progress made by PGR students which is outlined to students in their handbook. Progress of supervision is monitored through regular supervision reports to Faculty Research committees. The review team met students who endorsed the importance of this system for reviewing supervision and confirmed that the documented process takes place. The University has included a focus on progress and review in development opportunities for staff to encourage timeliness of thesis submission.

2.118 Supervisors are expected to assess and regularly monitor the skills of their students and identify those that require development, and students the team met confirmed that this takes place. The Doctoral College is responsible for training research students and providing for their generic development against the Researcher Development Framework. Students evaluate this provision positively. Skills workshops for students unable to access campus training are provided via the VLE and have been enhanced recently by video capture and remote participation following feedback that the training needs to be more accessible to part-time, distance learning and disabled students. Other development and support is available in faculties and in the University more widely and is advertised by the Doctoral College. Students reported useful development events designed to enhance their employability and entrepreneurship. Students whom the review team met confirmed University and faculty action to provide the opportunity to teach and access associated training opportunities including the Post-Graduate Certificate in Academic Practice in Higher Education. This development addresses a recommendation from the previous QAA review in 2008.

2.119 Research degrees are monitored annually by the RASC which produces a report using a range of sources and informs future target setting. USEC monitors performance and action plans. In addition to their reports on students' theses, views on the assessment arrangements are routinely sought from external examiners after completion of their duties. Full use is made of information from the national Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) and the internal survey (iPRES). Recent results indicate an improved student experience in a number of areas. Overall, there is good evidence that the University monitors PGR provision thoroughly using an increasing range of data and that this is used to make appropriate decisions.

2.120 Progress has been made following the 2008 QAA review regarding the provision for research students to provide feedback at a local level. The Students' Union is actively working with research students and supporting their representatives in collecting and representing student feedback on provision. Evaluation of PGR provision takes place drawing on the views of current and former students, supervisors and examiners, and has

led to enhancements; for example, provision of 'writing up' development workshops. PGR students confirmed that they are represented on relevant committees and provide feedback via annual surveys. Feedback on supervision is part of each student's Annual Progress Review and students are surveyed on completion. PGR student newsletters seek to ensure communication with PGRs, including material such as details of development workshops and other events, access to support, links to new guidance, details of recent changes to regulations and contact details for PGR student representatives.

2.121 In conclusion, the University's provision for postgraduate research awards operates in an effective research environment which secures academic standards and supports students' research, learning and development. The University has identified this as an area of growth and a number of enhancements are underway to develop research degree provision. Therefore Expectation B11 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation:** Met

**Level of risk:** Low

## The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.122 In reaching its judgement about the quality of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All Expectations are met and the level of risk is low in each case.

2.123 There is one recommendation in this area under Expectation B5. While the review team is satisfied that appropriate mechanisms exist for capturing and responding to the student voice, it recommends action to raise awareness of the opportunities available for student involvement in some quality assurance processes. The team also made three affirmations of action already being taken by the University to address identified areas of weakness. The team affirms the plans in progress to improve consistency in the recently introduced continuous course monitoring process, to review the clarity of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Sub-Strategy, and to address the causes of high levels of academic misconduct among international students.

2.124 There are two features of good practice which, in the view of the review team, make a particularly positive contribution to the management of this judgement area. These relate to the comprehensive range of initiatives to raise student attainment, and the effective approach taken by the University to enhance student employability.

2.125 In summary, the University makes available to its students appropriate learning opportunities to achieve the intended learning outcomes of the award for which they are studying. The single recommendation in this area relates to enhancing the effectiveness of existing processes, and therefore poses a low risk. Through its review processes the University has itself identified areas for improvement, some of which are in the early stages of implementation and reflected in the affirmations made by the review team. The review team concludes, therefore, that the quality of student learning opportunities at the University **meets UK expectations**.

### 3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

#### **Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision**

##### **Findings**

3.1 The University's processes for information generation and exchange are based on an Information Strategy which prioritises access to appropriate, timely and accurate information. The University Strategic Plan 2012-17, which is published on the website, describes the institution's mission, values and overall strategy.

3.2 The University's website, which was redesigned and upgraded during 2013-14, is the principal mechanism for communication with the public including prospective students, employers and other stakeholders. Redesign of the website, which coincided with a change of web content management system, was driven by a need to increase its capacity and achieve improved functionality, presentation and reliability.

3.3 The Students' Union has led on the development of a Student Charter which outlines a set of shared expectations and establishes the values and standards the University seeks to promote across all of the learning community. In addition, two subcharters, related to the original charter, have been adapted for the branch campus in Mauritius and for postgraduate research students respectively. The University and Students' Union are working together to increase the Charter's visibility within the institution.

3.4 In reviewing the University's arrangements for producing information the review team scrutinised a wide range of publicly available and internally published information including: the University website; the VLE; guides and handbooks; policies and procedures; and example award certificates. The team also explored staff's and students' views on the production and availability of information.

3.5 A wide range of information is made available to applicants, current students and other stakeholders. Prospective students are provided with web-based information, support and guidance to inform their choice of course and prepare them for the transition to higher education. The University's website contains a comprehensive range of information and dedicated web pages catered to the specific needs of different groups of students. The new website, which was launched in November 2014, incorporates an increased amount of audio-visual content.

3.6 Course and module specifications, supplemented by more detailed module and course guides, are made available to students through the VLE and are the main source of information for students during their course of study. Specifications provide the definitive records of courses including the learning outcomes and the learning, teaching and assessment strategies. Course and module guides provide more detailed information intended to support students in understanding the expectations of their course, academic regulations governing their award, and the range of support, advice and guidance on offer throughout their period of study at the University. To ensure information contained within these documents remains fit for purpose and trustworthy, a central database is used to maintain strict version control of specifications, and the Academic Registry checks for consistency in the procedures by which course guides are agreed and updated. A range of

media is used to communicate with students including email, the VLE, SMS text messaging and public area display screens, the latter being especially useful for communicating short-notice timetable changes. Each student has an account which contains a personal homepage through which they can access their grades and a planned development will see the addition of personalised timetables. University news and events are communicated through dedicated web pages, a Vice-Chancellor's Update and the staff e-magazine. Staff and student representatives the review team met confirmed the accuracy and availability of information, including access to external examiner reports.

3.7 The University's Academic Registry holds and maintains all data relating to student enrolments, assessment and awards. The University produces data to support the continuous monitoring of programmes and the deliberations of award and progression boards. Student recruitment, retention, progression and achievement data are also used to generate Key Performance Indicators that inform faculty performance reviews. The University uses management information when setting priorities for investment in student learning opportunities.

3.8 Partner-produced promotional materials including web-based information receive prior approval from the University ahead of publication. The Collaborative Handbook, Operations Manuals and memoranda of cooperation describe the arrangements for approval of published information. The review team met staff from partner organisations who were able to clearly iterate the University's expectations and regulations relating to the approval mechanisms for published information on their courses. Transcripts and award certificates for partner students are produced by the University and transcripts contain the teaching institution's name and location.

3.9 A partnerships database is maintained by the Assistant Registrar (Partnerships) and supports the production of an internal register that details all UK and overseas arrangements for off-site course delivery, supported delivery and accreditations but does not list articulation arrangements or placement providers. Details of partnership arrangements are published on the University's website. The University publishes a separate list of PSRBs with which it has accreditation arrangements.

3.10 Existing students receive a full transcript based on a diploma supplement detailing the credit awarded to them including grades and, where applicable, final degree classifications. Award certificates are produced and issued with the appropriate security controls. Work is continuing on the provision of a Higher Education Achievement Report for completing students. The University is currently looking into how to verify students' extracurricular activities to populate the Higher Education Achievement Report.

3.11 The review team concludes that the University clearly understands the expectations placed upon it with respect to producing information for internal and external stakeholders. Appropriate controls are in place to ensure information, including that produced by collaborative partners, is fit for purpose, trustworthy and accessible. Therefore Expectation C is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation:** Met

**Level of risk:** Low

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

3.12 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. There are no recommendations or features of good practice in this area. The review team is satisfied that the University employs effective mechanisms to ensure the information it produces for internal and external stakeholders is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The review team concludes, therefore, that the quality of information about learning opportunities at the University **meets** UK expectations.

## 4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

### Findings

4.1 The Strategic Plan 2012-17 and the supporting sub-strategies clearly articulate the University's enhancement-related aims, how these will be achieved and key performance indicators for measuring success. Strategic priorities for enhancement include academic excellence and scholarship, social inclusion, student employability and global engagement. The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Sub-Strategy, which is seen by the University as the key driver for enhancing the quality of students' learning opportunities, is in the process of being reviewed to facilitate better communication of priorities in this area to staff and other stakeholders (see Expectation B3).

4.2 The University has governance and management structures at both faculty and University level to implement, monitor and evaluate enhancement initiatives. USEC and UQEC are the two subcommittees of the Academic Board and their membership comprises deputy vice-chancellors, senior staff involved in quality and the delivery of support services, and student representatives. USEC has a specific remit for leading on the development of policy to enhance the student learning experience, as well as to identify and disseminate good practice across the institution. UQEC has oversight of all quality assurance processes and uses the outputs from these processes to prioritise areas for development and to share and promote good practice in all faculties. Actions are taken forward at a local level through faculty-level committees and completion reported back to USEC and UQEC.

4.3 The rationale behind the University's recent restructuring from schools to faculties was part of a wider enhancement initiative to create larger academic units that facilitate more effective exchange across the University and to enable improvements to take place in a coordinated and planned manner. As part of the new faculty structure there is an Associate Dean in each faculty with responsibility for leading on a specific substrategy, supported by a number of cross-faculty principal lecturers.

4.4 In testing the University's approach to enhancement the review team considered minutes of University and faculty committees, University substrategies, reports of quality assurance processes and documentary evidence pertaining to specific enhancement initiatives. The review team also met the Senior Management Team, academic and support staff, and a wide range of students to explore the extent to which an ethos of enhancement is embedded within the institution.

4.5 The University has been successful in promoting a culture of enhancement which is informed by self-reflection and continuous review. Over the last few years the University has rolled out a number of new developments as part of a deliberate approach to enhancing its provision, for example the introduction of an iterative course approval process, continuous course monitoring and central oversight of research provision through a Doctoral College. While some of these processes are still being developed and embedded further, the team noted the careful and planned manner in which many of these developments had been executed.

4.6 The University takes a self-reflective approach to enhancement, using evidence-based internal and external reviews to identify and prioritise areas for improvement. The team also noted the thorough way in which the University monitors the impact and effectiveness of new initiatives. An example is the move from alpha-numeric to percentage-

based marking. This institution-wide change was initiated in response to student feedback and was implemented by a Task and Finish Group closely overseen by UQEC. A year after the introduction of the new marking scheme a full review was undertaken, which involved feedback from staff, students and external examiners. Subsequently, an action plan approved by UQEC was put in place to make further improvements to the clarity of assessment criteria and the provision of feedback.

4.7 The deliberative committee structure provides an effective framework through which University-wide improvements take place. There is sound evidence that University-level committees identify strategic initiatives and that they explicitly measure progress against sub-strategies through an ongoing review of key performance indicators. Examples of initiatives supported by USEC include campus developments to refresh old learning spaces and improvements to personal tutoring. Minutes of committee meetings show a systematic and consistent approach across faculties in responding to actions raised at University level and for reporting back on progress made in these areas.

4.8 In the view of the review team, there are two particular areas of enhancement which have led to demonstrable improvements in the quality of student learning opportunities. The first is related to developing student employability - a theme which is embodied in the University's mission and strategic plan. The Enterprise and Employability Sub-Strategy articulates the University's aim of raising levels of employment upon graduation. This has been achieved through a range of innovative strategic initiatives including: the creation of posts within the University for its students and graduates, for example Graduate Interns in support services and Graduate Teaching Assistants; opportunities for mentoring through partnerships with local employers; and a Graduate Incubation Programme to support graduates in setting up their own business. The University also engages with employers as external stakeholders, giving due consideration to employers' expectations in curriculum design and development. The collective impact of these strategies is evident both in the satisfaction expressed by students whom the review team met and the increase in employment rates. According to the most recent DLHE survey data available at the time of the visit, 94 per cent of students who graduated from the University in 2013 are in work or further study after they leave - a four per cent increase on the previous year (see feature of good practice under Expectation B4).

4.9 The second stream of work which showcases the University's approach to enhancement is raising student attainment. Given that a notable proportion of its students are from under-represented groups or less privileged backgrounds, the University recognises the challenges it faces in supporting its student body in achieving their qualification. As well as widening access to higher education through social inclusion strategies, once enrolled at the University students are provided with comprehensive, accessible and tailored support to assist them in realising their academic potential. Raising attainment is evident as a priority in several of the University's strategies, and in minutes of University and faculty committees which review progress in this area. Through its faculty and University performance review processes the University has been able to put in place targeted initiatives for supporting students at key points in their lifecycle where there are known problems with attainment. For example, Graduate Teaching Assistants provide additional support to students with a particular view to encouraging progression from level 4 to 5 (see feature of good practice under Expectation B4).

4.10 Academic and support staff the team met had a common and shared understanding of the University's expectations for enhancement, particularly through the sharing of good practice. Both staff and students whom the review team met spoke positively of the recent restructuring to faculties and commented on the way in which it enabled a more coordinated approach to be taken to managing institution-wide improvements.

4.11 There is a high level of cross-faculty engagement and a number of formal forums through which evidence-based practice is exchanged. The University has well established 'communities of practice' bringing together staff from different faculties to promote the dissemination of good practice in specific areas such as learning and teaching, or quality. The Rich Exchanges Programme provides opportunities for teaching staff to showcase particular practices in learning and teaching. In addition there are various other networking and team away days, many of which are pan-University events that align to specific areas of strategic priority. These opportunities are extended to staff at collaborative partners and placement providers. The embedded culture of enhancement, which fosters the creation of staff networks to promote the exchange and dissemination of effective practice, is **good practice**.

4.12 There is good evidence that through engagement with the Students' Union, University enhancements are appropriately informed and in some cases even driven by student feedback. Students are represented on all senior decision-making committees and minutes of these reveal that 'student voice' is a standing agenda item. New initiatives are developed and introduced in close consultation with the student body, and any subsequent reviews take account of student opinion. Examples of student-led enhancement initiatives include: the formal recognition of student involvement in University projects; variant student charters for postgraduate research students and those studying at the Mauritius branch campus; and the 'Visioning the Library of the Future' project which includes the involvement of five student volunteers to help imagine the redesign of learning centres across all campuses.

4.13 The review team concludes that the University has an effective approach to enhancing the quality of students' learning opportunities. Enhancements are identified through internal reviews and quality assurance processes, informed by the student voice, and implemented through an effective governance and management structure. In particular, there are various forums through which staff are able to exchange good practice, promoting a well embedded culture of enhancement. Therefore 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

4.14 In reaching its judgement about the enhancement of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. There are no recommendations for improvement in this area. The University is in the process of refreshing its Learning, Teaching and Assessment Sub-Strategy to clarify institutional priorities for enhancement, and therefore the affirmation made under Expectation B3 is of relevance to this judgement area.

4.15 The team identified one example of good practice in relation to the networking opportunities created for sharing good practice across the institution. The two features of good practice identified under Expectation B4, which relate to specific enhancement initiatives for raising attainment and enhancing student employability, also make a positive contribution to the University's management of this area.

4.16 The University has a well embedded culture of enhancement that is embraced by staff and students. It takes a critically self-reflective approach, informed by internal and external review processes, to identify areas requiring further development. Institution-wide improvements are undertaken in a carefully planned and systematic manner in partnership with the Students' Union. There is a high level of cross-faculty engagement which promotes enhancement in learning and teaching practice through the sharing of good practice. Enhancement-related projects which include raising attainment and increasing employment rates on graduation have resulted in demonstrable improvements. Therefore, the review team 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 employs a range of methods for engaging with its student body and eliciting student feedback. While opportunities to participate in some quality assurance processes are not always taken up by students, there is a wide and diverse range of mechanisms in place to ensure that the student voice is an integral part of decision-making processes, particularly at the most senior level. The University works in close partnership with the Students' Union and this has been instrumental in initiating institution-wide improvements that are either led or contributed to by students.

5.2 Particular innovations in student engagement include the use of social media to gather student views and respond to feedback. In some departments, there is a dedicated social media page which enables students to provide feedback and exchange views in a contemporary way. Communication through this page is monitored by one of the University's graduate interns and it has been an effective way of ensuring issues raised by students are responded to in a timely manner. The Students' Union has introduced student-led teaching awards which recognise and reward the contribution of academic and academic-related support staff. In partnership with the Students' Union, the University has undertaken significant outreach activity to engage traditionally harder-to-reach students such as those studying by distance learning and at collaborative partners. A 'Students' Union on tour' initiative involved students visiting collaborative partners in the UK to raise awareness of student representation systems. This resulted in a visible improvement in postgraduate research representation across the faculties and in the committee structures in the regional campuses and the establishment of a local branch of the Union at the University's Mauritius branch campus.

5.3 There is good evidence that student views are considered and acted on, particularly in relation to enhancement activities. In addition to Student Union representation on key University committees including the Board of Governors, the Corporate Management Team and Academic Board, students are invited to participate in working groups associated with specific change activities, for example the change to percentage-based marking where they successfully lobbied for the addition of a 'classification calculator' to students' VLE profiles. There are numerous other examples of enhancement-focused projects in which the Students' Union has participated such as the development of personalised student timetables, extended opening hours for the library and other campus services, and the provision of additional support for students with mental health issues.

5.4 The University has evidenced many methods for the collection of student feedback and reports on the actions taken through the committee structures which is then disseminated through student representatives, and also through the annual 'in response to your feedback' campaign. This campaign highlights any changes at University level to improve the student experience, while faculties reinforce local changes for enhancement purposes through 'You said... We did' messaging. These campaigns are promoted by the Students' Union, which also feeds back to the student community on the successes it has had in bringing about positive change as a result of student engagement.

## Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 27 to 29 of the [Higher Education Review handbook](#).

If you require formal definitions of other terms please refer to the section on assuring standards and quality: [www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality](http://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](http://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* (FHEQIS).

### **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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