



Higher Education Review of University Campus Suffolk

November 2014

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About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at University Campus Suffolk. The review took place from 10-13 November 2014 and was conducted by a team of four reviewers, as follows:

- Louisa Green
- Helen Marshall
- Ann Read
- Mark Napier (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by University Campus Suffolk and to make judgements as to whether or not its academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. These expectations are the statements in the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) (the Quality Code)¹ setting out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and of each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

In Higher Education Review the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
 - the setting and maintenance of academic standards
 - the quality of student learning opportunities
 - the information provided about higher education provision
 - the enhancement of student learning opportunities
- provides a commentary on the selected theme
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the provider is taking or plans to take.

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 8.

In reviewing University Campus Suffolk the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland.

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

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

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

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

³ QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus.

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

Key findings

QAA's judgements about University Campus Suffolk

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at University Campus Suffolk.

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding bodies **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

Good practice

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

- The active involvement of employers in the design, approval, review and delivery of programmes (Expectations B1, B3, B4 and B8).
- The curriculum-based employability skills and extra-curricular work experience opportunities that have a positive impact on student learning (Expectation B4).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to University Campus Suffolk.

By March 2015:

- to liaise with the Joint Academic Committee to ensure that it is fully involved in managing, and clearly sighted on the evidence related to, academic standards and quality on taught provision delivered at the Learning Network Centres (Expectation B10).

By June 2015:

- ensure sufficient breadth of subject and supervisory expertise in order to formally consider, review and approve postgraduate research programmes of study (Expectation B11)
- in the context of institutional change, make sure that published information reflects changed arrangements in a timely, accurate and coordinated manner (Expectation C).

Theme: Student Employability

Employability features strongly in the University Campus Suffolk Strategic Plan and is a clear theme across the portfolio of its Ipswich campus. There are three main channels through which employability is promoted: by embedding it in the curriculum; via extra-curricular activity; and by partnering curricular and extracurricular channels.

Employability skills are an integral part of course design and employers are involved in both course design and ongoing course development and enhancement. Enterprise and

entrepreneurship is embedded in a number of curriculum areas and students reported favourably on the value of these opportunities.

UCS Ipswich has developed strong relationships with a number of local employers and these have engendered a variety of placements, internships, projects, guest speakers and live briefs developing student employability skills across the portfolio. There has been an investment in staff development opportunities to raise awareness and understanding of employability and the means by which it can be embedded within the wider student experience.

The review team concludes that employability is well embedded across UCS Ipswich, beginning with relevant strategies, and flowing to faculties and service areas for implementation. In addition, this makes a positive contribution to the student learning experience.

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

About University Campus Suffolk

University Campus Suffolk (UCS) was formed in 2007 as a joint partnership between the University of East Anglia and the University of Essex, in collaboration with a range of higher education providers across Suffolk and into Norfolk. It reflected the government's desire to encourage coherent tertiary offers in areas of demand, such as parts of East Anglia, identified as 'cold spots'.

The venture is conducted through the medium of a private company limited by guarantee, University Campus Suffolk Ltd (UCS Ltd). While the two providers jointly own UCS Ltd, UCS operates as a separate entity. It has its own executive team, led by the UCS Provost. The two providers act as the joint validating authority for UCS programmes, and students receive a degree awarded jointly by the University of East Anglia and the University of Essex.

UCS programmes are delivered at UCS Ipswich (UCS Ltd) and at five Learning Network Centres housed within and owned by regional further education colleges: UCS Bury St Edmunds (located within West Suffolk College); UCS Great Yarmouth (located within Great Yarmouth College); UCS Lowestoft (located within Lowestoft College); UCS at Suffolk New College (located within Suffolk New College); and UCS Otley (currently located within Easton and Otley College but about to leave the university network). The colleges employ staff at the Learning Network Centres.

The UCS partnership operates on a federal model, but with UCS Ipswich providing 'a central hub for the internal management of the partnership and the provision of a range of systems and services'. The validating universities have a direct relationship with UCS Ipswich and each of the colleges hosting the university Learning Network Centres.

The arrangement is underpinned by a Framework Collaboration Agreement between the two validating universities, UCS Ltd and the five colleges, which includes information on governance, structures, the quality assurance framework and the operational responsibilities of each party.

The operation of UCS is overseen by the UCS Board, to whom the UCS Provost and Chief Executive are accountable. The Board includes representation from the validating universities, UCS academic staff, the Learning Network and the UCS Students' Union. Implementation of the decisions of the Board is managed through the UCS Executive which aims to 'provide strategic leadership, direction and management, delivering the strategic plan and monitoring performance of UCS in relation to its strategic objectives.' A range of subcommittees support the work of the Executive, covering core areas of UCS's activity.

The Academic Board has responsibility for the academic operation of UCS, including teaching, learning and assessment, student support, learning resources and the learning environment. According to the self-evaluation document (SED), it 'maintains internal oversight of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities at UCS Ipswich and across the UCS Learning Network.'

The work of the Academic Board is supported by a range of sub-committees with responsibility for specific aspects of academic operation, including Faculty Boards; the Partnerships Board; the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Group; the Course Approvals Group; the External Examiners Group; the Student Experience Committee; and the Research and Enterprise Committee. The Learning Network is represented on all relevant committees.

The Academic Board also reports to the UCS Joint Academic Committee (JAC). As a joint committee of the validating universities, the JAC is 'ultimately responsible for all matters relating to the quality and standards of UCS academic provision.' It includes senior representation from the two universities, UCS Ipswich, the Learning Network Centres and the Students' Union.

This review focused on the provision at UCS Ipswich. Higher education provision within the university Learning Network Centres has already been subject to scrutiny via Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) of the colleges hosting the Centres in 2011-12.

UCS Ipswich has a core strategic aim to 'raise the educational aspirations and achievements of learners in Suffolk and the surrounding sub-region'. The provider explains that the strategic plan (2010-15) and vision statement (2015-20), and associated key performance indicators (KPIs), provide an overarching framework and reference point to enable UCS to offer 'cost-effective, high quality teaching and learning focused on vocationally relevant areas, underpinned by targeted national and international research and scholarship'. The vision statement outlines that UCS provision at all centres of delivery is intended to be genuinely rooted in and responsive to the economic, social and cultural aspirations of the communities it serves. A new strategic plan for the period 2015-20 is under development.

In the 2013-14 academic year UCS had 5,220 students overall (4,497 FTE), around 75 per cent of whom (3,352 FTEs) were based at the UCS Ipswich campus. Around 58 per cent of the overall UCS undergraduate student body are classified as mature students (over the age of 21 on entry), and 21 per cent of all students (undergraduate and postgraduate) are studying part-time. Students from the East Anglian region make up the bulk of the student population, including 86 per cent from Ipswich, Colchester, Norwich and Cambridge postcode areas.

The strategic plan identifies a focus on broad subject areas which 'relate to current expertise across UCS, the strategic agendas in the Suffolk/East Anglia region and national/international priorities'. The provider has a portfolio of courses at undergraduate and postgraduate level with an emphasis on employability; meeting the needs of specific professions (including local health contract requirements); and responding to regional and national growth areas. UCS also offers a Master of Philosophy (MPhil) and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in conjunction with the validating universities. Academic provision at UCS Ipswich is located in seven departments across the Faculty of Arts, Business and Applied Social Science, and the Faculty of Health and Science.

The Students' Union was formed in 2007 and has grown significantly since its inception, expanding its activities across all UCS's centres of delivery. The Students' Union was shortlisted for the National Union of Students (NUS) Small and Specialist Students' Union of the Year award in both 2013 and 2014, in both instances finishing runners up.

The provider sees the management of the 'unusual structure of UCS' as 'a source of strength in terms of the development of a highly collaborative approach to higher education provision across the region, enabling a range of FE and HE providers to work closely together to promote and support educational attainment within the East of England'. However, it also identifies the key challenge of 'managing this complex network of eight partner institutions and ensuring external stakeholder understanding of the unusual structure and status of UCS.'

UCS Ltd aspires to achieve taught degree awarding powers and has the support of its validating universities in this objective. This ambition reflects the provider's aim to establish an independent university presence in Suffolk, 'where there has been an historic under-provision of higher education, low HE participation levels, pockets of high deprivation and substantial skills gaps in the local economy.' UCS believes that a successful taught degree awarding powers application would allow a much clearer articulation of the provision of higher education by the university, enabling it to build on the strength of the relationship with the Learning Network Centres.

Reflecting the aim of adapting to external challenges, UCS Ipswich has engaged in a restructuring process during the 2013-14 academic year. The intention has been to provide a sustainable academic management structure that better reflects the size of the institution and its academic portfolio, and to place UCS in a stronger position to achieve its ambitions for future growth and development. In addition, student recruitment, conversion and retention are important institutional priorities, with UCS striving to enhance its performance in all three areas.

The Higher Education Review is the first direct engagement with QAA that UCS Ipswich has had since its inception in 2007. UCS was reviewed indirectly via the University of Essex Collaborative Provision Audit in 2010. The findings of the audit of the two providers' joint management of provision at UCS were presented separately from the University of Essex's other partnership activity, with the auditors identifying no recommendations for action in respect of the UCS partnership, and commenting on the 'sound framework' in place for the universities' management of quality and academic standards.

The five colleges making up the UCS Learning Network were subject to separate QAA IQERs in 2011-12, following developmental engagements the previous academic year. With one exception, these recorded confidence in the standards of awards, the quality of learning opportunities the centres offered on behalf of the validating universities, and the accuracy and completeness of published information. Each of the reviews was followed up by an action plan monitored by UCS and signed off by QAA. In the case of Great Yarmouth College, the review team arrived at a judgement of limited confidence in the way in which the College discharged its responsibilities for the management of standards. UCS and the awarding bodies undertook a detailed evaluation process to identify the underlying causes for the judgement and take action to address them. In addition to the QAA follow-up action planning process that focused on Great Yarmouth College processes, UCS and the validating universities undertook a review of their own processes. QAA has subsequently confirmed that it received a satisfactory response to the IQER summative review at Great Yarmouth College. To enable the improvement to be sustained, the Centre remains subject to close scrutiny by UCS and the validating universities, with a follow-up review visit taking place in June 2014.

UCS Ipswich also underwent a quinquennial review by the two validating universities in 2012. The self-assessment document and associated evidence base were commended by the validating universities and external panel member as an excellent basis on which to review the institution. The review resulted in two requirements, three recommendations and six commendations. The two requirements related to improving the JAC's oversight of elements of UCS activity (including its growth strategy, the postgraduate research degree student experience, and professional development within the Learning Network) and strengthening the relationship between academic departments at UCS Ipswich and the Learning Network to ensure academic authority and subject-based enhancement. A resultant action plan was reported to and monitored by the Academic Board, giving rise to a number of initiatives aimed at both strengthening existing arrangements and building on identified good practice.

UCS is also subject to external review at course level through the work of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs), and the outcomes of these review processes are reported to the Academic Board in order to maintain institutional oversight. In a number of cases, (re)accreditation is facilitated through PSRB involvement in UCS course validation and re-approval processes.

Explanation of the findings about University Campus Suffolk

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 maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies

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 UCS degrees are awarded jointly by the University of East Anglia and the University of Essex. The SED explains that the relationship is governed by the requirements, agreed processes and procedures set down in the Partnerships Handbook. UCS contributes to this Handbook via its consideration at the Partnership Management Group. The SED states that the qualifications (including those awarded through Learning Network Centres) are allocated to the appropriate level of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and defined in terms of a minimum credit threshold consistent with the expectations of the *Higher Education Credit Framework for England: Guidance on Academic Credit Arrangements in Higher Education in England*.

This position is reinforced by the Academic Regulations which require alignment with both.

1.2 UCS has used programme specifications to record the level of courses but these are being replaced with 'definitive course records' which the provider believes will enable students to have a clearer mapping of the learning outcomes for their course. Course approval and re-approval panels are required to consider Subject and Qualification Benchmark Statements and, where appropriate, the requirements of PSRBs.

1.3 The review team tested the arrangements described in the SED by considering documentation including that explaining the processes for the approval and review of programmes (such as course and module templates), examples of completed review reports, and external examiner reports. This information was also considered in meetings with staff. The team concludes that the requirements set out in the UCS documents have the capacity to meet the Expectation.

1.4 The consideration of documentation and discussions with staff confirmed that the provider employs Subject Benchmark Statements and qualification frameworks effectively in its published approval, review and assessment processes. The review team therefore **affirms** the assertions made within the SED, and that UCS meets the Expectation 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

1.5 The SED states that UCS has an academic framework and a set of regulations which govern how the provider awards credit and qualifications. The framework and regulations are jointly developed and agreed with the two validating universities via the JAC. A single set of academic regulations for all taught provision at both undergraduate and postgraduate level covers all awards delivered across UCS.

1.6 The common academic framework which governs the approval of new courses as well as assessment and awarding functions at UCS Ipswich is applied across all provision and is set out in a range of documentation, which is available to guide staff in the development and design of programs and their operation and review.

1.7 The academic regulations are kept under review by a working group and updated by JAC to take account of internal and external developments. External examiners comment on the application and relevance of the regulations in their reports. A summary of external examiner reports is presented to the Academic Board annually and changes to regulations may be made in response to external examiners' comments.

1.8 In discussion with staff, and following scrutiny of the evidence provided, the review team concludes that the academic framework and academic regulations have been developed and implemented in a way that enables UCS to maintain academic standards and to meet the expectations of the Quality Code in this area. Therefore the Expectation is met and the association 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

1.9 UCS operates with a central database that incorporates student and course records. This database is informed by programme specifications which have been routinely produced for all courses. They provide a definitive record of each course and qualification awarded, and are shared with students via student handbooks.

1.10 As noted, in the light of consideration of the revised Part A of the Quality Code, programme specifications are being replaced by definitive course records which are being progressively introduced during 2014-15. Course records will continue to be mapped against the Quality Code but will, in the provider's view, enable a clearer alignment between course learning outcomes and the relevant qualification descriptors. They will also form part of the documentation prepared for approval and re-approval events.

1.11 Through scrutiny of course documentation and discussions with staff, the review team is able to conclude that both programme specifications and definitive course records provide a suitable reference point for the delivery and assessment of the course, and its monitoring and review. Accordingly, the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.12 While the ultimate responsibility for setting standards rests with the Senates of the University of East Anglia and the University of Essex, the approval process is overseen on behalf of both universities by the JAC which, as noted, has representation from both validating universities, UCS Ipswich, Learning Network Centres and the Students' Union. The Academic Board of UCS Ipswich is a subcommittee of the JAC and makes the recommendations on all new awards for both UCS Ipswich and the Learning Network Centres. Both validating universities are in attendance at the UCS Ipswich Academic Board. UCS Ipswich and the Learning Network Centres programme proposals are subject to detailed scrutiny at number of stages, from the initial business case approved by the UCS Portfolio Development Committee through to the academic proposal being subject to scrutiny by a validation panel, chaired by one of the validating universities with external representation.

1.13 All module learning outcomes are mapped against programme requirements (and PSRB requirements where relevant), and the approval processes check the learning outcomes are set at an appropriate level aligned to the FHEQ. This approach to assessment strategies and criteria is designed to enable students to demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes. All programmes are approved for a maximum period of five years, and the views of employers and PSRBs are also sought in terms of programme demand and design.

1.14 Arrangements for the approval of postgraduate research programmes of study are detailed in the Partnership Handbook. Only one of the validating universities acts as the degree-awarding body, with the second supervisor being appointed from that university. Arrangements for the approval of individual programmes of research are approved by the Postgraduate Research Subcommittee, which currently has only three members from UCS Ipswich as well as two members from each of the validating universities.

1.15 The current assessment regulations, common to both UCS Ipswich and the Learning Network Centres, require students to demonstrate achievement of all learning outcomes in order to pass a module.

1.16 The review team tested the application of the policies and processes by scrutinising the Partnership Handbook, the Quality Manual and documentation from several programme approval processes, and by discussing the programme approval process with groups of staff and students. The minutes of the Academic Board, JAC, the University of East Anglia Learning and Teaching Committee, and the University of Essex Education Committee show that new awards are approved in line with formal guidance.

1.17 The review team found that the mechanisms for securing standards in the design and approval of programmes are comprehensively documented and well understood by staff. Furthermore, the operation and oversight of the processes, as demonstrated by documentation, and the minutes of panels and committees, is effective. The mapping against relevant Subject Benchmark Statements and the FHEQ, the involvement of external

experts in the approval panels, and the inclusion of PSRBs and employers in the design and approval of programmes ensure the validity and continuing relevance of programmes.

1.18 The review team concludes that the processes in place to approve programmes are effective and enable UCS Ipswich to meet the Expectation. 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

1.19 UCS Ipswich appoints an Assessment Board for each programme of study and this has delegated powers to make final decisions on the award of credit and qualifications. A sample of Assessment Boards are attended by the validating universities, who provide a summary report to the JAC.

1.20 The assessment of learning outcomes is designed at the initial course approval stage by course teams in reference to provider-wide frameworks that are mapped against national threshold academic standards.

1.21 Assessment Boards receive a range of information on student attainment against institutional thresholds that enables them to establish that individual students have achieved the relevant module and programme learning outcomes in order for credit and qualifications to be awarded. This information includes confirmation from the pre-assessment boards and also, where relevant, a recommendation from the Mitigating Circumstances Panel in relation to individual students. The Assessment Board can reach a decision as to whether to accept the Panel's recommendation and where a recommendation is declined the Assessment Board is required to record a reason for this.

1.22 UCS Ipswich reviews its assessment frameworks and regulations on a periodic basis as part of a regular cycle of review of all UCS policies and procedures. The performance of Assessment Boards is reviewed annually via the Academic Board and the JAC, and policy and practice is mapped against the Quality Code.

1.23 The review team looked at the operation of the Assessment Boards, associated frameworks and policies as evidenced in the committee terms of reference, minutes, policies and procedures. It also heard from staff involved in these processes. The review team was assured that, in practice, the Assessment Boards were enabled to confirm awards on the basis of appropriate information about individual student attainment and this was accurately set against provider and UK thresholds. The review team noted, however, that the terms of reference for Assessment Boards were not explicit in making it clear that they have delegated powers from the validating universities to make final decisions on awards. The review team suggests therefore that UCS might wish to revisit the terms of reference, both of Assessment Boards and those committees from which their authority is delegated, to ensure that they accurately reflect the provider's practice (see Part C of the Quality Code on published information).

1.24 Nonetheless, the review team concludes that the combination of processes employed provides assurance that UCS Ipswich has in place mechanisms that can ensure the maintenance of academic standards on behalf of the validating universities, and the Expectation is met.

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

1.25 A new review process, Risk Based Monitoring and Enhancement (RiME), was introduced in 2013-14 across UCS Ipswich and the Learning Network Centres. The process, described in the Partnership Handbook, is used for the monitoring of all taught programmes, the Graduate School and professional service departments. The reports and action plans then feed into the UCS annual report to the Academic Board, prepared by the Head of Quality Enhancement, and subsequently to the spring meeting of the JAC.

1.26 UCS has a risk alert process for investigating issues of concern arising from the RiME process. The risk alerts can be triggered by the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Team where the provider's key performance indicators are not met or where the concerns are more qualitative in nature. Once a risk alert has been raised the course team are asked to investigate the issue and complete a template proposing appropriate action. An audit team, which includes a student and a critical friend, independent of the provision, is then set up to review the situation and approve the planned actions which are then added to the programme action plan for monitoring purposes.

1.27 UCS Ipswich and the Learning Network Centres do not have a periodic review process at course level; rather courses are subject to review and re-approval every five years. The UCS Course Approvals Group is responsible for recommending to the JAC that a course proceeds for re-approval, and does this by reviewing the submitted forms and outcomes of RiME. The Course Approvals Group determines the scope of the re-approval process as a 'review and enhancement' or a full validation. This, in turn, informs the course team's completion of the re-approval documentation and the focus of the panel meeting.

1.28 The review team met staff and students, and considered the operation of the course monitoring and re-approval process by scrutinising the Partnership Handbook, relevant guides, course committee minutes and action plans, School Annual Reports, the UCS summary report, and minutes of Academic Board and JAC.

1.29 The review team found that UCS mechanisms are effective in ensuring courses are monitored regularly, re-approved every five years and delivered in accordance with what was approved; academic currency is maintained; and the programmes continue to meet UK threshold standards and those of the awarding universities. The processes are comprehensively documented, well understood by staff and students, and appear to be well embedded after the first year of operation.

1.30 The review team concludes that the processes in place to monitor and re-approve programmes are sound and enable UCS Ipswich to meet the Expectation. 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

1.31 Course validation and re-approval processes are set out by UCS Ipswich and the validating universities in the Partnerships Handbook, and require the involvement of external and independent expertise in the setting of academic standards for all courses mapped against UK and established internal thresholds of UCS Ipswich and the validating universities.

1.32 External examiners are appointed in accordance with the UCS procedure, and appointments are approved by the UCS Academic Board and the JAC. Externals are required to report on whether academic standards have been achieved, annually and prior to the recommendation for awards made at Assessment Boards.

1.33 The team considered a range of external examiner reports which demonstrated that this procedure was being followed. The UCS Academic Board and the JAC exercise oversight via receipt of annual reports on the content of external examiners' reports and the consequent action plans produced by course leaders working with their teams. External examiners' reports are also used as part of the RiME process providing a further mechanism by which a risk alert can be raised where there is a cause for concern.

1.34 Modifications to validated courses require course teams to seek external academic support for their proposals usually from the external examiner appointed to the course. This provides additional assurance that the academic standards continue to be appropriate.

1.35 The review team is satisfied that UCS Ipswich has in place appropriate mechanisms to ensure that independent and external expertise is routinely used at key stages of its procedures for setting and maintaining academic standards on behalf of the validating universities. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies: Summary of findings

In reaching its judgement about threshold academic standards, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook. All of the expectations for this judgement area were met and the associated levels of risk were low. The team identified no specific recommendations or affirmations for this judgement area, nor any examples of good practice. It was noted that the terms of reference for Assessment Boards needed to be revised to more accurately reflect practice but the team did not view this as a risk to the maintenance of academic standards.

The review team therefore concludes that the maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards at UCS, offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies, **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1 The same broad principles that govern the design and approval of modules, taught courses and qualifications at the University of East Anglia and the University of Essex apply to UCS Ipswich and the Learning Network Centres. Validation policies and procedures are fully described in the Partnerships Handbook and UCS Quality Manual, and are subject to a cycle of regular review by the Policies and Procedures Working Group, a subcommittee of the JAC.

2.2 UCS separates the business and academic approval of new programmes. The business case is approved by the UCS Portfolio Development Committee and the initial academic case by the Course Approval Group. Standard templates are used in the approval process, with slightly different versions for multi-site proposals.

2.3 Once initial approval is granted, course teams develop the documentation for the validation panel. The validation requirements, which include the production of a draft Student Handbook and staff curricula vitae, are articulated and supported by central services and an extensive range of guidance materials. The process requires that attention is paid to external reference points including relevant sections of the Quality Code, Subject Benchmark Statements and PSRB requirements. Courses are developed with local employers' needs to the fore.

2.4 Validation panels include representatives from both universities, one of whom chairs, external panel members, employers and students. Validation event reports are signed off by the chair and submitted to the JAC for approval thus enabling oversight by the validating universities. A summary report is produced for Academic Board on conditions and recommendations.

2.5 The review team considered a wide range of documentation, including descriptions of process; guidance documentation; examples of validation papers and reports; and committee minutes for, among others, the JAC, Course Approvals Group and Academic Board. The review panel also discussed the various processes for design, development and approval of courses with staff, students and employers.

2.6 The review panel found the course approval process to be well documented, with defined processes, roles and responsibilities, which were well understood by staff at both UCS Ipswich and the Learning Network Centres. The criteria for approval are clear, and are explicitly referenced in the relevant templates and checklists used at each stage of approval. Full use is made of relevant external reference points, and staff are provided with extensive guidance documentation and support from central UCS services. The approval process is kept under review and there was evidence of changes being made to improve practice. The process is robust, with strategic oversight from the validating universities in the form of the Universities Liaison Group, at the initial approval stage; by the sharing of chairing and membership of the validation panels; and via the JAC receiving the validation panel reports.

Students are invited to be members of validation and re-approval panels, but this is an area where UCS is still working to achieve greater student engagement. The team confirmed that employers are influential in advising on demand for the course, and also inform course design and content. Accordingly, the review team considers the active involvement of employers in the design and approval of programmes as contributing to **good practice**.

2.7 Overall, the team concludes that the procedures for the development and approval of new programmes meets the Expectation and the associated level of risk is low. The systematic approach to programme approval is effective in supporting course teams and results in new courses designed to meet the needs of local employers.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.8 UCS manages the recruitment, selection and admissions process for all undergraduate and taught postgraduate awards, including decisions on, and approval of, accreditation of prior (experiential) learning. It also has operational management of the recruitment, selection and admissions processes for postgraduate research students. The ultimate responsibility for approval of policies and procedures relating to recruitment, selection and admission is under the jurisdiction of the validating universities, via the JAC. UCS recruitment, selection and admission is explicitly informed by the provider's strategic priorities and is articulated in the Admissions Policy. A range of internal strategies including Student Recruitment, Outreach and Widening Participation, and International Student Recruitment have been developed to align with the Quality Code and guidance from relevant external bodies.

2.9 Selection processes for entry into higher education are underpinned by transparent entry requirements, both academic and non-academic, and these have been reviewed with the move to the UCAS paperless admissions system. Open days are conducted by authorised staff, who assist prospective students in making decisions. To promote transparency, procedural fairness and consistency, all staff involved in admissions are required to attend training to facilitate informed decision making; the training includes a focus on equality and diversity.

2.10 The provider has sought to develop effective working relationships with local schools and colleges by running summer schools and an annual Teachers and Advisers Conference designed to assist prospective students in making informed decisions about higher education. Workshops and open events staffed by academics and relevant professional service teams also aim to help provide prospective students with a smoother transition to higher education.

2.11 UCS has implemented a selection of online support mechanisms for admissions, such as an applicant portal for specialist advice, alongside broader application guidance on academic (including PSRB) and non-academic requirements as well as course information. Infozone Online, an enquiry management system, encourages applicant feedback, helping UCS to monitor, review and update its recruitment, selection and admission policies, and procedures. The Infozone is a single port of call for enquiries and information on various issues including academic courses, student finance and application routes.

2.12 Course-specific Admissions Assistants with specialist knowledge of subject areas have been appointed to assist new students in making the transition to higher education. Further, given a comparatively high proportion of students being enrolled through clearing, the staff in Admissions, Student Recruitment, Marketing and the Infozone have collaborated in the production of clearing-specific brochures designed to help prospective students manage the transition upon enrolment.

2.13 On the basis of its analysis of documentation, and meetings with staff and students, the review team concludes that UCS Ipswich operates an effective set of recruitment, selection and policies. The provider's procedures are transparent, reliable, valid, inclusive and underpinned by appropriate organisational structures and processes, and therefore meets the Expectation 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

2.14 The UCS Teaching and Learning Strategy sets out eight strategic objectives for the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices at UCS Ipswich. Implementation of the Strategy is undertaken via a Teaching and Learning Framework which sets out expectations on course design and delivery. At the local level, the team was made aware of a draft Teaching and Learning Strategy for one of the two faculties, which interprets the institutional strategy at the course level. It was clear from the academic staff with whom the team met that institutional-level strategies were articulated across the provider and were being used by course teams when designing and reviewing provision in course approval, re-validation and RiME processes.

2.15 The Learning and Teaching Assessment Group (LTAG) has responsibility for annually identifying development and enhancement priorities for learning and teaching at UCS Ipswich and also for ensuring their alignment with the Quality Code.

2.16 Additionally, UCS Ipswich systematically reviews the appropriateness of its learning opportunities and teaching practices at the course level through validation and re-approval processes. Resources to support course delivery are kept under review through the RiME process. These various procedures require reference to provider-wide undergraduate and postgraduate frameworks which are applied to all provision and include mapping against external reference points, including the FHEQ. This approach to learning and teaching is also informed by National Student Survey results and internal student evaluation data. Departmental and Centre Academic Committees, and Faculty and Partnership Boards, are responsible for defining, developing and reviewing learning, teaching and assessment strategies for courses within the overall context of UCS quality assurance processes

2.17 A system of peer observation is in place which was reviewed and revised in 2013-14. Those staff whom the team met attested to the usefulness of the recent pilot in informing their teaching practice. It is intended that following the pilot, the revised scheme will be implemented during 2014-15.

2.18 The LTAG minutes and associated papers, as well as information on course approval and re-validation, and discussions with UCS Ipswich staff, provided clear evidence that an effective mechanism is in place for systematically reviewing and enhancing the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices on taught courses. Additionally, the team noted that student satisfaction with teaching as expressed in the National Student Survey had increased from 79 per cent in 2010 to 83 per cent in 2013, providing further evidence that the mechanisms in place are effective in enhancing learning and teaching at UCS Ipswich. The team also saw evidence of employer involvement in course approval and re-validation processes to enable the embedding of employability skills within curriculum design, and concludes that this contributes to **good practice**.

2.19 The review team also saw evidence of recent innovations in the use of learning technology in course teaching, supported by the Elevate team. Students who met the review team spoke positively about teaching and learning on all courses with a high level of support

provided to them by course teams. Students receive written feedback on their work, with opportunities to discuss the feedback provided by course teams and personal tutors. The review team was aware from comments in the student submission that students have felt that turnaround times for feedback on marked work are not consistent across subject areas. Students met by the review team did not indicate this was a widespread issue, and the team was assured by comments from teaching staff that systems were in place for both monitoring feedback turnaround times and for informing students if delays occurred. The team noted that in response to previous comments from students, UCS Ipswich had amended its Student Charter for 2014-15 to specify that all feedback should be returned to students within four working weeks of submission.

2.20 A wide range of staff development opportunities oriented to supporting staff in developing teaching practice and sustaining the emergent research profile (see *Chapter B11* of the Quality Code) is described in the SED. Evidence provided to the review team confirmed that staff across UCS Ipswich are making use of these opportunities. Development opportunities for staff have been further enhanced with the introduction of UCS PASSPoRT, a consistent and aligned continuing professional development framework, for which UCS Ipswich is currently seeking accreditation from the Higher Education Academy. The team also heard that staff development opportunities were made available to Learning Network Centre staff with additional support provided by UCS Ipswich personnel, for example, in the development of new courses.

2.21 Information on learning opportunities is provided to students through a variety of media, including in person at induction and via delivery of courses, in print (course handbooks) and online via MyUCS, the UCS intranet site. Students expressed some difficulty in navigating MyUCS and reported experiences of outdated information. However, students who met the team were clear on where to access information about their courses, intended learning outcomes, assessment methods and learning resources.

2.22 A system for identifying and implementing reasonable adjustments for disabled students is in place to ensure equity of access to learning opportunities for all students. There is also a process in place for evaluating the success of those adjustments. Initiatives led by the student services and learning services teams are designed to promote anticipatory teaching practices and minimise the need for individual adjustments.

2.23 The team is assured that the provider has in place effective procedures to review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices to enable and support students to develop as independent learners and study their chosen subject. UCS Ipswich works with a range of its staff and students across the institution in implementing these procedures, often with active involvement from employers. Therefore the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement

Findings

2.24 A high quality student experience is emphasised in the UCS Strategic Plan, which is underpinned by priorities for supporting students' academic, personal and professional development outlined in the UCS Teaching and Learning Strategy. Success against institutional priorities is monitored, reviewed and enhanced through the RiME process.

2.25 A Personal Tutor system is in place with expectations and responsibilities of students and tutors formally outlined in the Tutorial Policy. It explains that personal tutors should advise students on module choices, study skills, personal development and any personal issues. Students who met with the team had all been assigned a Personal Tutor and described them as accessible, informative and supportive.

2.26 UCS describes a number of activities to support students' transition into university and their progression. These include those initiatives relating to admission and induction such as the applicant portal; Transition into HE days; identification through the application process of students who would benefit from the pre-entry study skills course; a student buddying system; and a range of more conventional induction events. Once students have started on their course, there are student support drop-ins, a Wellbeing Week, an Are You OK? campaign, and a programme of student engagement activities delivered by the Student Support team. In terms of developing students' study skills, UCS has worked with the Students' Union to appoint student peer assisted learning leaders (PALS), it has instigated an information literacy skills project, and it provides a range of academic skills sessions through the Learning Development Team. The UCS Graduate Headstart Scheme, and Careers and Employability Service, support students in moving towards employment. Additionally, the review team observed a number of examples of employers' active involvement in the support of the curriculum, and felt that this contributes to **good practice**.

2.27 In recent years, UCS has made a number of strategic investments in student services and learning resources including the IT infrastructure; the Library; Infozone (the One Stop Shop referral service for students accessing advice); e-resources, including the virtual learning environment (LearnUCS); and other specialist learning resources. It also provides training for students in using these various resources. The review team heard that student services staff have regular contact with service staff at the Learning Network Centres to provide them with advice and ensure that services across the network are aligned with those at UCS Ipswich.

2.28 UCS has an Equality and Diversity Policy which is communicated to staff via an e-learning course, provided to all new staff at induction and further staff development at later junctures. This is designed to ensure that all students are supported in their academic and professional development.

2.29 Students' access to information about what is available is clearly signposted in course handbooks, at induction events, via Infozone, and through Personal Tutors and course teams.

2.30 Students also benefit from direct access to employers who act as guest lecturers on some courses, provide internships and work experience students, and contribute to the design, review and modification of the curriculum. The review team noted that UCS Ipswich

is committed to supporting student transition into employment through the engagement of employers in curriculum design and delivery, as well as the provision of placement and work experience opportunities. The team concludes that the curriculum-based employability skills and extra-curricular work experience opportunities have a positive impact on student learning and are **good practice**.

2.31 The provider's student support arrangements and provision of learning resources are effectively designed to enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential, from transition into university to progression through their programme of study, and into employment on graduation. Arrangements are monitored through a number of mechanisms which include the opportunity for student feedback. Therefore, consideration of documentation and meetings with staff and students enabled the review team to conclude that UCS meets the Expectation 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

2.32 UCS, working with the student body, has defined and promoted a range of opportunities for students to engage in quality assurance and enhancement. The UCS Student Charter articulates the provider's aim of being 'a student-centred higher education institution'.

2.33 UCS has student representation across its committees at institutional, faculty and course level (Students' Union officers are on, among others: the JAC, Academic Board, LTAG, Partnerships Board, and Policies and Procedures Working Group). A key forum is the Student Experience Committee, a subcommittee of the Academic Board which meets four times a year and has among its membership senior academic staff, including the Provost, and Students' Union officers. The Student Experience Committee has overseen the development of the Student Charter.

2.34 The RiME process affords all students the opportunity to contribute to the evaluation and improvement of their experience. Within RiME, UCS uses a course-based student representative system, which includes the use of course committees, module evaluations, UCS Student Survey and the Student Voice Area of MyUCS. Details of these processes are promoted in all course handbooks, and through induction activities, MyUCS and LearnUCS. To avoid 'questionnaire overload', the Student Experience Committee maintains a register of feedback questionnaires with the aim of reviewing and approving their timing.

2.35 UCS and the UCS Students' Union have also developed a Code of Practice on Student Representation aimed at ensuring that the provider maintains an environment in which students and staff engage to bring about demonstrable enhancement of students' academic experience. The Code of Practice records UCS commitments regarding encouragement of the student voice, training of student representatives and monitoring of the effectiveness of student engagement.

2.36 UCS expects all courses to have student representation and defines the role they are expected to take in contributing to course committee meetings, in maintaining communication with their peers, and working informally with course teams to raise emergent issues. This is reinforced by student representative induction and specific course committee guides for both staff and students, alongside the aforementioned Student Representation Code of Practice.⁵ While student representative attendance in committee meetings has proved challenging, valuable contributions have been made through the system.

2.37 To further work toward student representation at all levels, UCS and the Students' Union have developed online training for student representatives on the Students' Union website, standing alongside face-to-face training sessions, to help engage with harder to reach students.

⁵ The Student Representation Code of Practice is available at:
www.ucs.ac.uk/About/Ourpolicies/StudentPolicy/Student-Representation---Code-of-Practice.pdf

2.38 The team heard that in response to the student submission, UCS has implemented an action plan to address issues raised. Plans for a centralised timetabling system are in train; the Student Voice section of MyUCS is being revised and there is an intention to publish a student-friendly executive summary of the Annual Academic report for students.

2.39 UCS Ipswich has recognised the need to 'close the loop'. A number of mechanisms are employed to achieve this both at course and institutional levels, including updates at the course committee and other meetings, and the work of personal and course-level tutors, alongside the You Said... We Did promotional campaign, which communicates ways in which the provider has responded to issues raised by students.

2.40 Both Students' Union officers and senior UCS staff explained to the team that student engagement, oriented to bringing about demonstrable enhancement of the students' academic experience, is effective at the formal dimension of committees and groups, and at the informal level. At the latter, the team heard that senior Students' Union staff and senior UCS management, including the Provost, communicate regularly in a variety of ways in order to promote an effective partnership between senior staff and the Students' Union. Furthermore, plans are in place for the transition of this mode of working to the next group of elected Students' Union sabbaticals.

2.41 The review team, having met staff and students, and considered relevant documentation, concludes that the provider is taking deliberate steps to engage students as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their academic experience, and that accordingly, UCS Ipswich meets the Expectation 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

2.42 UCS Ipswich and the Learning Network Centres have a standardised regulatory framework for undergraduate and taught postgraduate awards, designed to promote a consistent approach to assessment across all UCS centres. At the time of the review, the framework was under review, with a revised version due for presentation to the Academic Board and JAC for approval in autumn 2014.

2.43 Regulations on award of marks, progression and awards are contained in the Frameworks and Regulations for Undergraduate and Postgraduate Awards, which are supplemented with guidance notes for students. UCS's approach to assessment is articulated in the Assessment and Feedback Framework. Assessment strategies for individual programmes and units are approved through the validation and re-approval processes.

2.44 All internally set, summative assignments and assessment criteria at all levels of assessment are subject to moderation by an independent team member, normally appointed by the Programme Leader, prior to submission to external examiners and subsequent release to students.

2.45 Students are informed about what is expected of them in terms of assessment, including details of hand-in and return dates, in a variety of ways, such as via module guides, student handbooks and in-course briefings. Assignment briefs make explicit the task to be completed, the assessment criteria, the format and timescales. Generic support is provided online.

2.46 All summative work is internally moderated and a sample is seen by the external examiners, who are asked to confirm that assessments measure students' achievement against the learning outcomes, are rigorous and fair, and that feedback practices are sound. Cross-moderation is undertaken by UCS academic staff and external examiners where provision is offered at more than one site within UCS Ipswich and the Learning Network Centres, to ensure consistency of marking practice.

2.47 Feedback should be given on all summative work and returned on the date stated on the assessment schedule. The return of assignments is monitored by programme teams. In some departments a 'return of work on time' rate is calculated and shared with students via course committees, and UCS is in the process of extending this practice to all departments during 2014-15.

2.48 Policies, procedures and guidance for staff and students on accreditation of prior learning (APL) and academic misconduct are published, with good academic practice covered in induction and supported by an online assignment toolkit. All academic misconduct cases are dealt with centrally by the Academic Registrar to ensure consistency and fairness, with Assessment Boards approving the penalties. The Academic Board

receives a summary report to maintain academic oversight. The Mitigating Circumstances Policy is clear and explained well to students

2.49 The validating universities monitor the conduct of Assessment Boards via representatives attending a sample of Boards, and this is complemented by the provider's own internal monitoring. An annual report on the operation of the Boards is presented to the Academic Board. Academic tutorial support is available for students who have been referred or deferred.

2.50 The review team looked at a range of documentation, including: policies; academic regulations; procedures and guidance notes for staff and students; external examiners' reports; programme handbooks; and assignment briefs. Assessment practices were also discussed with staff, students and employers.

2.51 The review team found that UCS operates effective policies, regulations and processes that ensure that academic standards for each award are maintained at an appropriate level, and student performance is equitably judged. Policies for APL, Academic Misconduct and Migrating Circumstances are explicit, transparent and accessible. It was noted that the numbers of students seeking APL are currently low and applicants are approved by Assessments Boards. Students were well briefed on academic misconduct. With the exception of some professionally accredited health-related areas, employers are not involved in the marking of student work, although they do provide feedback on students' performance in the workplace.

2.52 The timeliness of academic feedback was raised as an issue in the student submission and has been acknowledged by UCS as an area for improvement. In response UCS have updated their Assessment and Feedback Framework to make the return time of four weeks, and the role of course committees in monitoring return rates, more explicit.

2.53 The arrangements for Assessment Boards, including membership, procedures and accountability are clearly articulated and overseen by the validating universities on a sampling basis.

2.54 The team concludes that UCS Ipswich operates processes which ensure the equitable, valid and reliable operation of assessment, enabling students to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes. Further, UCS fully meets the Expectation and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining

Findings

2.55 The UCS Appointment of External Examiners Policy sets out the appointment criteria, the roles and responsibilities of external examiners, including reporting requirements and the procedure for raising serious concerns. The guidance is aligned with the requirements of the Quality Code.

2.56 External examiners are provided with a range of resources for carrying out their role, including an information pack on appointment; an annual forum, attended by course team members (with an augmented version provided online); and course and assessment information from course teams, as well as samples of student work. They are expected to attend Assessment Boards and any absence is permitted only by the Academic Registrar (see also section A3.4, page 18).

2.57 The External Examiner Group has oversight of external examining arrangements with appointment of external examiners considered by an External Examiner Approval Panel established in 2013-14. It make recommendations to the Chair of the JAC thereby enabling oversight by the validating universities. Subsequently, the External Examiner Group scrutinises External Examiner Approval Panel activities.

2.58 External examiner reports are produced on an institutional template with an adapted one for courses delivered across multiple sites. They are submitted online and accessed by both UCS Ipswich and the validating universities. Completed reports are considered initially by the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Team at UCS Ipswich who identify any serious issues for immediate action by course teams. For any report, the course response must identify an action plan for approval by the line manager and the Head of Quality Enhancement. The validating universities are then provided with an overview of reports, responses and actions taken. Once reports and associated actions plans have been signed off by the JAC they are shared with the external examiners via an online system. External examiner reports also provide a key reference point in the RiME process.

2.59 The review team was told that external examiner reports are made available to students via LearnUCS, the student virtual learning environment, and discussed at course committee meetings. The student submission indicates that while reports are shared with Course Representatives, the availability of them was not widely publicised to all students and that often reports were difficult to locate. Students who met with the team reported that the majority of students were not aware that reports were available to them.

2.60 The review team was satisfied that the appointment of external examiners was in accordance with UCS Ipswich procedures and consistent with the Quality Code, and that effective use was being made of external examiners in the maintenance of academic standards. Clear institutional oversight of common issues arising was evidenced by the team, with appropriate arrangements in place for dealing with any immediate or serious causes for concern raised within individual examiners' reports.

2.61 The review team was made aware of some recent committee restructuring, including establishment of the External Examiner Approval Panel. While the team understands that in practice the appointment of external examiners remains broadly in accordance with its published procedures, it was noted that the terms of reference of the Academic Board needed to be updated to ensure that revised practice is sufficiently

reflected in all committee terms of reference, and that published information reflects changed arrangements (see Part C of the Quality Code).

2.62 While external examiner reports were made available to students, and were being discussed at course committee meetings, it was evident that the wider student body was not fully aware of them and the purpose they might serve in supporting students' academic development. The team noted that there is therefore scope for UCS Ipswich, working with the Students' Union, to raise awareness of external examiner reports.

2.63 The review team considers that UCS has a comprehensive set of procedures governing its use of external examiners. Furthermore, the team saw a wide range of evidence that these procedures are working effectively and consistently across the provider. Accordingly, the team concludes that UCS is making scrupulous use of external examiners, meets the Expectation and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.64 The RiME process is described in the Partnerships Handbook and has been fully mapped against the Quality Code. It was fully evaluated after its first year of operation and a number of enhancements were approved by the Academic Board for 2014-15. It is positioned as the key mechanism for systematically identifying, recording and evaluating action in order to enhance the quality of the student experience at UCS Ipswich and the Learning Network Centres.

2.65 Each programme, department, Learning Network Centre and professional service is subject to the RiME process, which uses a wide range of evidence on the quality and standards of provision to promote a reflective evaluation of the curriculum, its delivery, and the achievement of students or service. The process has a focus on continued monitoring and action planning. At programme level, course committee minutes record the course team's self-evaluative reflections in response to feedback and performance indicators, and the associated contributions and discussions from students and employers. Strengths and areas for enhancement should be identified and evidenced, with actions to address any areas of concern planned and monitored through course action plans. Employers are invited to course committees to allow their feedback to be incorporated.

2.66 Departments and Learning Network Centres are required to undertake similar monitoring and enhancement activities through their own committee structures and to produce an annual summary report subject to a formal review. RiME reports for professional services are received by LTAG and feed into the annual academic report received by the Academic Board and JAC.

2.67 The RiME process uses risk alerts, in effect, qualitative or quantitative triggers, to identify issues of potential concern, where an audit panel is set up to review the course's, department's or centre's response and proposed actions. The risk alert outcomes then feed into the relevant action plans.

2.68 UCS uses re-approval of courses every five years as the means of periodic review. The process is broadly similar to validation. Course teams complete a template for submission to the UCS Course Approval Group which makes a recommendation to the JAC as to whether a course should proceed either to a full re-approval or a lighter touch review based on the outcomes of RiME. The re-approval documentation is subject to scrutiny by a panel with external members, representatives of the validating universities and a student representative. Reports are signed off by the Chair with responses to recommendations monitored by the Course Approval Group. Outcomes are considered by the JAC, which makes a recommendation to the relevant committees of the University of East Anglia and the University of Essex for formal re-approval.

2.69 The course modification process allows programme amendment between re-approval events. It can be undertaken either through the minor changes process, that is for those changes which do not alter the substantial character of the course, or through the major changes process which applies to changes that fundamentally alter the character of the provision. Consultation with the external examiner and the inclusion of a summary of changes since the last re-approval to guard against curriculum drift are key features of the

process. The decision as to whether a proposed modification to an approved course constitutes a minor or a major change is made jointly by the Chairs of the JAC. There are processes to ensure programmes undergoing major changes (revalidation, suspension or withdrawal) are run appropriately.

2.70 The review team met staff and students, and looked at the operation of the RiME and re-approval processes by reading: the Partnerships Handbook and relevant associated guidance; course committee minutes and action plans; school annual reports; the UCS annual academic report; and minutes of the Academic Board and JAC.

2.71 The RiME and re-approval processes are clearly articulated, have defined processes, roles and responsibilities, and effectively use external and internal reference points and key performance data. They are well understood by staff and students, with the latter, as members of course committees and re-approval panels, engaged in events. RiME has been designed to enable UCS to take deliberate steps to use outcomes for quality enhancement. It was reviewed after its first year of operation and a number of minor improvements made. The team felt that it is too early in its implementation for effectiveness to be fully judged. However, it did note the active involvement of employers in course committees, and hence in the RiME process, and in course approval and revalidation events, and considers that this contributed to **good practice**. The course modification process is similarly effective, while the procedures covering course suspension and withdrawal protect the academic interests of students.

2.72 The team concludes that UCS effectively discharges its responsibilities for regular and systematic monitoring and review and that the Expectation is met with an associated low level of risk.

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

2.73 UCS provides opportunities for students to raise matters of concern through its Academic Appeals and Student Complaints Procedures, which has been aligned with the Quality Code. In addition, there is a Dignity at Study Policy, relating to matters of bullying and harassment, used where appropriate. If students exhaust all internal avenues for complaint and appeal, there is a procedure to enable students to appeal to the validating universities via the JAC.

2.74 UCS offers students clear advice and guidance through the UCS website, MyUCS, the Infozone, induction materials and course handbooks. The Student Support team work with the UCS Students' Union Advice Centre to offer advocacy. The Academic Registrar's Office is also available for advice. The student submission notes the instrumental roles of the Academic Registrar's Office and the Course Administration Team in promoting relevant information or appeals and complaints.

2.75 There is an Appeals and Complaints Annual Report, received by the Academic Board, which monitors processes and outcomes. The Equality and Diversity Committee scrutinises the annual analyses of appeals and complaints to identify any potential trends relating to students with protected characteristics. UCS policies and procedures are subject to regular review via the Policies and Procedures Working Group, which has student representation.

2.76 UCS is an independent subscriber to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator. It had only one complaint forwarded to the Office between 2011 and 2014.

2.77 On the basis of its scrutiny of documentation and meetings with staff, the team concludes that UCS Ipswich has an effective set of procedures for academic appeals and student complaints, and that the Expectation was met. The associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.78 UCS's mapping of its policies and procedures against the Expectation and indicators of the Quality Code, *Chapter B10* divides its relationships and responsibilities into three main areas:

- how the validating universities address each indicator in relation to their partnership with UCS
- how UCS addresses each indicator in terms of the relationship between UCS Ipswich and the UCS Learning Network Centres
- how UCS and the universities address the indicator in relation to delivery or support of learning by a third party outside the UCS network.

2.79 UCS Ipswich does not currently have the powers to award degrees and, therefore, formally does not have the ability to enter into collaborative arrangements. Within the broader UCS provision there are five UCS Learning Network Centres which are based in, and owned by, further education colleges. The SED states that ultimate responsibility for the academic standards and quality of courses delivered in the Learning Network Centres rests with the validating universities.

2.80 Arrangements between the validating universities, UCS and the Learning Network Centres are governed by a legal agreement known as the Framework Collaboration Agreement. This sets out key aspects of the collaboration's management: for example, with respect to approval of staff who may teach on courses and allocation of student numbers at the Centres. The agreement also states that the Board of Directors of UCS Ltd is responsible for the academic and educational character of UCS, for its academic strategies and 'to fulfil the requirements established by the senates of the universities in relation to appropriate quality assurance mechanisms and procedures'. Furthermore it states that the Senates of the University of East Anglia and the University of Essex have agreed that academic matters relating to joint awards that are subject to the agreement will be dealt with through the JAC, which shall formally report to the Senate of each. The JAC's terms of reference include the requirement to 'consider all matters related to the quality and standards of academic provision of UCS and to make recommendations to the Education Committee of the Senate of the University of Essex, and the Learning and Teaching Committee of the Senate of the University of East Anglia accordingly'.

2.81 UCS Ipswich's operational management of business within the Learning Network Centres is channelled through the UCS Ipswich Academic Partnerships Office. Operational management of the wider UCS partnership is undertaken by the Partnership Management Group, which reports to the JAC. This Group is chaired by the UCS Head of Quality Enhancement and includes representatives from both validating universities. It has responsibility for the development and implementation of UCS quality assurance processes, including new course planning, and keeping the relationship between the universities, UCS Ipswich and the Learning Network Centres under review.

2.82 Staff at UCS Ipswich provide extensive guidance and support to the Learning Network Centres in the development, design and implementation of new provision. The approval of new courses at the Learning Network Centres is undertaken by a validation panel chaired by a senior member of staff from one of the validating universities. The process is the same as for UCS Ipswich campus-based courses. The validation report is then sent to the JAC, which recommends the course for approval to the Senates of the validating universities. All academic provision within the Learning Network Centres is subject to UCS regulations and processes.

2.83 Each Learning Network Centre has a Centre Academic Committee where the validating universities are represented by staff from the relevant university partnership offices. Scrutiny of minutes showed attendance at these meetings was not always complete.

2.84 The review team was told that the management of the partnership with the Learning Network Centres, and functions relating to academic standards and the assurance of quality within UCS, is undertaken by the Partnerships Board, which reports to the Academic Board, then the JAC, and onward to the senates of the respective universities. The Partnerships Board is seen as equivalent to the Faculty Boards operating in each UCS Ipswich faculty and has similar responsibilities. The terms of reference of the Partnerships Board include the requirement for it to 'maintain oversight of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities within the Centres'. Membership does not include representation from either validating university. The Partnerships Handbook provided to the team does not mention the existence nor role of the Partnerships Board but describes the operation of the annual monitoring process as going directly from departments to Academic Board and then onto the JAC.

2.85 Following a review of documentary evidence and meetings with staff, the review team was able to determine that the main UCS forum for the management of academic standards and quality within the Learning Network Centres is the Partnerships Board, which reports to Academic Board. The validating universities have the capacity to oversee academic standards and quality within the Learning Network Centres through attendance at Centre Academic Committees and the Academic Board, and through the JAC and the Partnership Management Group. The minutes of the JAC show that it receives and agrees the annual RiME report from the Academic Board and has access to information relating to provision within UCS Ipswich and the Learning Network Centres. However, the team could not find evidence of any detailed engagement by the JAC with data or evidence pertaining to programme or subject level, and concludes that this limited the extent of involvement and knowledge that each validating university has with the Learning Network Centres. Given that UCS Ipswich has no degree awarding powers, it is currently undertaking an unusual level of responsibility for academic standards and quality within the Learning Network Centres. Accordingly, the review team **recommends** that UCS Ipswich takes steps to liaise with the JAC to ensure that it is fully involved in managing, and clearly sighted on the evidence related to, academic standards and quality on taught provision delivered at the Learning Network Centres.

2.86 UCS Ipswich works with a number of partners who provide work-based learning or placement opportunities for students. These relationships and their associated learning are guided by the Work Based and Placement Learning Policy which is used by staff to establish, prepare and manage the learning experiences that students have in these environments. Where a course is regulated by a PSRB, any additional requirements for students and employers are taken into account in establishing and managing the work environment, and associated learning.

2.87 From its consideration of documentation, and discussions with staff and students, the review team concludes that UCS Ipswich is meeting Expectation B10. It noted that the provider is currently undertaking an unusual level of responsibility for academic standards and quality within the Learning Network Centres, and recommends that the JAC should strengthen its oversight. However, notwithstanding this, the team confirms that those powers were being exercised effectively by UCS Ipswich and is able to conclude that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B11: Research Degrees

Findings

2.88 UCS Ipswich introduced postgraduate research degree provision in 2011-12 covering seven subject areas. It has recently added two further subjects to its portfolio - Heritage and SMART Technologies - approved in accordance with course validation procedures set out in the Partnerships Handbook. Research student numbers are small (only seven are enrolled at UCS Ipswich) but there are plans to expand numbers in line with the UCS Ipswich Strategic Plan.

2.89 Students are admitted via the validating universities with an initial enquiry to UCS Ipswich administered by its Graduate School. Students are enrolled at UCS Ipswich where the primary supervisor is based. However, awards are made by one of the validating partners (the University of East Anglia or the University of Essex) determined by the location of the secondary supervisor and where the student is registered.

2.90 The regulations governing research degree students are those of the validating university at which the student is registered. These are provided to students at the point of offer and again at induction, with copies available via MyUCS. They set out the responsibilities of the student, procedures for progression, transfer of status and final assessment, as well as the responsibilities of the supervisory team. Students are required to keep written records of supervisory meetings and to log these with the Graduate School.

2.91 The supervisory team assigned to each research student includes a primary supervisor from UCS Ipswich with at least one other (secondary) supervisor based at one of the validating partners. Additional members of the supervisory team are allocated to students on the basis of their academic expertise. Decisions on the approval of candidates, the formal appointment of the supervisory team, and approval of the candidate's field of study and research, are currently taken by the Postgraduate Research Subcommittee (and formerly the Research Committee). The Subcommittee, which includes representatives from the validating partners, is also responsible for monitoring research degree provision at UCS Ipswich.

2.92 The research environment at UCS Ipswich is an emergent one, with growing numbers of research-active staff with supervisory expertise. A Graduate School, established in 2011, supports both research students and supervisory staff via the faculties for all aspects of research degree management and administration from application to graduation. Services provided by the Graduate School are also subject to the RiME process. A researcher development programme is also provided by the Graduate School and is available to all research students. Provision for research students at UCS Ipswich is currently augmented by the access to the research environment at the validating partner where they are registered (for example, students benefit from research methods training provided at the University of East Anglia and the University of Essex).

2.93 Final assessment procedures and requirements for research degree awards are those of the validating partner at which the student is registered, and are detailed in the Handbook provided to students. The first cohort of students is due to submit and be examined under these regulations by the end of 2014-15. Appeals procedures are those of the validating partner. Research students can use the complaints procedure of either UCS Ipswich or the validating partner, depending on the nature of the complaint.

2.94 Overall, the team regards the design of the provider's procedures to be in accordance with the Expectation offering students the appropriate quality of opportunities and support to achieve the academic, personal and professional outcomes from their research degrees. In partnership with the validating universities, students enrolled at UCS Ipswich are provided with an environment providing secure academic standards for doing research and learning about research approaches, methods, procedures and protocols consistent with Expectation B11 of the Quality Code.

2.95 While the team was satisfied that the provider's procedures are sound, it was concerned that the membership of the Postgraduate Research Subcommittee (and its predecessor, the Research Committee) did not include a proportionate number of academic staff with direct supervisory and/or academic expertise in reaching decisions about students' programmes of research. While the team heard from UCS Ipswich staff that it had recognised this and intended to expand membership of the Subcommittee to include academic staff with supervisory experience, at the time of the review the team could find no evidence of progress. The review team therefore **recommends** that UCS Ipswich ensure sufficient breadth of subject and supervisory expertise in order to formally consider, review and approve postgraduate programmes of study. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

In reaching a judgment about the quality of learning opportunities, the review team considered a significant range of institutional documentation and met with students and staff from UCS Ipswich, and staff from the validating universities and the Learning Network Centres.

Of the 11 Expectations in this area, all are met. The team noted two features of good practice, the first relating to Expectation B4 and the curriculum-based employability skills and extra-curricular work experience opportunities that have a positive impact on student learning. The second identified the active involvement of employers in the design, approval, review and delivery of programmes; this embraced Expectations B1, B3, B4, and B8.

In one area - relating to Expectation B10 - the team noted that UCS is currently undertaking an unusual level of responsibility for academic standards and quality within the Learning Network Centres, and recommends that the JAC should strengthen its oversight accordingly. However, notwithstanding this, the team was able to confirm that those powers were being exercised effectively by UCS Ipswich, and was able to conclude that the Expectation is met and the risk low.

Similarly, with respect to Expectation B11, the team recommends that UCS Ipswich ensure sufficient breadth of subject and supervisory expertise in order to formally consider, review and approve postgraduate programmes of study. However, again the review team concludes that the risk attaching to this recommendation is low and the Expectation is met.

The review team found that UCS had considered the formal requirements of these sections of the Quality Code, and had ensured that it was possible to demonstrate its compliance with broad expectations and its engagement with the Indicators informing those expectations. It concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities 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 As a core feature of UCS's relationship with its validating partners, the University of East Anglia and the University of Essex, it is obliged to ensure that all information regarding awards provided through courses validated by the universities must be fit for purpose, and should provide full and appropriate information to those who may reasonably be expected to refer to it. The About UCS⁶ section of the UCS website sets out relationships with the universities in terms of organisational structures, governance, strategic objectives, student population and academic portfolio. This approach to course approval, with initial proposals going to the Course Approval Group and then to the JAC, provides the universities with an opportunity to be assured of the quality of any proposal before it is included in the UCAS Directory and the UCS prospectus and website, or publicised in any other way. Following approval in principle, courses can be advertised as 'subject to validation'. All publicity material is required to make it clear that UCS courses are jointly validated by the University of East Anglia and the University of Essex and, except in the case of research degrees, lead to a joint award of the two universities. The prospectus is checked by the universities prior to publication and the universities also undertake periodic reviews of information published on the UCS website. UCS has also mapped its procedures against Part C of the Quality Code.

3.2 UCS provides pre-entry information through a wide range of channels, with the main sources coming from prospectuses, the website, Infozone and the applicant portal. Information on the UCS learning environment, curriculum content, entry requirements, financial costs, recruitment, selection and admissions procedures is provided. Currently, programme specifications are published for all courses on the UCS website, however, UCS is currently in the process of replacing them with definitive course records in response to Part C of the Quality Code.

3.3 UCS provides students with information on their programme of study upon enrolment and throughout their studies, via MyUCS, course handbooks, definitive course records and module specifications. LearnUCS, a virtual learning platform, provides students with essential information such as assessment strategies, schedules, deadlines and arrangements for returned work. The Student Charter and the Student Representation Code of Practice provide information for current students on what they can expect from UCS staff and the UCS Union, alongside what is expected of them.

3.4 Upon a student's completion of study, UCS provides graduates with an awards letter, detailing the title and classification (if applicable) of their award, and a list of the modules completed in achieving the award, including the credit value and grade achieved. Degree certificates are produced on behalf of the validating universities by the University of Essex, with academic transcripts (based on the Diploma Supplement) produced by UCS under delegated authority. Both validating universities are recorded on the certificate and transcript, and it is explained that it is a joint award. UCS is also planning the introduction of

⁶ More information is available here: www.ucs.ac.uk/About/Abouthomepage.aspx

the Higher Education Achievement Report, detailing additional information on student's extracurricular activities.

3.5 UCS operates a number of procedures aimed at ensuring that all information, both virtual and physical, is up to date and accurate. These include review procedures for the quality assurance of marketing and recruitment material; prospectuses; annual reviews of printed materials; visitor evaluation forms; and staff feedback on published information. These processes are undertaken by the Policies and Procedures Working Group, the Published Information Group, site editors, and the Marketing and Communications team, alongside yearly external reviews by the validating universities.

3.6 The team noted steps taken by UCS in responding to comments about published information in the student submission. As previously noted, the provider has responded with an Action Plan which includes objectives to more clearly explain information about formal disciplinary and appeals procedures, and to establish clearer protocols on course information.

3.7 From consideration of documentation and the UCS website, and from meetings with staff and students, the review team concludes that the information produced by UCS about the learning opportunities it offers is, in the main, fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. However, the team identified a number of areas of the website where material was out of date and inaccurate. These included information about job titles and staffing structures, and terms of reference for Assessment Boards and committees. Further, it was noted that web pages are not always dated making it harder to confirm the currency of information.

3.8 In meetings, UCS staff confirmed the providers' use of a number of monitoring mechanisms, such as annual meetings of the Published Information Group, aimed at ensuring the provision of current information. However, it was acknowledged that there were areas of inaccuracy and explained that these were likely to be as a result of recent and ongoing restructuring at UCS. In this context, the review team **recommends** that UCS Ipswich, in the context of institutional change, makes sure that published information reflects changed arrangements in a timely, accurate and coordinated manner.

3.9 Other than in this regard, the review team judged that UCS had a clear understanding of the expectations placed upon it, with respect to the publishing of information to prospective, current and former students, and accordingly meets the Expectation. The associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

In reaching a judgment on the accuracy, integrity and completeness of published information, the review team scrutinised a range of documentation (both published in hard copy and via electronic media) made available to prospective, current and former students and other stakeholders.

The review team found that, to a significant extent, UCS Ipswich had considered the formal requirements of this aspect of the Quality Code, and had ensured that it was possible to demonstrate its compliance with the broad expectation and its engagement with the indicators informing that Expectation. In the light of some areas of inaccuracy with regard to its published information, the team recommends that UCS Ipswich, in the context of institutional change, ensure that published information reflects changed arrangements in a timely, accurate and coordinated manner.

In summary, the team concludes that the provider has furnished stakeholders with appropriate levels of information and ensured that it is accurate, with approval mechanisms for published information, both internally and with collaborative partner bodies. It concludes that the quality of information about student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1 UCS Ipswich states that the enhancement of the student experience is the central focus of their Strategic Plan and is integral to the Teaching and Learning Strategy, and the Assessment and Feedback Framework. The Teaching and Learning Framework describes the RiME process, using relevant statistical measures and feedback from external examiners and students, and the course re-approval process, as the key measures which enable the institution to take deliberate steps to embed quality enhancement.

4.2 Annual quality enhancement priorities are set and monitored by LTAG on behalf of the Academic Board, and are based on Strategic Plan objectives and the outcomes of RiME. The annual UCS Ipswich enhancement plan is included in the annual academic report to the Academic Board and JAC, and course, departmental and faculty action plans are generated as part of the RiME process.

4.3 UCS Ipswich has embarked on a number of major enhancement projects, including the peer review of teaching practice; greater use of technology-enhanced teaching and learning; an innovative assessment and feedback project; a continuing professional development framework with associated policies for upskilling and recognising staff; a commitment to research-informed teaching; the embedding of employability skills in the curriculum; and the supporting of students to gain extracurricular work experience. UCS Ipswich seeks to take deliberate steps to share good practice through the annual Learning and Teaching days at institution and departmental level; by discussing good practice in the LTAG; by funding departmental Learning and Teaching fellows and projects; and by gathering student views on good practice through surveys and course committees.

4.4 The review team investigated the steps taken by UCS Ipswich to improve the quality of learning opportunities by firstly reviewing the key strategic documents to establish institutional drivers, priorities, and processes. The team then looked at documents showing how the priorities and actions were agreed upon and monitored on an annual basis. Finally, the team asked staff and students about their experiences of enhancement activities.

4.5 The provider sets out a clear vision, its objectives in terms of students' learning opportunities, and the processes it believes will enable it to achieve these objectives. Priorities are set annually and monitored by LTAG, and a number of enhancement initiatives are in the process of being implemented. Where appropriate, the Quality Assurance and Enhancement, Elevate (Learning technology), Careers and Employability, and Research and Enterprise teams provide targeted staff development events and guidance, as well as managing cross-provider pilot studies and embedding of initiatives.

4.6 The course validation and re-approval processes are effective in embedding the provider's core values and long term objectives, such as real world learning and employability skills, research-informed teaching, and technology-enhanced teaching to enhance student learning opportunities. UCS are undertaking a systemic approach to enhancing student employability, by defining what is meant, organising a number of staff development events on the topic, and setting up a working group to integrate employability and personal development into the curriculum. The expectation that course teams develop close links with employers ensures that the curriculum is responsive to local, regional,

national and international cultural and economic needs, and the extra curriculum activities provided by local employers enhance students' employability prospects.

4.7 The comparatively new RiME process appears to be working well, identifying actions for enhancement, which are monitored by the course committees, and subsequently by departmental and faculty boards. The RiME process uses benchmarked key performance data to identify any areas for concern and to identify good practice with the potential for wider dissemination and embedding. The RIME process, combined with course committees, are the main mechanism for reflecting on student feedback, whether it is from student surveys, courses representatives or the National Student Survey. Feedback from students suggests that UCS Ipswich is responsive to student concerns and has taken a number of actions - for example, requiring the date for the return of assignments and provision of feedback in assessment schedules - to enhance students' learning opportunities.

4.8 On the basis of its consideration of documentation, and meetings with staff and students, the team concludes that UCS is taking deliberate steps to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities and therefore meets the Expectation with the associated level of risk being low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The review team concludes that UCS Ipswich takes deliberate steps to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities.

This is evidenced by: the provider's overall Strategic Plan and its supporting strategies. UCS has embarked on a number of major enhancement projects, such as an Innovative Assessment and Feedback project, and a commitment to embedding of employability skills into the curriculum. In addition, the institution's committee structure enables enhancement, and quality assurance procedures allow the identification, support and dissemination of good practice.

Therefore, the team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1 Employability features strongly in the UCS Strategic Plan and is a clear theme across its portfolio. There are three main channels through which employability is promoted: by embedding it in the curriculum, via extra-curricular activity, and by partnering curricular and extra-curricular channels.

5.2 Employability skills are an integral part of course development, and employers are involved in both course design and ongoing review and enhancement.

5.3 UCS has developed strong relationships with a number of local employers and these relationships have engendered a range of placements (including international ones), internships, projects, guest speakers and live briefs across programmes, all of which support the development of students' employability skills. Schools are responsible for the establishment and management of placements, and this work is guided by the UCS Work Based and Placement Learning Policy, which is well aligned to *Chapter B10* of the Quality Code.

5.4 Where a course is regulated by a PSRB, any additional requirements are taken into account in establishing and managing the learning environment. This includes preparation of students and employers.

5.5 A range of staff development opportunities have been put in place over recent years to raise awareness and understanding of what employability means and how relevant activities can be embedded within the students' academic experience. For example, the Graduate Headstart Handbook for students, a form of personal development planning, has recently been developed to record the growth of employability skills.

5.6 Enterprise and entrepreneurship is embedded in a number of curriculum areas. Students reported favourably on the value of these opportunities and gave examples of work they had engaged in as a result of the opportunities to develop entrepreneurial skills.

5.7 Comprehensive careers and employability advice is available to students. This includes support for curriculum vitae writing, interview preparation and job applications. Students found these services valuable. Both students whom the team met and evidence in the student submission confirmed that students are broadly appreciative of what UCS is providing in terms of support for employability. DLHE data for 2012-13 shows that 92 per cent of UCS students were employed and 67 per cent in graduate level jobs.

5.8 From scrutiny of documentation, and discussions with staff and students about employability, the review team concludes that employability was well embedded across UCS, beginning with relevant strategies, and flowing to faculties and service areas for implementation. The team was of the view that this makes a positive contribution to the student learning experience.

Glossary

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

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

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

Academic standards

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

Award

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

Blended learning

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

Credit(s)

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

Degree-awarding body

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

Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

Dual award or double award

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

e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning

Enhancement

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

Expectations

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

Flexible and distributed learning

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

See also **distance learning**.

Framework

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

Framework for higher education qualifications

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

Good practice

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

Learning opportunities

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

Learning outcomes

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

Multiple awards

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

Operational definition

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

Programme (of study)

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

Programme specifications

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

Public information

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

Quality Code

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

Reference points

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

Subject Benchmark Statement

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

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)

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

Threshold academic standard

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

Virtual learning environment (VLE)

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

Widening participation

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

QAA1078 - R4015 - Feb 15

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Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786