



Higher Education Review of St Mary's University, Twickenham

March 2015

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About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at St Mary's University, Twickenham. The review took place from 16 to 19 March 2015 and was conducted by a team of five reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Peter Bush
- Professor Mark Davies
- Ms Zoe Harrison (student reviewer)
- Mr Martin Stimson
- Ms Helen Uglow

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

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 6.

In reviewing St Mary's University, Twickenham 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/the-quality-code

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

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

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

Key findings

QAA's judgements about St Mary's University, Twickenham

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at St Mary's University, Twickenham.

- The setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards and the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies **meet** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **requires improvement to meet** UK expectations.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at St Mary's University, Twickenham:

- the Learning Advice Service, which provides a range of information and advice on academic study skills for a diverse student population (Expectation B4)
- the clear and comprehensive sets of assessment criteria for different modes of assessment, which promote consistency of assessment and assessment literacy in both staff and students (Expectation B6)
- the establishment of a clearly defined moderator role to provide effective ongoing links between academic schools and the University's delivery organisations (Expectation B10)
- the introduction of an effective interim review of programmes delivered with others to provide an additional check on how well the arrangements are working. (Expectation B10).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to St Mary's University, Twickenham.

By August 2015:

- establish robust central oversight of student complaints and academic appeals, including analysis and discussion of emerging trends, and ensure that appropriate action is taken (Expectation B9).

By September 2015:

- ensure that all staff who prepare modules and programmes for validation and revalidation are fully conversant with the key external reference points (Expectation A1)
- ensure that all those who teach and/or assess, including postgraduate students, are appropriately qualified, supported and developed (Expectation B3)
- implement a system to ensure that reciprocal appointments of external examiners are avoided (Expectation B7)

- review and communicate the guidance available to students to enable them to benefit from reading external examiner reports and the responses to them (Expectation B7)
- secure central oversight of the schedule for the review of memoranda of cooperation and operating arrangements with the University's delivery organisations (Expectation B10)
- strengthen the central oversight of research degree provision (Expectation B11)
- identify and make more effective use of the categories of data that will best support the University's management of academic standards, quality and enhancement (Expectation C).

By June 2016:

- ensure that academic and regulatory frameworks, policies, procedures and guidance are aligned with the Quality Code and reviewed regularly (Expectation A2.1)
- in partnership with students, articulate and implement a shared strategic approach to promote and embed student engagement in quality assurance and enhancement (Expectation B5)
- formalise the protocols by which the University can assure itself at institutional level that the information it produces about its higher education provision is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy (Expectation C)
- develop and codify a University-wide approach to enhancement that is strategic, systematic, planned and coordinated, and embed it at all levels throughout the institution (Enhancement).

Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms** the following actions that St Mary's University, Twickenham is already taking to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to its students:

- the steps taken by the University to strengthen central oversight of programme and module modifications over time (Expectation A2.2)
- the steps being taken to address the shortage of physical learning spaces, for example the development of an additional library building (Expectation B4)
- the reintroduction of panels in the revalidation process to provide more challenging scrutiny of proposals (Expectation B8).

Theme: Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

The University states that it places student engagement at the centre of quality assurance and enhancement. Student participation is an important and increasingly effective element in St Mary's approach to quality assurance and enhancement. The University and the Students' Union are working together effectively to ensure that the recent significant increase in and appreciation of the role of students in this regard is both sustained and enhanced.

About St Mary's University, Twickenham

St Mary's University, Twickenham (St Mary's, the University) is a Catholic higher education provider. It was founded in 1850 by the Catholic Poor Schools Committee to train teachers to work in the many voluntary Catholic schools that opened across the country, especially following the movement of population caused by the Irish famine.

The objects of the University are:

To advance education, in such a manner as befits a Catholic foundation, by:

the provision, development and conduct of a Catholic institution of higher education
[and]

the provision of training and continuing professional development for teachers in both religious and secular schools, with special provision for those intending to teach in Catholic and other Christian schools.

These objects inform the University's mission, which is that:

St Mary's prepares its students for flourishing lives, successful careers and social commitment through excellent, research-enriched teaching in a strong community of mutual respect based on our Catholic ethos and identity.

St Mary's was granted University title by the Privy Council in January 2014, marking an important milestone in its history. The University has four academic Schools: Education, Theology and Leadership; Arts and Humanities; Management and Social Sciences; and Sport, Health and Applied Science. At the time of the review visit, 4,357 of the University's 5,308 students were studying full-time, 951 were studying part-time and 48 were research postgraduate students.

During the period since the last QAA Institutional Audit in 2010, St Mary's has experienced significant changes to its senior leadership. A new Principal, appointed shortly before the 2010 audit took place, reorganised St Mary's academic structure, reducing the number of Schools from five to four with effect from 2013-14. The changes and other matters were controversial and the Principal resigned in 2013, to be replaced on an interim basis by the previous Principal. A new Vice-Chancellor was announced in December 2013 and took up post in August 2014.

During 2012, St Mary's was the subject of a QAA Causes for Concern investigation, arising out of its collaboration with the Brief Strategic Therapy and Clinical Hypnosis Foundation. Significant shortcomings were identified in the safeguarding of the quality of student learning opportunities in relation to this specific arrangement. The University's action plan was signed off in January 2013 and its effective response to the recommendations was endorsed in a follow-up visit from QAA in March 2013.

As a consequence of these difficulties, two governance reviews have been conducted, one commissioned by the University's governing body, the other requested by HEFCE. The former considered the lessons to be learned by the institution and the latter found governance and management at St Mary's to be on a sound and effective basis. In December 2013, the Board of Governors approved a Scheme of Delegation following consultation with Academic Board. In September 2014, the Vice-Chancellor redefined the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) as the Vice-Chancellor and Pro Vice-Chancellors and expanded the Senior Management Team (SMT) to include SLT plus Heads of School, the Registrar and the Directors of Finance and Human Resources.

A new Registrar was appointed in December 2012, with a revised remit that focuses exclusively on registry functions. Registry was restructured the following July.

In 2011, Academic Board approved a proposal to restructure and revalidate all undergraduate provision, in phases, between 2011 and 2013. Modules of 15 and 30 credits were replaced by 20 and 40 credit modules to provide greater depth and breadth of study while reducing the number of assessment points.

There has been considerable activity to enhance the campus estate since the last audit including: a new sports centre; upgrading of student halls of residence; improved access for students and staff with disabilities; and improvements to the Teddington Lock sports campus.

Some of the challenges St Mary's faces are shared with the wider UK higher education sector, while all of them have local characteristics peculiar to St Mary's particular identity. The University summarises these as follows:

- optimising distinctiveness
- sustaining the University's financial health in the context of the new fee and funding regime
- maintaining standards, enhancing quality and providing an excellent student experience against the backdrop of the changing economic landscape
- achieving research degree-awarding powers
- meeting the increasing demands and expectations of students, their families, employers and the professions, in the context of rising tuition fees
- the challenges of the changing learning landscape, including distance learning and transnational education
- competition for students: changes arising from the removal of the student numbers cap; the risks associated with this; the rising prominence of private providers
- ensuring that quality assurance and enhancement processes remain fit for purpose as St Mary's grows and develops during the next five years.

A long-term relationship with the University of Surrey as the awarding body for St Mary's postgraduate research programmes is coming to an end and a new validation arrangement with Liverpool Hope University has been in place since September 2014. At the time of the review visit, St Mary's was exploring the possibility of a strategic partnership with Heythrop College and a decision was expected within a month.

The University acknowledges that responses to the 2010 Institutional Audit were not always 'systematically or effectively embedded in practice'. Nevertheless, there has been considerable activity to address the issues raised over the last two to three years. A Quality Assurance and Enhancement Steering Committee managed implementation of a composite action plan which brought together the recommendations of the 2010 institutional audit, the 2012 'lessons learned' report commissioned by the governing body and the 2012 QAA Causes for Concern report. Progress was monitored up to October 2014.

Nine of the 13 advisable recommendations concerned collaborative provision and there is clear evidence that the University has taken steps to remedy shortcomings and enhance this aspect of its practice. Three recommendations concerned validation and revalidation processes which were subsequently modified to accomplish the restructuring and revalidation of undergraduate provision and have again been reviewed following critical evaluation of that experience. Steps have been taken to strengthen the monitoring of the quality of learning opportunities for joint honours students.

Several of the seven desirable recommendations would still benefit from further attention including: oversight of summative reports of student complaints and academic appeals; incorporation of staff research and scholarly activity within programmes; use of student data and opinions in programme development; and collective feedback mechanisms for postgraduate research degree students. There was clear evidence of good practice in respect of the support mechanisms and information provided for prospective and current students studying with St Mary's delivery organisations.

Little was heard during the audit visit about the Principal's Dashboard which was identified as a feature of good practice in 2010. The enhancement themes and learning lunches have been superseded by other activities. The Centre for Workplace Learning was, however, singled out for praise by both staff and students.

Explanation of the findings about St Mary's University, Twickenham

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

1 Judgement: The setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards and 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 The Quality Assurance and Enhancement (QAE) Handbook and the University Academic Regulations set out the requirements for programmes to meet national academic standards. The QAE Handbook prescribes the University's requirements for setting and maintaining academic standards, with comprehensive links to relevant external and University documents. The University's quality assurance policies and procedures are approved by Academic Board, on the advice of the Validation and Review Committee (VRC) and are currently mapped against Part B of the Quality Code. A draft of the University's mapping against Parts A and C of the Quality Code was presented to VRC in March 2015. The QAE Handbook explains how the processes of module and programme design, validation and revalidation (periodic review) ensure that courses reflect *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), the Higher Education Credit Framework for England, and appropriate subject and other benchmark statements as the key national reference points. QAE officers guide and support teaching staff and school and University committees at various stages in module and programme development, approval and review, and advise on the application and interpretation of these reference points.

1.2 The Validation and Revalidation Guidelines require validation and revalidation documents to show clearly how a programme maps against the FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements, and other elements of the Quality Code, along with the requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) and government standards, as appropriate. The University makes use of the credit level descriptors developed by the South East England Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer (SEEC) to map learning outcomes and align them with FHEQ qualification descriptors.

1.3 The Guidance for External Validators requires external readers of pre-validation and validation documents to consider the programme in relation to these national reference points, and external examiners are requested to comment specifically on the congruence of the programme with academic standards elsewhere in the sector, including FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements.

1.4 These arrangements should in principle enable the University to meet the Expectation in theory.

1.5 Meetings were held between the review team and senior staff with responsibility for quality assurance matters, staff from the QAE Office, and with programme directors and teaching staff with experience of module and programme design, validation, monitoring and review. The review team viewed a range of validation/revalidation documents, written comments from external reviewers and external examiners, together with a selection of minutes from School Validation and Review Committees (SVRCs), VRC and Academic Board. Minutes of the SVRCs record the attendance of QAE officers, who offer advice on procedure and draft validation/revalidation documents.

1.6 There is clear evidence that SVRCs consider carefully the validation and revalidation proposal documents submitted by programme teams and suggest modifications, or require further information before formally approving the documents for submission to VRC. There is evidence of VRC considering comments from external readers very carefully and noting particular observations on alignment with Subject Benchmark Statements, the FHEQ and SEEC descriptors. VRC additionally reflects on the comments from the SVRCs before approving the proposal for progression to the next stage.

1.7 The validation/revalidation documents compiled by programme teams relate to programmes specifically to the appropriate levels of FHEQ and distinguish between these. Some of the proposals demonstrated particularly detailed and careful mapping against Subject Benchmark Statements.

1.8 The review team viewed sample responses from external readers' comments on validation documents. Those responding via the University's pro forma make very explicit their confirmation of the proposed programmes' congruence with the relevant reference points at section 8 of the pro forma. The responses from those responding more informally are less direct in this regard.

1.9 The validation/revalidation proposals map the programme against the relevant Subject Benchmark Statements when appropriate. New Subject Benchmark Statements are reported to VRC and distributed to programme staff; any changes to programmes as a consequence are considered by Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC). Staff are encouraged by VRC to participate in national consultations on the development and review of Subject Benchmark Statements.

1.10 The review team noted that QAE staff are attached to individual schools and are nominated to support academic staff with specific validation/revalidation preparation. Teaching staff whom the team met confirmed the value of these arrangements, and the team noted the attendance and contributions of QAE staff at SVRC and VRC meetings. Some

teaching staff demonstrated an awareness of the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements and some were familiar with the Higher Education Credit Framework for England and the SEEC level descriptors. Senior staff reported that programme directors are fully aware of the FHEQ and SEEC descriptors but that there is a deficit in the knowledge of teaching staff. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that the University establish arrangements to ensure that all staff who prepare modules and programmes for validation and revalidation are fully conversant with the key external reference points.

1.11 Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation A1 is met and risk in this area is low since arrangements for securing threshold academic standards are appropriate and are implemented effectively. Staff involved in programme design and validation/revalidation would, however, benefit from gaining more detailed awareness of relevant national reference points, including the FHEQ, the Higher Education Credit Framework for England, and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements.

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

1.12 St Mary's identifies six core documents which provide and explain the framework for the setting and maintaining of academic standards and the award of credit and qualifications. These are the QAE Handbook, the Collaborative Provision Handbook, the University's Academic Regulations, the St Mary's Model structure of the undergraduate curriculum, individual Subject Requirements, and the Quality and Student Experience Enhancement Framework (QSEEF).

1.13 Each of these documents is reviewed and re-issued annually, published on the staff intranet and available to students. Up to six staff forums are arranged each year to update staff on developments in the quality assurance arena and to receive staff suggestions. The QAE Handbook and the University Academic Regulations set out the requirements for programmes to meet national standards and conform to St Mary's internal regulatory framework. The former defines design, approval, monitoring and review, and provides a useful summary, with hyperlinks to more detailed documents on the Quality Code and the University's arrangements for quality assurance more generally. The St Mary's Model describes the structure of the undergraduate framework following Academic Board's decision in 2012 to change it. Larger modules, worth either 20 or 40 credits have replaced the smaller modules which were worth either 15 or 30 credits in the previous structure. The Academic Regulations include general regulations for studying at the University, regulations for undergraduate and taught masters' programmes, requirements for single and joint honours programmes (with separate regulations for the 15-30 and 20-40 credit point frameworks), regulations for assessment, progression and awards, and describe course management arrangements.

1.14 In addition, specific subject requirements, annually updated, are listed for each programme, and contain information on general requirements, entrance requirements, programme structures, assessment, and requirements to obtain credit, though not to a given template. The details are defined in programme validation documents and are set in accordance with the Academic Regulations.

1.15 The responsibility for the approval and review of the internal quality assurance frameworks rests with Academic Board. Reporting to Academic Board on various matters relating to quality assurance are VRC, leading on academic standards, and the Committees for Planning and Resources (PRC), Teaching and Learning (TLC) and Research and Enterprise (REC), which contribute in particular respectively to the oversight of collaborative provision arrangements, the quality of learning and teaching, the research environment and the quality assurance of research programmes.

1.16 Gaining Research Degree Awarding Powers (RDAP) is one of the University's strategic objectives. The University has recently entered into an agreement with Liverpool Hope University which will award research degrees for those students registered from September 2014. The University of Surrey will continue to award degrees for students registered before that date (see paragraph 2.125). Hence, overall responsibility for the standards of research degrees lies currently with these universities.

1.17 The review team concluded that the University's formal quality assurance framework and the comprehensive academic regulations, each overseen by Academic Board and its relevant committees, provide a sound basis for St Mary's to meet this Expectation, particularly with the guidance from the QAE Handbook and the support available from the QAE office.

1.18 The evidence was tested by the review team via meetings with staff as summarised under section A1 above, and groups of students. The review team also viewed the range of documents reported under A1 above, the Academic Regulations and sampled programme handbooks. The team paid particular attention in meetings to the use of the QAE Handbook and the extent to which staff and students understood the University's regulatory framework.

1.19 Validation and revalidation documents carefully present programmes in accordance either with the 15-30 or 20-40 credit model. Following a major revalidation exercise of all programmes, the latter framework was introduced following discussions at Academic Board for level 4 programmes from 2013-14, rolling out for levels 5 and 6 over the next two academic years. Business Law and Drama introduced their revalidated programmes a year earlier. The new structure is intended to deliver greater depth and breadth of study, reduce the number of assessment points and generally to improve student retention. A review of the new arrangements commenced in 2014-15. Staff were fully aware of the new arrangements and confirmed that the 15-30 model was being phased out of all programmes. Level 5 and 6 students were largely unaware that a different system was operating at level 4, and were not confused by the running of two different credit structures within the University.

1.20 Programme specifications (see section A2.2 below) are an integral element of the validation/revalidation document and explicitly map the curriculum against the University framework and the requirements of the QAE Handbook. They are amended as necessary and formally approved in light of any changes required at validation. The review team sampled several programme specifications within validation/revalidation proposals.

1.21 Assessment practices are approved at validation in line with these requirements. The University's assessment policy identifies guidance on the testing of outcomes and the marking and moderation processes which support the award of credit and/or qualifications when outcomes are achieved. The assessment policy supports staff in determining the appropriateness of assessment, particularly through the assessment tariff and the marking guidelines which are presented in template form in each validation/revalidation document. Examination boards at programme and University level ratify the grades awarded and consider and confirm progression and awards within the framework of the Academic Regulations and specific subject regulations approved at validation.

1.22 Staff were clear about roles and responsibilities for ensuring the implementation of internal frameworks. As presented in the QAE Handbook, heads of school are responsible for the quality and standards of programmes within their schools and for ensuring that there are appropriate structures to consider quality issues within them, particularly those responsibilities delegated from VRC. Academic directors have responsibility for the management of an academic subject area within which there may be several programmes, each overseen by a programme leader. Academic directors have a specific remit to oversee quality assurance and enhancement in their area. SVCs, reporting to VCR, deliberate on QAE matters, debate QAE issues and are the approving bodies for module modifications, new module implementation and programme modifications. They constitute the forums that recommend to VRC approval to programme validations/revalidations prior to external scrutiny. The review team noted the very detailed and comprehensive review of the Academic Board and its committee structure, which resulted in changes to their terms of reference to ensure that their roles were clearly focused on oversight of the six key documents referred to in paragraph 1.12.

1.23 Programme directors confirmed and teaching staff recognised that specific subject requirements are set within the framework of the Academic Regulations and approved through the validation process. They reported that University-wide arrangements for curriculum structures, assessment, progression and awards are well understood across the University, and that the frameworks are beneficial both in preparing new or revalidated programmes and in delivering courses. Students whom the review team met were familiar with their programme structures, assessment and progression regulations, and module requirements. The review team considers, however, that the University would benefit from a more detailed mapping of the University's arrangements for securing and maintaining academic arrangements against Part A of the Quality Code than that reflected in the recently completed draft mapping exercise (see paragraph 1.1). Once this exercise is complete, the review team encourages the University to embark on review of the QAE Handbook.

1.24 As part of the agreement between the University of Surrey and SMU, the former carried out a review of St Mary's postgraduate research provision in 2013-14 to establish that the university is discharging its responsibilities for safeguarding the academic standards of Surrey's awards. This report concluded that St Mary's discharges its duties and responsibilities effectively in key areas including the monitoring of academic standards and student progression. Surrey recorded a number of commendations, including the seriousness with which (St Mary's) annual report (to the University of Surrey) is treated which, it said, is becoming an increasingly valuable pointer to St Mary's critical self-evaluation. Notwithstanding the transfer of RDAP to Liverpool Hope University for research postgraduate students registered from September 2014, St Mary's continues to progress the Action Plan developed in the light of this report. While the Research and Enterprise Committee reports on recently registered students to Liverpool Hope University, and has ensured that its regulations meet those of that institution for students registered since September 2014, there has been insufficient time for Liverpool Hope University to review the operation of St Mary's arrangements. The review team's observations on St Mary's approach to the management of and environment for the support of research degree programmes are reported in section B11. Notwithstanding the recommendation in that section, the review team notes the endorsement of the University of Surrey of St Mary's arrangements for assuring the academic standards of Surrey's research degrees.

1.25 Overall the review team concludes that Expectation A2.1 is met and risk in this area is low since the University's internal reference points for securing academic standards are effective and fit for purpose and their implementation is sound. While noting that the Collaborative Provision Handbook, the Academic Regulations and programme and module handbooks are reviewed annually, the review team formed the view that the University would benefit from cyclical review of all its policies and associated documentation. Therefore the review team **recommends** that academic and regulatory frameworks, policies, procedures and guidance be aligned with the Quality Code and reviewed regularly.

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

1.26 A definitive programme specification (PS) is the central feature of the validation and revalidation processes, including those involving another delivery organisation, and is formalised following approval/re-approval of a programme. The PS includes a statement of intended learning outcomes, shaped by the SEEC descriptors, and indicates how these are threaded through at module level. The PS becomes the definitive record of each programme.

1.27 Programmes are normally approved for five years. Amendments to modules and programmes during this period are documented and approved by SVRCs and logged and maintained by the QAE Office. Amendments are reflected in modified, annually updated versions of the subject requirements, which include a running record of modifications; these are available on staff intranet.

1.28 The University has in place arrangements designed to log changes to an approved programme and ensure that any such changes may be tracked and accessed. These arrangements should in principle enable the University to meet the Expectation.

1.29 The review team met students, academic delivery staff and staff with oversight of the quality framework to gain an understanding of the production, maintenance and use of the University's definitive records. They sampled evidence of SVRCs' roles in approving module and other changes to programmes, and viewed examples of programme specifications and programme handbooks.

1.30 Arrangements for establishing a formal record of each programme and awards the University validates are effective and comprehensive. Academic and senior managers confirmed that changes subsequent to the validation process require approval at the relevant SVRC, with formal records being maintained within each school and a definitive copy maintained in the QAE Office. The review team noted the very thorough scrutiny of programme/module amendments at school level. Agreed changes appear in the annually revised programme handbook and module guides prepared for students for the following academic year, although the formal programme specification is not updated.

1.31 Programme handbooks are produced primarily for students, to provide clear guidance on the outcomes of their programme, as well as setting forth expectations of their own responsibilities and commitment. The handbooks are also expected to be a source of information used for external programme reviews. Module guides are also produced annually and are distributed to students according to the specific version of the module they are undertaking. The review team noted the helpful guidance to staff on the preparation of programme handbooks and module guides. Students whom the team met attested to their comprehensiveness and value.

1.32 The review team observed that programme and module guides produced annually are accurate, and that the QAE Office holds a record of changes to programmes and modules, as advised by Schools following approval by SVRCs. There is, however, no

comprehensive VRC oversight of such changes nor a systematic tracking of these linked with original programme and module specifications. Accordingly, changes to modules resulting in an application of a new module code could lead to challenges for those seeking to track the history of the evolution of a programme and its modules.

1.33 The University acknowledges the need to strengthen the process for tracking and monitoring the cumulative effect of modifications over time, and VRC had determined in January 2015 that there was need for more effective VRC oversight of module approvals, module modifications and the tracking and monitoring of modifications. The review team therefore **affirms** the steps taken by the University to strengthen central oversight of programme and module modifications over time.

1.34 Overall the review team concludes that Expectation A2.2 is met and the risk associated with this area is low on the grounds that the University's arrangements for maintaining definitive and updated programme and module records are broadly effective and will become more so as central oversight of cumulative programme and module modifications is strengthened.

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

1.35 The QAE Handbook defines the processes governing the design and approval of academic programmes for St Mary's and for programmes provided via delivery organisations.

1.36 The establishment of academic standards which meet UK threshold standards is achieved through the design, approval and re-approval of modules and programmes in the validation, and revalidation processes. Use is made of external contributions in design, monitoring and review, to check that programmes and modules are designed in line with the University's own academic and regulatory frameworks. This applies to programmes delivered wholly by the University and those provided via other delivery organisations.

1.37 The University refers to a suite of internal core documents in its quality framework for setting and maintaining academic standards, and awarding credit and qualifications (see paragraph 1.12). Guidance to programme and module designers, proposers and externals requires them to validate that the requirements of the FHEQ, relevant Subject Benchmark Statements and any PSRB requirements at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels are met. Internal SVRCs scrutinise proposals, and their procedures ensure that this requirement is met prior to external scrutiny.

1.38 A definitive validation document is produced by programme developers on behalf of their team, making use of the guidelines. This must explicitly refer to any relevant subject benchmark statement(s); confirm that the proposal maps to the FHEQ; and that the appropriate qualification characteristics' document has been consulted. Reference is also made to the SEEC level descriptors.

1.39 Programme content is described in outcomes-based terms, with programme aims and objectives mapped to learning outcomes grouped under the headings of the SEEC framework. Learning outcomes are defined at module level, with a curriculum map showing the profile of outcomes across the programme. This information is included in programme handbooks and module guides produced for students. The Assessment Policy and assessment tariff are both used in design of programmes. The Academic Strategy, the Learning Teaching and Assessment strategy, and the Curriculum Strategy provide internal reference points and ensure that assessment is related to outcomes.

1.40 The arrangements the University has in place should, in principle, enable it to meet this Expectation.

1.41 The review team examined the information provided on programme design, development and approval alongside the core documentation that provided guidance for validation and revalidation teams. They met senior staff and student representatives and read a number of case studies of programme approval. Meetings were held with a wide range of staff who were involved in programme design development and validation.

1.42 The principles of programme design and the approval processes are clearly described in a range of readily available internal reference points. Guidance for internal and external use is comprehensive. Documents provide clear reference points to the internal and external frameworks. There is an effective comprehensive process of deliberative committees which scrutinise validation proposals so that the setting of academic standards is secure.

1.43 Academic staff, professional support staff and academic managers involved with the design and approval of courses at St Mary's and its delivery organisations were able to articulate the established processes followed for programme design, development and validation. Although they had a thorough knowledge of internal processes, and how to obtain support if required, awareness of the way the Quality Code supported the establishment of academic standards by reference to the FHEQ was limited. Internal documentation, the use of external advice and the committee structure is effective in ensuring that threshold academic standards are established. However, reference to the FHEQ or other components of the Quality Code was not always explicit in validation documentation and programme specifications and this shortcoming contributes to the recommendations made under Expectations A1 and A2.1 (see paragraphs 1.10 and 1.25 respectively).

1.44 Overall the review team concludes that Expectation A3.1 is met and risk associated with this area is low since internal frameworks, external consultation, the deliberative committee structure and professional advice from the QAE Office ensure that the principles of programme design and their application to the establishment of UK threshold standards are fit for purpose and effectively implemented.

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

1.45 The Academic Regulations provide an internal framework defining the assessment outcomes required for the award of credit and qualifications, in line with national standards. The University Assessment Policy provides information on the ways in which St Mary's undertakes to assess its students and clearly states that assessment should test achievement and accredit learning objectively against intended learning outcomes.

1.46 Learning outcomes are defined at programme and module level. Curriculum maps show how the two link together. Teaching, learning and assessment methods are matched against these educational outcomes, providing opportunities for students to demonstrate achievement of programme and module learning outcomes.

1.47 Programme assessment and threshold academic standards are tested through validation and revalidation processes and through scrutiny by SVRCs and VRC. Examination boards at programme and University level ratify grades and confirm progression and awards.

1.48 The arrangements the University has in place should, in principle, enable it to meet the Expectation.

1.49 The review team considered the assessment of learning outcomes by reading policy and regulation documents, reviewing a sample of validation and revalidation documents, and by discussing the operation of assessment policies and processes with academic staff in the context of meeting UK threshold standards and the University's own academic standards.

1.50 Staff receive informal support in setting module levels from programme and School colleagues. They make use of existing modules as exemplars, together with grade criteria, validation guidance and subject requirements, the latter of which set out the programme-level requirements for achieving credit and progression. Although programme proposers are formally required to design and map curricula against relevant external reference points, awareness of publications such as the FHEQ and SEEC credit level descriptors was patchy and this contributes to the recommendations under Expectations A1 and A2.1 (see paragraphs 1.10 and 1.25 respectively).

1.51 External scrutiny is provided by external examiners. They report on the appropriateness of assessment methods in relation to module and programme learning outcomes, marking criteria, and range and consistency of marks.

1.52 Processes are in place to provide learning support and make reasonable adjustments to assessment where required to avoid the risk of disadvantage to students with disabilities. However, it was not clear to the review team how the University assures itself

that such assessment adjustments do not compromise academic standards and this needs to be clarified.

1.53 Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation A3.2 is met and the risk associated with this area is low because the design and, for the most part, the operation of the University Assessment Policy and Academic Regulations are in good order.

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

1.54 The University's principal monitoring and review processes that contribute to the maintenance of academic standards are firstly annual programme evaluation and review and secondly revalidation of established programmes, which embraces periodic review. The processes are described in the QAE Handbook with standardised templates and user guidance. Monitoring and review are intended to secure academic standards and ensure delivery occurs as originally approved. VRC minutes record that the University's activities are mapped with *Chapter B8* of the Quality Code, and the review of handbooks is part of revalidation process.

1.55 Following a recent review of monitoring and review processes, a revised process was introduced in summer 2014, for the 2013-14 reporting period. The new annual statement of programme evaluation and review (ASPER) 2013-14 includes a redesigned pro forma. This provides a consistent approach and emphasises the evaluative nature of the process while retaining comprehensive reporting. ASPERs include an evaluation of student achievement, for example, reviewing and addressing module pass rates below 85 per cent.

1.56 Revalidation occurs every five years for programmes delivered wholly by the University, while programmes offered wholly or in part by other delivery organisations go through interim review after two years. Revalidation processes were also recently reviewed and revised by VRC in 2013-14. The process requires the proposer to demonstrate that the programme maps appropriately to external reference points, the University's own framework, and any relevant PSRB requirements, thus confirming that relevant standards are being maintained. The template used by external readers for the revalidation process encourages comment on external reference points. Monitoring and review for 'academic currency' is enshrined in the role of the external validator. The revalidation process is informed by data on student progression and achievement, external examiner reports, annual programme monitoring reports, the input of current students and, where possible, recent graduates.

1.57 The processes in place for monitoring and review are detailed and thorough, supported by a comprehensive set of internal documents which together should, in principle, enable the University to meet the Expectation. Annual monitoring through the ASPER is effective. However, although there is a comprehensive template which ensures consistency, the ASPER does not refer explicitly to UK threshold academic standards. ASPERs do reference standards required of PSRBs. External examiner comments on standards are included and responded to in the ASPER. The review process relies on the external readers' reports to consider external reference points, especially PSRB requirements. The ASPERs and revalidation documents, seen by the review team, are light on reference to the maintenance of academic standards, except in relation to attainment in annual monitoring. Other outputs of these processes would benefit from more explicit attention in this regard. The review team noted and recognised that the University has kept its process under review and has decided to move back to using revalidation panels.

1.58 The review team reviewed the core guidance documentation and a number of consolidated reports associated with the process, including external readers' reports and a

range of ASPERS. The team was also provided with the minutes of VRC. The review team met staff associated with monitoring and review processes and senior managers involved with the process. The team discussed student participation in review with student representatives who were familiar with monitoring and review activity. Two delivery organisations were interviewed over the phone.

1.59 The annual monitoring process and the staff associated with it are fully supported by internal framework documentation, and professional QAE advice. The use of ASPERS in association with the academic committee structure makes monitoring effective. The University recognises through reflection on the recent review processes that the use of external readers was a 'pragmatic' solution and, although successful, was less effective than it had hoped. The reinstatement of revalidation panels reflects a desire to improve effectiveness and student engagement and engage external advisers in more detailed conversations. This decision is the subject of an affirmation in relation to Expectation B8 (see paragraph 2.89). The process complies with the University's internal frameworks, and external advice ensures that UK threshold academic standards are met. The deliberative committee structure provides opportunities for reflection and consideration. The process is effective, although confirmation that threshold academic standards are met is not always explicit in the discussions or in the outputs. This reflects the University's recognition that it has yet fully to map its activities with the Part A of the Quality Code and contributes to the recommendation in relation to Expectation A2.1 (see paragraph 1.25).

1.60 Overall the review team concludes that Expectation A3.3 is met and the risk associated with this area is low on the grounds that the combination of comprehensive internal core documentation, an established deliberative committee structure and external advice ensure that academic standards are maintained in the monitoring and review process. The team noted, however, that reference to the FHEQ and other components of the Quality Code is considered by external readers but is not an explicit outcome in the processes associated with review and revalidation. This shortcoming contributes to the recommendation in relation to Expectations A1 and A2.1 (see paragraphs 1.10 and 1.25, respectively).

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

1.61 The University states that all stages of the programme lifecycle are informed by independent external input. External comments are sought at the initial stage of new programme development, as part of the validation process, in delivery and assessment, and programme monitoring and review.

1.62 This range of external and independent expertise should, in principle, enable the University to meet the Expectation and verify that both UK threshold academic standards and the University's own internal standards are being consistently set, delivered, achieved and maintained.

1.63 The review team examined a range of external inputs to validations and revalidations, professional body accreditation reports, external examiner reports and responses to them, annual monitoring reports (ASPERs) and overviews.

1.64 The range of external expertise sought and used integrates effectively across the programme lifecycle. For new proposals, input is sought from external academics, potential employers, other practitioners and potential students. For revalidations, feedback is additionally sought from current students and external examiners. Programme validation and revalidation processes also involve at least two external validators. External validators receive clear and concise guidance on their remit, which includes prompts asking how the programme outcomes relate to relevant external reference points and how the subject provider reviews standards.

1.65 External examiners are a further key source of independent external expertise. External examiners consider and comment in their annual reports on programme structure, content and assessment in light of their own experience, the standards in their own organisations and elsewhere in the sector, and relevant external reference points. External examiners also provide inputs to programme revalidations, modifications, suspensions and closures.

1.66 Overall the review team concludes that Expectation A3.4 is met and the risk associated with this area is low. Appropriate systems are in place for the provision of external and independent expertise at key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

1.67 In reaching its judgement about setting and maintaining academic standards, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All of the applicable Expectations in this area have been met and the risk is judged low with two recommendations and one affirmation arising.

1.68 Both of the recommendations can be met by St Mary's by strengthening current procedures and ensuring that they are implemented consistently. This will not require or result in major structural, operational or procedural change.

1.69 The review team concludes that the setting and maintaining of academic standards **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 QAA Institutional Audit of 2010 identified several recommendations relating to validation activity. These were comprehensively addressed in a consolidated action plan incorporating responses to a number of subsequent reviews. This included a QAA Causes for Concern investigation in 2012, after which St Mary's was required to 'strengthen' its validation/revalidation procedures.

2.2 Validation panels have been strengthened and give specific attention to proposals that involve one or more of the following: a new or unusual academic discipline; a proposed arrangement with a delivery organisation new to higher education; and/or flexible delivery. Programmes provided in whole or part by St Mary's delivery organisations undergo the same validation procedures as provision delivered wholly by the University.

2.3 The Governing Body delegates responsibility for validation approval to Academic Board. Academic Board in turn delegates authority for validation to VRC. VRC and PRC take into account the University's Academic Strategy when considering new programme proposals. PRC considers the resource implications. The HE Curriculum Strategy is designed to ensure that programmes are developed in line with the mission and strategic aims of the University, and that the needs of students and their employers are considered.

2.4 Programme development begins with approval by the SVRCs, proceeding to University-level with the PRC and VRC, thence to external consideration by a validation panel. After a final check at VRC, final approval occurs at Academic Board. There is wide consultation across the University including discussion with the Head of QAE and heads of professional services and the Head of School for the proposed programme.

2.5 Experienced and new staff are supported in the approval process by the QAE Office to ensure consistency of practice. The validation process is also covered in programme directors' QAE induction and the Programme Directors QAE Guide. From March 2015, a new Head of Academic Professional Development will provide support for academic staff in programme design.

2.6 The QAE Handbook provides guidance and defines the processes governing the design and approval of academic programmes and the external validators' role. The QAE Handbook is published on staff internet and includes explicit reference to external sources of guidance including the Quality Code, Subject Benchmark Statements and the SEEC credit level descriptors. The University has mapped its activity to the Expectations and Indicators of Chapter B1 of the Quality Code. Guidance for module developers and validators on module assessment loading is also provided.

2.7 The validation process enables staff to identify and outline, via programme learning outcomes, how the programme and its modules will enable student development and achievement, using the Quality Code and SEEC framework as reference points. The validation document sets out the rationale for the programme, its likely market, and

evidence of demand, aims and outcomes at both programme and module levels, content, delivery, assessment and staff resourcing. At the design stage, external readers comment on the proposal and their reports are considered internally. Internal and external committee processes include at least two externals who consider academic currency, QAA and PSRB requirements. One external is usually an academic from another provider; another may be a practitioner and/or a PSRB representative. External readers make use of a template explicitly seeking their opinion on alignment with the Quality Code, particularly the FHEQ and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements, PSRB requirements and government standards. From 2014-15, one validation panel member other than the chair, will be an internal member of staff from outside the School originating the proposal. This member will provide additional internal scrutiny, and knowledge of the University's procedures and regulations, commenting on the proposal's overall coherence and quality. A QAE officer is attached to each course proposal.

2.8 Student input is obtained through membership of the SVRC and focus groups and VRC. From 2014-15 the University is trialling the addition of a student member to validation panels. Specific guidance is also provided for student members of these committees.

2.9 Programmes are approved for a maximum of five years during which period there is a process for amendments to be made to programme structure or individual modules. These are documented and approved by SVRCs and logged by the QAE Office. Programme handbooks and module guides are updated accordingly.

2.10 These arrangements should, in principle, enable St Mary's to meet the Expectation.

2.11 The review team scrutinised internal guidance on programme design and approval and on validation panels. Meetings were held with staff involved with validation and approval process at different levels. Definitive validation documentation was reviewed in relation to the minutes of PRC, VRC and Academic Board. The review team also met students and student representatives involved with the curriculum design and validation process and interviewed representatives of delivery organisations with whom St Mary's has a formal relationship.

2.12 The University has responded positively to the QAA Institutional Audit and strengthened its systems and processes. A comprehensive set of internal documents and a robust deliberative committee structure supports the development of new course proposals. There is wide consultation, including with students. The University is reflecting on its processes and has recently produced its own internal self-analysis in the form of an annual academic health report, which includes an action plan for consideration by Academic Board.

2.13 Internal documentation is comprehensive and there is support for staff and students involved in programme design and validation. The internal deliberative committee structure ensures comprehensive consideration of new proposals before they are validated. Processes are working effectively in practice and the University keeps them under review.

2.14 Overall the review team concludes that Expectation B1 is met and the level of risk associated with this area is low as there is a consistent approach to the design, development and approval of new programmes which is supported by a wide range of documentation, professional support and a deliberative committee structure. Wide consultation occurs across the University and with other providers.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.15 The University has in place an Admissions Policy and admissions terms and conditions for the recruitment, selection and admission of students. This includes the general entry criteria. The Admissions Policy is made available on the website, which also provides an overview of each programme and its associated entry requirements, application and selection processes, and the support and welfare available to students. The University assures itself that its admissions processes are fair by following the principles governed by the Supporting Professionalism in Admissions Programme (SPA) and the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). The Admissions Policy is reviewed annually to assure transparency and fairness and scrutinised by Academic Board before final sign-off. There is a centralised system for undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes which is overseen by the admissions team. The International Office, working closely with the admissions team, is responsible for the admission of international students, whose applications are received either through UCAS or directly by the University. A dedicated International Admissions and UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI) Compliance Officer has been appointed reporting direct to the Registrar to mitigate risk in this area. In some circumstances, for example in borderline cases or when applicants have non-standard entry qualifications, the admissions team may refer admissions' decisions to programme teams, but these decisions are always returned to the admissions team for final sign-off.

2.16 On the basis of these processes, the University should, in principle, be able to meet the Expectation.

2.17 The review team examined the operation of the University's recruitment, selection and admissions procedures in meetings with students and members of staff, including those responsible for admissions. They also scrutinised documentation relating to selection and admissions policies and procedures, and tested the effectiveness of monitoring of these policies.

2.18 The admissions team maintains overall oversight of admissions and liaises closely with the Marketing and Recruitment Department, heads of School and programme directors to assure the quality of information available to prospective students and other stakeholders. Programme directors are informed about the admissions process as part of their induction process, and the Head of Admissions attends regular meetings in each School. The University holds open days, post application events and taster days as part of the admissions process and provides pre-registration information to all prospective students. Some applicants, specifically those applying to initial teacher training and drama programmes, are required to attend an interview/audition to ensure that the appropriate decision can be made about each candidate's suitability.

2.19 When admissions decisions are referred to academic tutors, the admissions team provides them with information about the application process and any specific entry requirements relating to the programme. Contact between the admissions team and academic tutors is maintained throughout the process and the application is discussed collaboratively. The admissions team keeps a record of each application; notes are maintained about both the process employed and the outcome.

2.20 The University's access agreement outlines the criteria prospective students must meet to be eligible to attend the 'Get Set for Success' programme prior to starting their programme. This residential programme aims to enable students to orientate themselves on campus and familiarise themselves with the services available to them.

2.21 Prospective students are able to appeal any decision made regarding an application to the University, via the Head of Admissions in the first instance. The University provides feedback to unsuccessful applicants on request. The University believes that this has helped reduce the volume of formal complaints about admissions. In 2013-2014, no formal appeals were made.

2.22 The University website and prospectus contain comprehensive information about programmes, including information regarding programme structure and content, application requirements and tuition fees, as well as career opportunities. Students whom the review team met reported that they used the website for information about their application and found it to be trustworthy and useful. Upon commencing their programme, students are given an induction into the University and provided with various sources of information such as the Student Handbook and information about student services. While students told the review team that this information is trustworthy and useful, the review team identified issues with protocols for assuring the quality of information for prospective students, which contributes to a recommendation in relation to the Expectation concerning information about higher education (see paragraph 3.8).

2.23 Overall the review team concludes that Expectation B2 is met and the risk associated with this area is low since the University's policies and procedures are fair and effective. The University has appropriate levels of transparency and support for prospective students applying across Schools, study areas, undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The needs of prospective students are considered throughout the application and enrolment processes and procedures.

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

2.24 The University's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy provides a conceptual framework and vision for learning activities which are operationalised through an action plan. The action plan is reviewed annually, coordinated by the TLC. Schools similarly have learning, teaching and assessment strategies and action plans, the latter again considered by TLC.

2.25 The University's Research-Enriched Teaching and Learning Policy presents an inspirational model and is being used as a prompt on validation and review templates from 2014.

2.26 Teaching staff are supported by a range of development opportunities including short courses and an annual learning and teaching conference, though attendance has been modest. The teaching and learning excellence fund has been used by staff to enhance their teaching through scholarship activities and to support applications for fellowship of the Higher Education Academy (HEA). Records are kept of the impact of funding and are reported to the Teaching and Learning Excellence Fund Subcommittee of TLC. However, in 2014, the University's teaching and learning development framework was accredited by the HEA and the University is now able to recommend its staff who follow its Accredited Individual Route to the HEA for the award of fellowship. At the time of the review no such awards had been made but some staff are at an advanced stage of preparing a submission.

2.27 For new or inexperienced teaching staff, the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (Higher Education) is available and the review team met staff who are enrolled on it. This programme, which constitutes another route within the teaching and learning development framework, is also accredited by the HEA and contributes to realising the University's intention to increase the number of staff with fellowship of the HEA.

2.28 The results of the University's 2014 postgraduate research degree programme survey indicated that 60 per cent of postgraduate research students were engaged in teaching, but of those only 35 per cent thought they had been prepared adequately and only 70 per cent had been formally trained in teaching. Although most of the postgraduate research students whom the review team met were engaged in teaching, the training available and its take-up were variable and training was in some cases informal.

2.29 For the most part, the University's structures, procedures and opportunities for staff allow effective learning to take place and should, in principle, enable the University to meet the Expectation, although a lack of formal training for all who teach weakens this. The University's attempts better to understand and develop its staffing base have resulted in a goal of increasing year-on-year the proportion of staff who have an academic profile in research, pedagogy, consultancy or enterprise. Enterprise proved difficult to measure, however, so an alternative means of capturing staff activity, perhaps via human resources data, was being developed at the time of the review visit.

2.30 In testing against this Expectation, the review team examined various key strategy documents and action plans and the minutes of deliberative committees at both University

and school level. They also met a range of senior staff and those with responsibility for delivering the University's programmes.

2.31 Through the action plan of the Learning Teaching and Assessment Strategy, the University maintains oversight of its learning opportunities and teaching practices and ensures that it has effective means for driving progress. In general progress is good, though not all plans are realised. At School level the review team noted evidence of good discussion of sound strategies and action plans. Although some progress is strong, some reports are delivered orally, and the keeping of more formal records would allow progress to be monitored more effectively and would better demonstrate how the strategies and plans drive change.

2.32 Although the Research-Enriched Teaching and Learning Policy integrates well with the overall mission of the University, it has yet to be fully operationalised. As a prompt at validation and review it is addressed variably well and most teaching staff whom the review team met were not aware of the policy.

2.33 Support for teaching staff, both new and established, through development or funding, is appropriate and aligned with the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy. Staff whom the review team met were well aware of the various training and development opportunities available to them and regarded themselves as adequately supported.

2.34 In its annual reports of its postgraduate research degree programme, the University indicates that postgraduate research students who teach are required to undertake training, though the nature of that training differs from report to report. Furthermore, the University's self-evaluation document reported that, for these graduate teaching assistants, experience, qualification or training is mandatory. However, and despite the University's initiatives to develop skills in learning and teaching, staff whom the review team met confirmed that training for research students who teach was an expectation rather than mandatory. Although staff claimed the University was aware that not all such teachers had been trained and was moving towards a requirement, the review team saw no systematic evidence of this. The review team regards the three-hour training schedule for postgraduate research students who teach as too brief to allow anything other than a superficial consideration of the topics proposed. As a consequence, the review team **recommends** that the University ensure that all those who teach and/or assess, including postgraduate students, are appropriately qualified, supported and developed.

2.35 Overall the review team concludes that Expectation B3 is met but took the view that the level of risk associated with this area is moderate because of the lack of formal training for all those engaged in teaching activities.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

2.36 The ethos for student development is outlined in the Strategic Plan which notes, as a strategic aim, to '...offer our students...the opportunity to achieve their full academic and career potential'. This aim is supported by the action plans of the Learning Teaching and Assessment Strategy, the Employability Strategy, and the Learning Resources and Technology Strategy, which show sound aspirations for delivering on student potential. The Learning Resources and Technology Strategy and its action plan, focus on the delivery of library services, learning spaces and the technological tools and related skills which enable students to be successful. This action plan, termed the technology enhanced learning (TEL) action plan, is monitored and updated by the TEL group, which reports to TLC. The Employability Strategy centres on developing a set of attributes in students that will enhance their employability. That development is pursued through specific aims, and its action plan is linked to the Academic Strategy. Implementation of the Employability Strategy is vested in the Careers Service and the Centre for Workplace Learning. The University also has a Strategy for Student Engagement, Retention and Success (SERS) 2013-2016 which has various aims and sub-aims that link well with the University's mission.

2.37 Approximately 30 per cent of eligible undergraduate students take up placement opportunities, mostly facilitated by the Centre for Workplace Learning, which offers a credit-bearing placement module. The Careers Service provides appropriate facilities and services. Its staff are employees of the University of London Careers Group, which gives them access to a wide range of resources and specialist training. The Head of the Careers Service, Director of Information Services, Director of Academic Affairs, and Director of Library and Learning Technology all give reports on activity to TLC.

2.38 The University has recently introduced a student review scheme, which aims to ensure that all students have designated points in the academic year when they can reflect with the help of their academic tutor on their academic, career and personal development. The scheme involves students completing online forms concerning their development and setting goals that are monitored at meetings with academic tutors. At the time of the review visit, the scheme was operating for students at levels 4 and 5 and the University plans to introduce it to all taught students, including postgraduates, by 2016-17. In the University's self-evaluation document, the scheme was described as a module which is assessed as pass or fail, is non-credit bearing, and is not listed on students' transcripts. Although the self-evaluation described student engagement with the scheme as a 'requirement', only 40 per cent of eligible students engaged in 2013-14.

2.39 Located within Academic Affairs, the Learning Advice Service offers study skills support to undergraduate students, including producing support materials in response to students' needs. Learning advisers are assigned to schools and can identify and support students who need additional help with their studies. Priorities are partly driven by feedback from students, for example from internal surveys. Students whom the review team met indicated that their attention was drawn to the Service via the University's website and by presentations given by learning advisers.

2.40 Taught postgraduate students can request support in academic literary skills from two Royal Literacy Fellows.

- 2.41 Student achievement, including employability, is addressed at validation and review, in part via articulation with the Quality Code. Resource-checking, including equity for disabled students, is a part of these processes.
- 2.42 The University's framework for provision of resources provides a firm base to enable student potential to be fulfilled and therefore should, in principle enable the University to meet the Expectation. Strategies and plans are, in general, appropriately detailed to drive activity and to provide aspiration for future activity. Reporting mechanisms are sufficient for the maintenance of oversight.
- 2.43 The review team tested this Expectation by speaking to senior staff, support staff and students and by examining a range of relevant strategy documents and minutes of meetings.
- 2.44 The University's self-evaluation document stated that all action plans are approved by TLC, but the review team could find no record of this and was informed by the University that though approvals had taken place they had not been minuted. Furthermore, the action plan for SERS does not refer to the strategy's aims, but rather to 'institutional level priorities'. Senior staff whom the review team met were unable to explain the nature or origin of these priorities. The action plan is considered by the SERS strategy implementation group, also known as the SERS strategy development group. Notes of this group show good general discussion, focusing on student engagement, but no discussion of data on student retention, progression, satisfaction and attainment, contrary to its terms of reference.
- 2.45 Although many students whom the review team met did not recognise the term 'Centre for Workplace Learning', they did indicate that they are adequately supported before and while on placement. Students also reported satisfaction with the Careers Service.
- 2.46 Students, including representatives, whom the review team met had generally not heard of the student review scheme by name but recognised the processes it embodies and regarded it as supportive and helpful. Teaching staff were aware of the scheme, though were unclear about what guidance they could draw on and acknowledged that there was variability in how the scheme operated in practice. Although the University had stated in its submission that the scheme is mandatory and some staff whom the review team met concurred with this view, the University confirmed during the review visit that student review is not mandatory for students, though plans are in hand, to make it so, as it becomes embedded in University practice. In essence, student enrolment on the module is currently mandatory and automatic, but there are no sanctions should students choose not to engage. The review team formed the view that the scheme has the potential to be an effective tool in support of the University's students, but that to reach any more conclusions would be premature.
- 2.47 Students confirmed the effectiveness of the learning advisers and the service in general. From discussions with students and with learning advisers themselves, the review team identifies as **good practice** the Learning Advice Service, which provides a range of information and advice on academic study skills for a diverse student population.
- 2.48 A Student Services Handbook provides an overview of the facilities available to students and the review team regard this handbook as comprehensive. Although students reported little knowledge of this document, they indicated that their support needs are wholly met without recourse to the handbook and in general were content with the range and quality of the support services available to them.
- 2.49 Some students reported to the review team various issues regarding library provision. The review team noted several instances where the University has acknowledged issues with library provision, for example in heads of schools' overviews of quality assurance

and enhancement, and concluded that the University is taking appropriate steps to deal with these matters.

2.50 The improvement and increase of available learning and teaching spaces was noted as an area for further development in the 2012-13 annual academic health report and the 2013-14 report noted considerable progress. In particular a building has been acquired that will house a new library and learning resources facilities to be opened in September 2015. The review team noted further instances where the University has acknowledged and is addressing issues regarding space, for example in the Annual Report of St Mary's Postgraduate Research Degree Programme 2013-14. Accordingly, the review team **affirms** the steps being taken to address the shortage of physical learning spaces, for example, the development of an additional library building. This matter is discussed further in section B11 (see paragraph 2.140).

2.51 Overall the review team concludes that Expectation B4 is met and the risk associated with this area is low because, in the main, the internal frameworks and their operation enable students to develop and achieve their potential. Students report general satisfaction with the provision of services that this Expectation encompasses.

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

2.52 The University's mission and values, and the strategic aims and objectives of the Corporate Plan outline St Mary's commitment to placing the student experience at the heart of its activities. Emphasis is placed on ensuring the University responds to student feedback and that staff and students work collaboratively to enhance the student experience. In 2013, the University developed the SERS strategy which defines student engagement as improving opportunities for and motivation of students to engage more fully in their academic and wider student experience across the student life cycle. The strategy envisages that participation of students in quality enhancement and quality assurance processes will result in the improvement of their educational experience. The Student Charter explains the responsibility of the University, students and the Students' Union (SU) in these activities.

2.53 The SU exists to support and represent the interests of the student body, and aid communication between students and the University, with whom officers enjoy a very positive relationship. The SU contributed to the development of the SERS and the Student Charter, and has a role in promoting student engagement among its membership.

2.54 There is currently student representation on all thirteen University committees, including Academic Board. The University has two to three student representatives per programme. Responsibility for this system is shared, in principle, between the SU, the QAE Office and Student Services. Training sessions and a Programme Reps Handbook prepare programme representatives for their role. They are expected to gather feedback from their peers and report back to academic staff. Formally, this is done via programme boards, though informal discussion may also take place. Student-staff liaison meetings take place once per semester for each programme, with student feedback a standing item on the agenda. The minutes of these meetings are reported to SVRC as part of the annual programme review process. Academic staff are also provided with information about programme representatives, for example, via induction and the Programme Directors' QAE Guide to encourage engagement.

2.55 Students are elected by the student body to represent their peers by serving on University and school-level committees, or taking up an SU sabbatical post. Elections may be at programme level or cross campus, depending on the role. The University is currently piloting having student serving on SVRCs, with the support of the SU.

2.56 Students are invited to give feedback about their learning and teaching experience through a variety of means. Module evaluation takes place within programmes, and a recent review of this process led to the adoption of a standardised approach. Final year students are also encouraged to share their experiences in the National Student Survey (NSS), the results of which are considered at Academic Board and at School level.

2.57 These processes provide a basis that should, in principle, enable the University to meet the Expectation.

2.58 In order to test the effectiveness of student engagement at St Mary's, the review team spoke to students, student representatives, staff of the SU, senior staff, academic staff and professional support staff of the University. The review team also examined

documentary evidence provided by the University, including strategies, committee minutes and policies, and viewed online resources.

2.59 Both the University and the SU have recognised the need to improve current student engagement practices and have taken steps to do so. In 2012, a working group was set up, with SU membership, following identification that student representation required further development. The review team found evidence, from speaking to staff and students and reviewing minutes of meetings, specifically Academic Board, that considerable efforts have been made to increase representation across University and School level committees. Committee minutes confirm the membership of student representatives, albeit attendance is variable. Committees now give consideration to student issues via standing items on agendas for feedback from representatives. The SU has instigated a review of the Student Charter and developed a five-year strategic plan which seeks to improve representation, particularly for postgraduate research (PGR) students, which is currently lacking. During 2013-14, a review was conducted into the process for module evaluation in an attempt to standardise the process. Feedback from students and teaching staff whom the review team met, confirmed that this has been piloted across certain programmes, and those who had experience of it spoke positively.

2.60 The review team recognises that initiatives to improve student representation in engagement activities are relatively new and have improved in a relatively short amount of time. It was clear that the University and students value the informal and close relationships they have with each other, which facilitate honest and open dialogue. As a result, students consider that the University listens to their voice and responds accordingly. The review team noted, however, that responsibility for driving such student engagement initiatives often falls in large part to the SU and questioned whether this is in the best interests of quality enhancement. The review team, therefore, **recommends** that, in partnership with students, the University articulate and implement a shared strategic approach to promote and embed student engagement in quality assurance and enhancement.

2.61 Overall the review team concludes that Expectation B5 is met on the grounds that the University encourages student engagement through a range of channels both formal and informal. The level of risk associated with this area is moderate, however. Despite examples of the University and the SU working closely together, there remains considerable scope for further improvement in the engagement of students as full and active partners in their education. The University has yet to articulate explicitly how it intends to work with the SU to achieve this.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

2.62 The practice of assessment is governed by the University Assessment Policy which articulates the principles underpinning assessment and provides information on the ways in which St Mary's undertakes to assess its students. All assessment practices must also adhere to relevant sections of the Academic Regulations which set out several aspects of assessment, including admission with advanced standing, marking and moderation, late submission of coursework, extenuating circumstances, arrangements for the operation of boards of examiners, and academic conduct.

2.63 The University's assessment tariff provides specific guidance on assessment loading, against which programme assessment is mapped. The tariff specifies word or time limits for types of assessment at different levels according to their weightings.

2.64 The University is committed to using a range of appropriate assessment methods, and providing timely and relevant assessment feedback. Feedback is normally provided within three working weeks, and should include some form of oral and online feedback.

2.65 The University recognises that high quality assessment is an essential element of the student experience, serving the dual purpose of measuring student achievement and promoting student learning.

2.66 The current assessment policy and the new assessment tariff were implemented recently, alongside the restructured undergraduate curriculum. The tariff plays an important role in ensuring that a consistent, transparent and equitable approach is applied to assessment during curriculum design, validation and delivery. It seeks to achieve equity of assessment loading across all components of the student learning experience, as well as greater consistency across programmes.

2.67 Programme specifications include an assessment rationale for the programme as a whole, highlighting any distinctive features or novel techniques. Module outlines also include an assessment rationale, which shows how the assessment relates to the module learning outcomes. Details regarding the timing, nature and extent of feedback that students can expect are published in programme and module handbooks. By these means the University should, in principle, be able to meet the Expectation.

2.68 The review team tested assessment practices through examining a range of policy and process documentation and meeting staff and students to discuss assessment issues including design, marking, feedback and use of technology in assessment.

2.69 Programme assessment is developed in accordance with the Assessment Policy and with reference to the assessment tariff. Staff regard the tariff as a helpful framework, particularly for designing and modifying module assessment regimes. Implementation of the tariff has rationalised and slimmed down assessment loads, and assures parity in joint honours programmes.

2.70 Predicated on a set of underpinning principles, the Assessment Policy provides good guidance on the testing of outcomes and on marking and moderation process. Clear and comprehensive marking criteria for a range of assessment types are applied thoroughly and have proved useful to both staff and students. The review team heard that the criteria have been used in a marking exercise undertaken with students to promote assessment literacy. The team identifies as good **practice** the clear and comprehensive sets of assessment criteria for different modes of assessment, which promote consistency of assessment and assessment literacy in both staff and students.

2.71 Students are supported in understanding the assessment process, are familiar with the assessment criteria and receive feedback which includes advice on, and in some cases targets for, improving grades. Feedback is detailed, and both formative and summative. The review team heard from staff and students that the University is working to strike the right balance between timeliness and quality of feedback. Staff are clear that the turnaround for assessment feedback is three teaching weeks and are confident that deadlines are being met. More at issue are instances of bunching of assessments, with some students reporting too small a gap between assessments to meet the requirement to build in a response to feedback offered on the previous assignment. Staff are responsive to such problems and changes to assessment deadlines were cited as an example of action taken in response to student feedback. There is a University-wide move towards online submission and return of coursework, which, through a timed and automated release of feedback, is felt will help with any remaining issues of timeliness.

2.72 Overall the review team concludes that Expectation B6 is met and the risk associated with this area is low. The Assessment Policy and assessment tariff, together with programme assessment strategies and module assessment rationales form a framework that provides an equitable, explicit and systematic approach to assessment. Sound and reliable processes are in place to operationalise these policies and strategies, enabling students to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the credit or qualification being sought.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining

Findings

2.73 The University's requirements for external examining are set out in the Academic Regulations. The QAE Handbook contains clear procedures for the operation of the external examining system. The procedures should, in principle, enable the Expectation on external examining to be met.

2.74 The review team tested the operation of the procedures by reading external examining regulation and process documents, a range of external examiners' reports, the University's responses to those reports, and documentary evidence of further discussion and review of the issues and recommendations raised in the reports. The review team also discussed the operation of the external examining system with staff and students.

2.75 External examiners are nominated by Programme Directors in accordance with internally published criteria which are consistent with guidance in the Quality Code. Appointments are made following scrutiny by VRC. Thorough guidelines are provided to newly appointed external examiners on their role.

2.76 External examiners comment on draft assessment tasks, moderate a sample of examination scripts and coursework, and attend relevant programme examination boards. They are required to submit an annual report using a pro forma which invites comments in particular areas of importance. The reports seen by the review team provided clear and informative feedback, and had been received and responded to in a timely manner. Staff confirmed that action is taken to address any non-receipts of reports. Reports are discussed at programme boards and published on the virtual learning environment (VLE). Analyses are undertaken of issues and themes arising from external examiners' findings and associated action plans developed, notably in ASPERs and the annual academic health report.

2.77 Students are aware of the external examining system and confirmed that external examiners' reports are discussed with them at programme boards. While none of the students whom the review team met had seen an external examiner's report, most were confident that they knew how the reports could be accessed. Information provided to students did not include the name, position and institution of external examiners and students were unaware of the identity of their external examiners. In view of this low level of engagement, the review team **recommends** that the University reviews and communicates the guidance available to students to enable them to benefit from reading external examiner reports and the University's responses to them.

2.78 The University does not currently maintain a central record of its own staff who are external examiners at other higher education providers and instead relies on programme directors to ensure that reciprocal appointments are not made. The review team heard that although this informal approach has served adequately to date, the University recognises the need for greater security in managing potential conflicts of interest, and the team **recommends** that the University implement a system to ensure that reciprocal appointments of external examiners are avoided.

2.79 Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation B7 is met and the risk associated with this area is low since the design and the operation of the University's external examining system is well established and operating effectively and shortcomings can easily and swiftly be addressed.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review

Findings

2.80 The continuing health of academic programmes and learning opportunities is overseen by Academic Board and its subcommittees. The purpose and nature of programme monitoring and review are clearly identified along with the processes and templates in the QAE Handbook. These are designed to meet the requirements of the Quality Code as well as 'St Mary's Model'. The University's principal monitoring and review processes, post-validation, are annual programme evaluation and review, five-yearly revalidation and external examiner procedures. Delivery organisations experience an additional interim review after two years. VRC considers the outcomes of annual programme reviews and evaluations, and revalidation proposals. Recently St Mary's has introduced an annual academic health report for Academic Board which provides University-wide oversight and reflection on all its academic activity.

2.81 Annual monitoring involves programme teams submitting an ASPER to SVRC. ASPERs encourage teams to reflect on the previous academic year, in terms of objectives both achieved and planned, programme developments, response to student feedback, analysis of student achievement, areas of good practice, and how the programme incorporates aspects such as employability and equality/diversity. Input must come from the whole programme team, and not simply represent the views of the programme director [4.8.2] and be informed by quantitative data and qualitative input. This includes the views of students, external examiners, and other stakeholders. Module evaluation, which was standardised in 2013-14, is discussed at programme boards.

2.82 Documentation required for revalidation is the same as required for validation with the addition of an evaluation of programme delivery since the original validation. Additionally the programme's track record in student recruitment and attainment is considered, as well as how the programme is being re-shaped for revalidation and the drivers behind this. A reflective pro forma template is used for consistency, completed from a team perspective. As with validation, detailed documentary guidance is provided for staff, who can obtain support from development sessions. The revalidation proposal responds to external examiner reports and takes account of student views, and where possible alumni and employers. The revalidation proposal forms a standing item on the programme board agendas.

2.83 External examiners review the initial draft of the revalidation proposal for approval before the proposal proceeds, and makes recommendations for modification. Revalidation proposals are scrutinised by SVRC before University-level committees. Where applicable, PSRB mapping is reported to VRC.

2.84 The University follows the standard procedure for discontinuation of courses, as set down by UCAS and records modifications to courses centrally (see paragraphs 1.27 and 1.33).

2.85 Monitoring includes a central analysis by Academic Board of the NSS results and degree attainment data. TLC also considers an analysis of the NSS results and each academic school is required to provide an overview of their programmes' responses to it.

2.86 A special modified system of revalidation was introduced to implement the new 20-40 credit undergraduate curriculum structure, which necessitated the revalidation of all undergraduate provision in a short space of time. A significant feature was the use of external readers to undertake the external validator role by correspondence. Although this process was retained following completion of the curriculum restructure, following further review, revalidation panel events are being reintroduced in 2014-15.

2.87 The processes and procedures in place should, in principle, enable the University to meet the Expectation

2.88 In order to test this, the review team read a wide range of evidence relating to the documentary guidance and processes associated with annual monitoring, review and revalidation. The minutes of VRC and Academic Board were considered together with a number of exemplar reports. The review team met a range of staff involved in monitoring and review at a range of levels and spoke to student representatives who were familiar with, or participants in, module evaluation and programme review. Interviews were held with representatives of delivery organisations.

2.89 The comprehensive core documentation and guidance available internally provides a consistent framework for monitoring, review and revalidation processes. This is supported by careful consideration of external reports through the academic committee structure. The recent introduction of an annual academic health report provides consolidated University-wide oversight. St Mary's has kept its processes under review and is making proposals to revert to a revalidation panel, recognising that effectiveness can be improved. Proposals for change were considered at VRC. The review team **affirms** the reintroduction of panels in the revalidation process to provide more challenging scrutiny of proposals.

2.90 Comprehensive University-wide documentation guides processes for annual monitoring and review, which are regular and systematic. The processes are the same for St Mary's delivery organisations. Together with module evaluation, ASPERs provide a consistent methodology for annual monitoring and the annual academic health report for Academic Board (now in its second year) is more detailed and includes a register of good practice. [Paper copy submitted to review team]. The deliberative committee structure effectively discharges its responsibilities. The University has also undertaken a preliminary review of the revised 20-40 credit structure.

2.91 Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation B8 is met and the risk associated with this area is low as the processes developed and implemented for annual monitoring and review of programmes at St Mary's and its delivery partners are effectively supported by the internal regulatory framework documentation and the internal deliberative committee structure which is well established.

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

2.92 The University considers itself to have a transparent approach to student information and guidance to minimise situations that may lead to academic appeals and student complaints. The principles underpinning appeals are set out in the academic regulations as are the procedures which involve submission to the Registry. The complaints procedure is a three-stage process, with involvement of the SU at stage two, where a formal panel is convened to which the student can present a case. Revisions to the complaints and appeals procedures are discussed at and approved by Academic Board. Recent revisions have been prompted in part by the 2012 Cause for Concern investigation and a case considered by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.

2.93 Students are made aware of complaints and appeals processes orally at induction and via the VLE. Examples of programme handbooks and guidelines provided to the review team clearly indicate how students may go about making a complaint or lodging an appeal. There is similar information in some module guides.

2.94 Staff from across the University have attended training in handling difficult situations with students, which includes dealing with complaints. Guidance notes for staff on complaints and appeals were under development at the time of the review visit.

2.95 Central oversight of complaints and appeals is vested in Registry. Complaints and appeals data, without analysis, is presented to Academic Board within the annual academic health report, which contains information on many aspects of the University's functioning. In both the 2012-13 and the 2013-14 reports, appeals were listed but complaints were not reported on, and there was little commentary on the data. In the 2012-13 report it was noted that 145 appeals were received against programme termination following exam board decisions and of these 68 were successful. No commentary was supplied with this data and so the reason why so many appeals were successful was unknown.

2.96 In general the design of the University's processes should, in principle enable the University to meet the Expectation, but there is a single exception: central oversight of data is limited.

2.97 The review team scrutinised complaints and appeals procedures together with summary data on complaints and appeals and examined the manner in which the University oversees the processes. In addition, the review team met students and staff at various levels of the University, including the Student Conduct and Complaints Officer.

2.98 The review team formed the view that the University's procedures for complaints and appeals are comprehensive, fit for purpose, and are kept under review. The forms and guidance are well set out and recourse to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator is clearly indicated. In the University's self-evaluation document, procedures were described as 'written to be prescriptive, informative and user-friendly'. The review team concurs with this view. The training of staff in dealing with complaints is appropriate.

2.99 Students, including representatives, whom the review team met were generally unaware of formal processes for complaints and appeals, though did indicate whom they

would contact for advice. The review team concluded that information on complaints and appeals is readily available to students should they need to access it.

2.100 The review team requested an overview and analysis of complaints and appeals and was informed that records for 2012-13 are incomplete and yet an overview report on complaints and appeals for that year was included in the University's annual academic health report without any indication that the data was incomplete. Similarly, data on complaints presented in a report prepared for the review team did not appear in the annual academic health report.

2.101 In the 2010 audit report 'weakness of the central oversight of complaints and appeals which stems in part from the lack of an annual report on their number and nature' was noted. During the present review, the University acknowledged that central oversight of this area is a relatively new development.

2.102 The review team formed the view that the document in which the data was presented, the form the data took, and lack of analysis prevented the University maintaining effective oversight of the complaints and appeals systems. Accordingly, the review team **recommends** that the University establish robust central oversight of student complaints and academic appeals, including analysis and discussion of emerging trends, and ensure that appropriate action is taken.

2.103 Overall the review team concludes that Expectation B9 is not met because of the lack of central oversight and analysis of complaints and appeals data. The risk associated with this area is moderate on the grounds that, without action, the absence of central oversight could lead to problems over time if systemic problems and/or emerging trends are not promptly identified and remedied.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

2.104 St Mary's collaborative provision (CP) underwent a major review in light of the significant number of advisable recommendations from the 2011 QAA Institutional Audit, the outcomes of the 2012 Causes for Concern Review and the findings and recommendations of the 2012 report commissioned by the University. The University acknowledged it had moved too quickly to establish collaborative arrangements as a validating/franchising body following the award of taught degree awarding powers in 2007. St Mary's continues to work through and monitor outcomes of a composite action plan compiled progressively in light of these three reports. These actions (and other quality assurance matters) continue to be monitored by a working group comprising the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Students and External Relationships) (PVCS), the Registrar, the Director of Learning and Teaching and the Head of QAE.

2.105 The University states that its definition of collaborative provision falls within the scope of *Chapter B10* of the Quality Code and that its arrangements reflect the Expectation of B10.

2.106 The University's comprehensive Collaborative Provision Register groups delivery organisations into four categories: validation, franchise, part-franchise and flying faculty, which are each explained in the CP Handbook. The University currently has no partnership arrangements leading to joint, dual or multiple awards nor any serial franchise arrangements. Over the last 18 months, the University has compiled a risk register which lists all current delivery organisations, the likely levels of risk associated with each type, and appropriate mitigating controls. The risk levels are regularly reviewed and updated.

2.107 A new Collaborative Partnerships Strategy was approved by Academic Board in June 2013. This lists a range of possible collaborative models and requires delivery organisations to make an explicit contribution to the achievement of the University's strategic aims and the realisation of its vision. The University assures itself that collaborative arrangements are compatible with St Mary's strategic approach, ethos and mission and mapped to *Chapter B10* of the Quality Code. Proposers must clearly address these issues in the application proposal which is considered initially by SMT. All Schools and relevant departments are encouraged to engage in working with delivery organisations and to develop a partnership portfolio based upon their academic expertise and experience, with 'the assurance of quality and maintenance of standards having the highest priority (that) will not be compromised under any circumstances'.

2.108 The strategy is underpinned by the Collaborative Provision Handbook (CPH) which outlines the types of collaborative activities, procedures for approving, monitoring and reviewing programmes delivered with others, the relevant University committee responsibilities and the roles of different parties within the University and the delivery organisation. The handbook was prepared in light of the recommendations from the various reviews listed in paragraph 2.104 and has been updated annually.

2.109 The CPH outlines in some detail a two-tier, risk-based process of approval of delivery organisations. Strategic oversight of these arrangements rests with the PVCS, supported by the Registrar, and is overseen on behalf of the Academic Board by the

Collaborative Provision Sub Committee (CPSC), which reports to PRC and is chaired by the PVCS. The first stage involves approval of the delivery organisation, which is initiated by a School proposal to the Senior Management Team (SMT). If agreed in principle, the proposal is then considered in detail by CPSC; a successful outcome at this stage triggers a due diligence visit by a team including an SMT member and the relevant Head of School. This visit is informed by an outline due diligence process guide, which includes an agenda and list of issues for consideration and then report by the team to PRC. The due diligence visit also includes consideration of the proposed delivery organisation's learning resources, arrangements for learning and teaching, scrutiny of relevant staff CVs, student support and staff development. The due diligence process includes discussion on responsibilities for student admissions. The planning stage reviews the process to be followed should course closure be required.

2.110 PRC submits the proposal to Academic Board for formal approval, after which a memorandum of cooperation (MoC), mapped to the Chapter B10 of the Quality Code and prepared by the University's legal services team, [examples at 244] is signed before any academic activity commences.

2.111 Programme validation forms the second tier of the approval process. The programme quality assurance arrangements and the academic regulations for CP reflect those applying to programmes delivered wholly within the University, with the addition of guidance to external validators, prompting them to scrutinise and question the proposal on the basis of its collaborative nature.

2.112 The relevant SVRC will, if appropriate, recommend to VRC a validation panel visit to the proposed delivery organisation. Due diligence checks and a review of the memorandum of cooperation accompany revalidation visits as part of the periodic review process. Programmes delivered with or by other delivery organisations are subject to an additional interim review, two academic years after validation or revalidation. The outcomes of interim reports are submitted in template form to SVRC and VRC during the first semester of the third year of operation. External examiners may be nominated by the delivery organisation and considered and appointed through normal University approval processes. Each validated delivery organisation will normally have an independent CP programme moderator, with a designated role descriptor, whose function is to ensure that the University's academic standards are safeguarded and that quality control is maintained within the programme. The moderator will periodically visit the delivery organisation, observe practices and procedures and report their findings with recommendations.

2.113 The review team noted that two validated programmes are subject to professional accreditation: MA Sports Journalism (delivered with News Associates) was accredited by the National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ) in 2013, and BA Acting wholly delivered at the Academy of Live and Recorded Arts (ALRA) is being accredited by Drama UK.

2.114 There are separate arrangements, led by the International Office, for the approval of study abroad programmes. In summary, programme directors map with their students, and with the advice of the International Office, possible study options offered by institutions approved, via due diligence and mission fit, by the International Office. New study abroad programmes receive high level approval at SMT. These arrangements are currently under review following the recent appointment of a Pro Vice-Chancellor with a remit for global affairs.

2.115 The arrangements in place should, in principle enable the University to meet the Expectation.

2.116 The review team tested the operation of the University's approaches to working with others through discussions with university staff, and with staff representatives and students of delivery organisations. They viewed a selection of Memoranda of Cooperation; validation, interim review and revalidation documents; relevant SVCR minutes; a delivery organisation's student handbook, a series of interim reports and the life history of the relationship with a particular delivery organisation.

2.117 The review team learned that the University's current partnership strategy, with its emphasis on compatibility of mission, continues to inform the University's future approach to working with others. Whilst still adopting a 'cautious' approach to new collaborations, the University intends to develop a number of arrangements with carefully selected institutions overseas as part of its emerging global strategy, perhaps leading eventually to joint awards. The review team noted that proposals for collaborations are considered as outlined in the CP Handbook and that although ten out of twelve new arrangements were approved during 2013-14, each of these was a low risk extension of the University's current activities with the schools' sector. The two that were not approved represented high risk initiatives. The review team encourages the University to continue to monitor carefully the continuing appropriateness of all sections of the CPH as the University's arrangements for working with others, including its opportunities for study abroad, expand numerically and globally.

2.118 The University explained that the arrangements for validation, monitoring and revalidation of programmes delivered with others mirrors the arrangements in place for on-campus provision, with the exception of an additional interim two-year review for delivery organisations. The memoranda of cooperation viewed by the review team are detailed and comprehensive and relate to both the overall relationship between the University and its delivery organisations and the operation of the programme. The review team noted that the reports of these reviews are very comprehensive and resemble those associated with validations, concluding with recommendations. Representatives of delivery organisations indicated that their organisations welcome these interim reviews and find them helpful. The review team identifies as **good practice** the introduction of an effective interim review of programmes delivered with others to provide an additional check on how well the arrangements are working.

2.119 It was not always clear to the delivery organisation, however, whether the memorandum of cooperation is itself under review at the same time as the formal revalidation. The review team understands that there is a schedule of interim reviews and revalidations updated manually, but that there is currently no formal schedule of reviews of memoranda of cooperation. The University is currently in the process of devising a systematised process for the monitoring and review of all contracts/memoranda of cooperation, due to be operational from 2015-16, although it currently maintains with manual oversight a list of all contracts and their expiry dates. To promote clarity and to ensure that all aspects of agreements with delivery organisations are reviewed periodically, the review team **recommends** that the University secure central oversight of the schedule for the review of memoranda of cooperation and operating arrangements with the University's delivery organisations.

2.120 Delivery partners welcome the appointment of moderators, another additional feature of the quality assurance arrangements for programmes delivered with others, usually from the relevant school, who act as the regular link between the two organisations. The review team viewed several moderators' annual reports, produced in a consistent template format for discussion with the delivery organisation and VRC, which demonstrate that the role is taken conscientiously. Delivery organisations reported positively on the support the moderators provide to their own staff, and the regular and helpful communications with the School more generally. The review team identifies as **good practice** the establishment of a clearly defined moderator role to provide effective ongoing links between academic schools

and the University's delivery organisations and encourages the University to consider establishing a moderators' forum for the sharing of good practice and common concerns.

2.121 Students spoke positively about the supportive arrangements the University has in place for programmes delivered by University staff at other centres. They affirmed the high quality of the teaching and course materials, the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the programme handbooks and module guides, and the more general support they receive. The review team viewed a number of redacted certificates which aligned with the Quality Code.

2.122 The review team noted the attention to detail paid by SVRCs in considering reports on collaborative activities. VRC agendas include a standing item on collaborative provision; in this regard, the review team noted the committee considering moderator nominations, the role and induction of moderators, and interim review reports.

2.123 The University maintains a detailed collaborative partner corporate identity schedule, to be signed by the Director of Marketing and a representative of the delivery organisation, which clearly provides an agreed schedule of the programme material to be promoted by the latter. Memoranda of cooperation viewed by the review team include sections on the relative responsibilities of the University and its delivery organisations for the publication of promotional materials. The review team was advised that the University's Marketing Department reviews the accuracy and completeness of the delivery organisation's websites biannually. The University also provides a detailed check-list of all the university/delivery organisation/programme information to be supplied to students at induction. The review team viewed a sample of redacted degree certificates and diploma supplements which align with Part C of the Quality Code, citing the University's name, the identity and location of the delivery partner and the title and classification of the award.

2.124 Overall the review team concludes that Expectation B10 is met since the design and operation of the University's arrangements for working with others is effective. The risk associated with this area is moderate, however, because the lack of clarity surrounding contract review could lead to serious problems over time, especially given the University's intention to expand the number of global partnerships.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Findings

2.125 The University does not have powers to award its own research degrees, though acquisition of such is a strategic goal, and postgraduate research students study for awards of the University of Surrey or Liverpool Hope University. The University has recently entered into an agreement with Liverpool Hope University which will award degrees for those students registered from September 2014. The University of Surrey will award degrees for students registered before that date.

2.126 While working within the awarding bodies' regulations, the University has its own system of managing research students, primarily through the Sub-Committee (of the Research and Enterprise Committee) for Research Students and School-level committees, which report to it. The names of the School-level committees vary as does their frequency of meeting, which is not always regular. The Sub-Committee for Research Students produces a research degree action plan, partly informed by feedback from students, which is part of the overall annual reports to the awarding bodies.

2.127 Research committees at school-level have student membership, though often students do not attend. The University's self-evaluation document stated that School Research Committees are expected to approve applications for registration before these are presented to the Sub-Committee for Research Students. In some schools approval is given after careful discussion, but in others the minutes show no evidence of this activity.

2.128 The Research Degree Programme Review Board brings together staff and students to consider the effectiveness of the research degree programme in supporting the needs of students. Although at its first meeting in April 2014 the Board was described as a biannual forum, it has not met since and the team was told that it now meets annually. It has no terms of reference.

2.129 Supervisors are required to be trained and staff from Liverpool Hope and Surrey Universities deliver some training at the University, supplemented by updates to the regulations supplied by the University's Research Office.

2.130 All applicants are interviewed by the proposed director of study and one other academic staff member from within the relevant school, and then considered by the appropriate school-level research committee and the Sub-Committee for Research Students. The University's self-evaluation document stated that students are normally registered on the University's pre-registration period during which time they receive support in developing a research proposal and an application to study. However, students to whom the review team spoke did not recognise this process. Central and local inductions are provided, and students indicated that local inductions are informal and usually delivered by the supervisors. Some students had reservations about whether the initial training fully met their needs, for example in respect of qualitative research.

2.131 The University publishes its own handbooks for students, one for those registered with the University of Surrey and one for those with Liverpool Hope University. These are generally comprehensive and detail administrative procedures, regulations, support

available, advice on, for example, plagiarism, and appeals, indicating the role of the awarding body. Local complaints procedures are included in one handbook but not the other and in both documents the word 'University' is often used without specifying whether the awarding university or St Mary's is being referred to.

2.132 Skills development is monitored through a rolling skills audit form and research methods training is available through a researcher development programme. Though students did not recognise this term they indicated that they were adequately supported in their studies. They were also appreciative of the annual postgraduate research student conference, which provides a forum for research students to exchange ideas. To support his or her studies each student is allocated £200 per year that can be used, for example, to fund conference attendance or to buy specialist equipment.

2.133 Each student, in conjunction with her or his supervisory team, produces interleaved interim and annual reports that are presented both to school-level research bodies and the Sub-Committee for Research Students, which meets in September each year as a progression board. For those students who intend to exit with a PhD there is also a confirmation review that either confirms their status as a PhD student or recommends that they be re-registered for the award of MPhil or be withdrawn. However, students whom the review team met, though broadly aware of the procedure, were not clear on its purpose.

2.134 Students reported that opportunities to provide feedback on their experiences are via an annual survey and student representatives, though students were largely unaware of who their representatives were. Some students also have six-monthly meetings with their school's Director of Research. Students were able to cite issues that had been satisfactorily resolved via these processes.

2.135 While there is evidence that the framework for managing research degrees is effective and should, in principle, enable the University to meet the Expectation, the effectiveness is dependent on the relatively small scale of the provision. Through its Research Strategy the University has plans to increase research student numbers but the review team saw no proposals to revise the framework in the light of these plans.

2.136 In testing this Expectation the review team met research students, supervisors and senior academic and administrative staff involved in the management of research degrees. They also scrutinised a range of policy documents and minutes of deliberative committees including the Research and Enterprise Committee, Sub-Committee for Research Students and school-level committees with responsibility for research students.

2.137 The Sub-Committee for Research Students has appropriate terms of reference that explicitly link with the Quality Code, and an examination of its minutes shows careful consideration of research students and their activity, including, for example, applications for registration where project proposals are scrutinised in detail.

2.138 The University's admissions policy, without differentiating between taught or research students states that where '...interviews are conducted, there must be clear criteria against which applicants will be assessed. These criteria will be made available to applicants prior to the interview'. The review team asked for examples of criteria but was provided with advice to staff on considering research students and concluded that criteria for research student admissions via interview have yet to be established.

2.139 In general, the review team regards the support arrangements for research students as satisfactory.

2.140 The University of Surrey's review of the provision at the University, the University's Research Strategy, and the 2014 postgraduate research degree programme survey all draw

attention to the issue of lack of learning space. The last also highlights issues with computing resources. Despite this, students whom the review team met were broadly content with IT provision, though since some had no dedicated working space they had no dedicated computing facilities. While students were generally content with library provision, those without dedicated space spent much time in the library where noise could be a problem. Students were aware of the planned increase in student numbers and voiced concern that a change in infrastructure would be required. Staff whom the team met confirmed plans expressed in both the Research Strategy and the action plan following the University of Surrey's review to create more dedicated space for research students. The review team welcomes this development which forms an integral part of the action affirmed in relation to Expectation B4 above (see paragraph 2.50).

2.141 Overall annual reports on research degree activity, as required by the degree awarding bodies, are considered by the Sub-Committee for Research Students and approved by the Research & Enterprise Committee before dispatch to the degree-awarding bodies. In the past, reports were noted for information by Academic Board, but following a review of the remit of the Research & Enterprise Committee, reports should now be approved by Academic Board. However, this process has not always operated as intended, since in 2014 the annual report was sent to the degree-awarding body before being approved by St Mary's. The review team scrutinised minutes but could not find evidence that the previous annual report had been approved. By examining a selection of these reports, the review team established that they are generally fit for purpose, though lacking in detail on and discussion of progression and completion data that might be used to inform University debate. Progression data is also presented in the annual academic health report and thus come to the attention of Academic Board via this route, but similarly lack contextualisation. Though the Sub-Committee for Research Students deals with the progression of students it does so in relation to individual students rather than assessing data from across the programme.

2.142 In view of the variation in function, title and meeting schedule of school-level research committees, the lack of terms of reference and a fixed meeting schedule of the Research Degree Programme Review Board, the lack of internal discussion and approval by Academic Board of annual reports prior to their dispatch to the degree-awarding body, and a lack of detail on and discussion of progression and completion data, the review team **recommends** that the University strengthen the central oversight of research degree provision.

2.143 Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation B11 is met and the risk associated with this area is low since the University's framework for managing research degrees is effective. Although the review team identified various issues that resulted in a recommendation to strengthen central oversight of research degree provision and identified procedures that are unlikely to be able to support an expanded provision, these areas do not currently present a serious risk to the management of this area and can swiftly be improved.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.144 In reaching its judgement about the quality of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. Of the 11 applicable Expectations in this area, 10 have been met; seven of these have a low level of associated risk and three have a moderate level of associated risk. Expectation B9, which is not met also has a moderate level of associated risk. The area as a whole gives rise to four features of good practice, two affirmations and seven recommendations.

2.145 Each of the recommendations made in respect of Expectations B3, B5, B9, B10 and B11 requires the University to strengthen central oversight of quality assurance mechanisms to ensure that those with responsibility for the management of the quality of student learning opportunities are fully informed about how well the University's arrangements are working. The two recommendations made in respect of B7 require amendments to information provided to students and completion of an activity that is already underway. While there is a moderate level of risk associated with B3, B5, B9 and B10 on the grounds that, without action, serious problems could arise over time, the University should be able to address all the recommendations relatively swiftly and effectively and in some cases has already begun the process. None of the actions require, or will result in, major structural, operational or procedural change.

2.146 The review team 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 The University's mission, values and strategy and other corporate information is made available on its website.

3.2 The University makes available a variety of information to its stakeholders, notably its prospectus, the QAE handbook, Collaborative Provision Handbook, the Academic Regulations, the St Mary's Model, the Quality & Student Experience and Enhancement Framework, and subject requirements. Departments across the University contribute collaboratively to produce, maintain and update these resources.

3.3 Information for prospective students is provided on the website, in the prospectus and via programme leaflets and gives an overview of the entry requirements and application processes. The University Admissions Policy and terms and conditions are also made available. Prospective students can find information about attending open days and events to gather additional information about their programme and the campus on the relevant website pages.

3.4 A variety of arrangements exists to assure the quality of information at St Mary's and these should, in principle, enable the University to meet the Expectation. For example, the academic content and the accuracy of all information about higher education provision are checked annually at the instigation of the QAE Office. In addition, Registry and the Marketing Department may have oversight of information before publication. However, these arrangements do not appear to be coordinated within an overall strategic approach to the management of information. The University only recently mapped its practices against Part C of the Quality Code, despite having completed detailed mapping against Part B.

3.5 The review team met students, senior staff, academic staff and professional support staff involved in the production, use and monitoring of the University's information. They also examined documentary material and browsed the website to test whether information produced for internal and external audiences meets the Expectation.

3.6 The University's external website and the platforms used by the students, contain useful information regarding all aspects of the student life cycle. Students confirmed during the review visit, that the information they had received was fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. During induction, all students are provided with a programme handbook which provides information specific to the structure and content of their chosen programme, key dates and signposts to additional support students may require. Both the programme handbook and the Student Charter seek to manage the expectations of students, outlining each party's responsibilities. Students are also given module guides which provide specific information about each component of their level of study, including content, schedule, assessments and reading lists. Programme teams are responsible for the content of module guides and guidance is provided to them on the format and content of both. Students assured the review team that these documents are helpful and meet their needs.

3.7 During the review visit, the review team became aware of a number of areas in which quality would be enhanced if the University were to harness information more effectively and systematically. For example, St Mary's does not have in place clear protocols for tracking cumulative changes to modules and their consequent effect on programme specifications (see paragraphs 1.27 and 1.33). The University is not able to state categorically whether PGR students acting as graduate teaching assistants have undertaken training to teach (see paragraph 2.34). The University does not keep a formal record of staff undertaking duties elsewhere as external examiners and relies on the local knowledge of programme directors to avoid reciprocity of appointments (see paragraph 2.78). More seriously, there is no central oversight of data relating to student complaints and academic appeals. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that the University identifies and makes more effective use of the categories of data that will best support the University's management of academic standards, quality and enhancement.

3.8 The review team found some evidence of good practice in relation to the management of information within particular departments of the University, for example the systematic quality checking carried out routinely by the admissions team. Such examples tended to be isolated, however, rather than contributing to the overall enhancement of practice University-wide. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that the University formalise the protocols by which it can assure itself at institutional level that the information it produces about its higher education provision is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

3.9 Overall the review team concludes that the Expectation concerning information about higher education is met since students and staff attest to the high quality and value of information they receive and individual units take the matter seriously. The risk associated with this area of provision is moderate, however, because the lack of an overall strategic approach to the management of information could, over time and in certain circumstances, lead to errors and/or the loss of opportunities to enhance the quality of student learning opportunities.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

3.10 In reaching its judgement about the quality of the information about learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The Expectation in this area is met with a moderate level of associated risk and gives rise to two recommendations.

3.11 There is a moderate level of risk associated with this area on the grounds that the lack of an overall strategic approach to the management of information could, over time and in certain circumstances, lead to errors and/or the loss of opportunities to enhance the quality of student learning opportunities. The University should, however, be able to address the recommendations relatively swiftly and effectively by harnessing and formalising some of its current practices. None of the actions required require or will result in major structural, operational or procedural change.

3.12 The review team concludes that the quality of information about 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 In its self-evaluation document, the University introduces enhancement as a process that permeates through from the overarching principles set out in the Corporate Plan and are put into action through the Annual Operating Plan supported by a suite of related strategies and action plans. There is also a newly published Quality and Student Experience Enhancement Framework (QSEEF) which articulates how the University works to enhance the quality of learning opportunities and the overall student experience, and is further described as setting out an institutional basis for fostering a culture of enhancement, incorporating engagement of the student body. It defines quality enhancement as the implementation of deliberate processes of change intended to improve the student learning experience, and the framework itself as an articulation of the means by which the University ensures that enhancement is ongoing.

4.2 The QSEEF states that while Academic Board has ultimate responsibility for the academic activities of the University, it delegates a number of its responsibilities. In the case of enhancement, responsibilities are shared between formal committees, schools, staff and students, and the framework sets out a long list of these various groups and individuals. The review team was not able to form a clear view about how the QSEEF works in practice.

4.3 The review team heard that the University recognises the need to strengthen its strategic planning capabilities and this process has commenced. A new corporate plan is currently being developed to replace the existing one, which reaches the natural end of its mandate in July 2016. Several major external reviews are taking place to feed into the new plan for the period 2016-20. This new plan is intended to provide an overall framework for a strategic approach to enhancement and strands such as Curriculum 2020 and Technology in Learning will offer opportunities for enhancement. It was not clear to the review team, however, that current arrangements for enhancement enable the University to meet the Expectation in theory.

4.4 The review team spoke to the Vice-Chancellor, senior staff, academic staff and professional support staff. The team also viewed documentary evidence, which included strategies, plans, policies, frameworks and reports.

4.5 The review team found a broad understanding among staff of enhancement being all that the University does to improve student learning and the student experience. It is clear from both staff and students that the University is committed to improving the student experience and they provided many examples, such as the survey of newly arrived students undertaken by the admissions team, which enables better content and timing of responses to applicants, and programme monitoring and review processes which routinely identify examples of good practice. Although good practice is shared and discussed amongst colleagues and at QAE forums, staff whom the review team met tended to view enhancement simply as day-to-day improvements, which would be expected as a matter of course in a well-managed high-quality learning environment. The examples presented to the review team largely took place in isolation, missing opportunities for systematic integration across the University.

4.6 Students are involved in some good practice activities, such as the HEA-sponsored What Works? programme, improvements to the VLE and online marking for Law

programmes. It was evident that they feel their voice is heard and they are kept informed of changes and developments. However, while students engage appreciably in feedback surveys and attend committee meetings, the review team encourages the University to reach a shared understanding of enhancement with the SU and support students in becoming more full and active partners in enhancement activities.

4.7 The re-institution of an annual academic health report in 2013-14 represents a positive step in bringing together various strands of potential quality enhancement on paper. A new register of good practice has been incorporated within the most recent report, which was presented to Academic Board in March 2015. The review team heard, however, that items included in this first register had been selected at the discretion of the author, but for future editions more explicit criteria that reflected University-wide priorities would likely be used. To date the register of good practice constitutes a component of the annual academic health report with no actions arising from it. St Mary's acknowledges that there is scope for improvement in turning good practice and other localised improvements into University-wide enhancement and the review team **recommends** that the University develop and codify a University-wide approach to enhancement that is strategic, systematic, planned and coordinated, and embed it at all levels throughout the institution.

4.8 Overall the review team concludes that the Expectation concerning Enhancement is not met. There is some evidence that the University is taking deliberate steps to improve the quality of the learning experience, but these activities largely focus on good practice and other localised improvements that do not link up at University level. The review team could not find evidence of the high-level awareness and clear locus which are needed to secure enhancement and formed the view that the policies, structures and processes currently in place are not effective in enabling the University to take a strategic approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities. The lack of high-level attention to embedding strategic and systematic improvement throughout the University raises uncertainty about the University's present readiness and capacity for enhancement, and the level of risk posed to the quality of provision is accordingly considered moderate.

Expectation: Not met

Level of risk: Moderate

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.9 In reaching its judgement about the enhancement of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The Expectation in this area is not met with a moderate level of associated risk and gives rise to one recommendation.

4.10 There is a moderate level of risk associated with this area on the grounds that the lack of high-level attention to embedding strategic and systematic improvement throughout the University raises uncertainty about the University's present readiness and capacity for enhancement.

4.11 There was evidence that the University, while committed to improving the student experience, is not fully aware that it is failing to take a strategic approach to enhancement. The review team notes, however that the strategic planning work recently set in train by the new Vice Chancellor will provide the University with an opportunity to improve its approach to enhancement and feels confident that St Mary's is capable of taking the required actions to improve its approach to enhancement of student learning opportunities, and provide evidence of progress as required.

4.12 The review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities **requires improvement to meet** UK expectations.

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

5.1 The University claims to place student engagement at the centre of quality assurance and enhancement. In its Student Engagement Retention and Success (SERS) strategy approved by Academic Board in January 2014, the University cites student motivation to engage more fully with programmes and the '...participation of students in quality enhancement and quality assurance processes, resulting in the improvement of their educational experience' as the two domains of student engagement. SERS highlights partnership-working with the University as a key driver in engaging students. The SERS strategy identifies four key aims, one of which is to ensure '...that students are represented and have their views fully considered in planning, evaluation and quality assurance mechanisms'. The University explained to the review team that detailed attention to student involvement in quality assurance processes has been a relatively recent development. Working in partnership with the SU, the University now emphasises to students the role they can undertake in shaping and influencing the University's provision.

5.2 Both students and staff stressed the strong sense of community and the very positive relationships between students and staff in the University, while the Vice-Chancellor noted the egalitarian quality of these relationships as a key feature of the University. The students as partners initiative gives a more formal expression to this close working relationship, citing in particular the attendance of PVCs and Departmental Heads at SU executive meetings to update the student body on University developments; the monthly meetings between the SU Executive and the PVCS in addition to regular meetings with the Vice Chancellor; and the membership of students on each of the University's thirteen senior committees, including Academic Board, VRC and, from 2015-16, SVCRs. The partnership theme is emphasised in the student submission, which cites the 'significant progress' made by the University in this regard since 2012. The review team acknowledges this progress but also observes that current practice still falls short of full partnership-working (see paragraph 2.60).

5.3 Two key elements of student involvement are reflected via the Student Charter and through the system of student programme representatives. The student submission reports that over 85 per cent of students did not agree with the statement offered to focus groups that 'I am aware of the University Student Charter and know where to find it' and that a significant number of students claimed never to have heard of the Charter. Both staff and students whom the review team met were aware of the Charter's lack of prominence, the students observing that the existing Charter is out of date. With the agreement of the University, the SU is taking the lead in redrafting the Charter for use in 2015-16. The student submission notes that the number of student representatives on programme boards increased from 196 in 2012-13 to 329 on taught programme boards in the current year. Attendance at boards is not as robust as the University would wish and the PVCS is working closely with the SU on a number of initiatives to address this. The joint aim is to ensure at least two representatives for each cohort group for each undergraduate programme, and to make more effective a system which until recently has been largely haphazard. Training for representatives is led by the SU, with contributions from the QAE Office, with the SU facilitating a programme reps forum and a monthly reps newsletter from the SU to supplement this. There is now provision for alternate members to cover absences and the role descriptors for student members are being reviewed. In particular, both parties are promoting the personal and professional development aspects of the role, with special emphasis on student-centred aspects of committee papers, proposals and business. The review team found the Programme Representatives Handbook and the Programme Representatives Guide to Staff particularly useful initiatives in promoting and explaining the important contributions made by students, both informally and formally to the business of

programme boards. Programme representatives are expected to attend programme boards which meet formally once per semester, to engage with their student colleagues and to work informally with the programme team and the SU to identify and find innovative solutions to improve the experience of students on their programme, and highlight good practice.

5.4 Via attendance at programme boards, students are able to view and contribute to the annual statement of programme evaluation and review (ASPER). The SU contributed in 2012-13 to the review of the then current module questionnaire system, supporting the introduction of a more University-wide, standardised feedback model in 2014-15 and working with the University in making further enhancements for 2015-16. Groups of students contribute to programme revalidation events at an early stage in the process, and the University is currently piloting, for full introduction in 2015-16, student membership of validation/revalidation panels, with training provided by the QAE Office. The review team noted the increased active participation of RPG students on research-related committees, and their contribution to the postgraduate research student experience survey.

5.5 Overall the review team concluded that student participation is an important and increasingly effective element in the University's approach to quality assurance and enhancement, and that the University and the SU are effectively working together to ensure that the recent significant increase in, and appreciation of, the role of students in this regard is both sustained and enhanced.

Glossary

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

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

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

Academic standards

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

Award

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

Blended learning

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

Credit(s)

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

Degree-awarding body

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

Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

Dual award or double award

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

e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning

Enhancement

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

Expectations

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

Flexible and distributed learning

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

See also **distance learning**.

Framework

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

Framework for higher education qualifications

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

Good practice

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

Learning opportunities

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

Learning outcomes

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

Multiple awards

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

Operational definition

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

Programme (of study)

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

Programme specifications

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

Public information

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

Quality Code

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

Reference points

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

Subject Benchmark Statement

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

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)

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

Threshold academic standard

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

Virtual learning environment (VLE)

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

Widening participation

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

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