



# Higher Education Review of University of Liverpool

November 2015

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## About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at the University of Liverpool. The review took place from 9 to 13 November 2015 and was conducted by a team of five reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Demelza Curnow
- Dr Ian Duce
- Dr Mark Rawlinson
- Mr Simon Pallett
- Miss India-Chloe Woof (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

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

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

The [themes](#) for the academic year 2015-16 are Student Employability and Digital Literacy,<sup>2</sup> and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

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

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

<sup>2</sup> Higher Education Review themes:  
[www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2859](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2859).

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

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

## Key findings

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

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

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

### Good practice

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

- The role of the Quality Assurance Process Review Group in developing and improving the University's approach to quality assurance (Expectation B8).
- The strategic and effective role played by the Centre for Lifelong Learning in training and supporting staff in pedagogic practices and developments, and disseminating good practice (Enhancement).

### Recommendations

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

By June 2016:

- strengthen monitoring and oversight of external examiner reports to ensure that they are sufficiently informative and that recurring issues can be identified (Expectation B7).

By September 2016:

- modify annual monitoring processes to explicitly record consideration of the maintenance of academic standards (Expectation A3.3)
- strengthen criteria, guidance and procedures for the appointment of external reviewers and external examiners to ensure that the process of appointment is transparent and the appointees are sufficiently independent (Expectations A3.4, B7)
- develop a systematic approach to making taught students aware of responses to their feedback on learning opportunities (Expectation B5)
- establish formal channels to systematically capture, consider and act on postgraduate research students' views on their academic experience, and to ensure that actions taken are reported to students (Expectation B11)
- ensure programme learning outcomes and any changes to the Code of Practice on Assessment are communicated to students in an accessible and timely way (Expectation C).

## Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The work underway to include students in programme design and approval, annual monitoring and periodic review processes (Expectation B5).
- The work being undertaken to ensure that students, including those at the University's partners, are aware of and can readily access the name of their external examiner, their reports and subsequent responses (Expectation B7).
- The actions of the institution of the Liverpool Doctoral College to promote a more consistent level of support for postgraduate research students (Expectation B11).
- The steps being taken to ensure that additional programme costs are clearly accessible to prospective and current students (Expectation C).

## Theme: Digital Literacy

There is clear evidence of the University's commitment to promoting digital literacy. The University is taking a systematic approach to supporting the development of digital literacies among its student body, and this is underpinned by a range of strategies and working groups. Staff are being supported in developing digital awareness and competency as a means of recognising and embedding digital literacies across the University. Students have some concerns in relation to the various digital platforms through which information is provided to them, but overall there is evidence of the University seeking to develop digital literacy to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities.

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

## About the University of Liverpool

The University of Liverpool (the University) was founded in 1881 as University College, Liverpool, a constituent college of the federal Victoria University. It was granted its own Royal Charter as a separate university in 1903. The main campus is located near Liverpool city centre, with a smaller campus on the Wirral Peninsula, and new campuses in Singapore and London (opened September 2013 and 2014, respectively). The University also has a major strategic partnership with Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU) in China, a joint venture between the University of Liverpool and Xi'an Jiaotong University.

The University currently has nearly 23,000 students, comprising over 18,000 undergraduate students, 2,500 postgraduate taught students and nearly 2,000 postgraduate research degree students. In addition, there are nearly 10,000 students registered on online learning programmes run in partnership with Laureate Online Education (LOE). Approximately 6,000 staff are organised into three faculties and 11 professional services areas. The University offers a range of programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate level across a wide range of academic disciplines. Many of the programmes have accreditation by a professional, regulatory or statutory body.

The University's Students' Union is known as the Liverpool Guild of Students (the Guild). The Guild's mission is 'to improve, develop and enrich the lives of all students from application to graduation'. The Guild annually elects four Student Representative Officers.

The University's Strategic Plan 2009-14 states that it is 'a globally-focused institution whose activities are rooted in world-leading research excellence and reflect the dynamics of the knowledge economy'. The University also aims to offer 'an environment in which staff and student talent is nurtured and celebrated'. Its identity as a research-led Russell Group University has seen a focus in the current Strategic Plan on existing and emerging strengths with plans to achieve growth in quality and scale across five key priorities: improving research performance; positioning as a global university; driving knowledge exchange and innovation; enhancing the student experience; and extending widening participation. In the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014, eight of the University's 26 units of assessment submitted were graded in the top quartile, and 81 per cent of the University's research was judged to be of world-leading or internationally excellent quality.

Following the appointment of a new Vice-Chancellor in February 2015, the University is conducting a strategic review, with the aim of approving a new Strategic Plan by February 2016.

Since the Institutional Audit undertaken by QAA in 2009, the University has undergone a number of changes. A new structure was introduced from the start of academic year 2009-10 with reorganisation into three faculties: Health and Life Sciences, Humanities and Social Sciences, and Science and Engineering. At the same time, a new governance structure was introduced to support the aims of the Strategic Plan, with greater decision and policy-making powers being vested in a smaller number of specialist committees.

The University opened its Singapore and London campus developments in 2013. The Singapore Campus commenced delivery of a BA (Hons) Criminology and Security programme in 2013. The programme was co-developed by the University, the Singapore Institute of Technology, and Singapore's Ministry of Home Affairs, and is delivered by the University of Liverpool in Singapore in partnership with the Institute of Technology. The staff in Singapore are full members of the University's Department of Sociology, Social Policy and Criminology.

The London campus opened in September 2013, initially in interim premises at the University of Law campus in Bloomsbury and then at a permanent campus in Finsbury Square in September 2014. Initially, the development of programmes at the London campus has been aimed at the postgraduate professional market and at overseas recruitment, reflecting the University's strategic aim of positioning itself as a global university. Programmes running in London are delivered and managed by their 'home' School within the University, while the overall strategic direction and operations of the London campus are managed via a London Steering Group, which reports to the University's Senior Management Team (SMT). In terms of governance and management, the campus operates within the same processes, policies and procedures as the University's Liverpool campus; a quarterly report on the London campus student experience is received by the Student Experience Committee.

There has been considerable expansion in student numbers both at XJTLU and in students from XJTLU articulating into programmes at Liverpool. The number of programmes has increased from 15 in 2009-10 to 26 undergraduate programmes and 21 postgraduate programmes in 2014-15. In the same period the number of students articulating has risen from just over 300 to nearly 1,500. The University is a co-owner of XJTLU and has Board membership, allowing it to be fully conversant with XJTLU's strategic plans. A University Pro Vice-Chancellor is appointed as Vice President (Academic Affairs) at XJTLU and acts as the senior link between the two institutions.

In total, the University has 17 teaching collaborations, 18 international research degree collaborations and 15 UK-based research degree collaborations. These include a long-

standing collaborative partnership with the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, and partnerships with further education colleges in the Merseyside region.

The University, via the SMT's oversight of risk and planning, has identified a number of key challenges it faces. These include: concerns regarding funding for undergraduate, postgraduate and research provision; competition for national and international student recruitment; rising student expectations and more informed student choice; and likely change to the external quality assurance and legislative environment over the coming years.

The University has implemented a performance measurement framework which employs a series of key performance indicators (KPIs) and supporting performance indicators. Data on performance internally and in comparison to peer providers and sector benchmarks facilitates quarterly monitoring at University and Faculty levels. In addition, sector data from the National Student Survey (NSS), Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES), Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) and Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education Survey (DLHE) is used in various quality assurance processes.

The University reports that it has used the outcomes of audit and review activity to reflect on its approaches to managing quality and standards. The University was subject to Institutional Audit by QAA in March 2009, and the subsequent report identified two features of good practice around widening participation and scrutiny of collaborative partner proposals. In addition, the report identified two advisable and four desirable recommendations. The Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC) took oversight of the subsequent action plan from the Institutional Audit and monitored action taken to address the recommendations.

The review team was not provided with any indication of how the University has used the features of good practice identified in the 2009 Institutional Audit. However, with respect to the identification of 'the strength of the University's commitment to a diverse and innovative suite of widening participation and equal opportunities activities', the University's continuing commitment in this area is illustrated by a 2014 report on 'Widening Participation and Fair Access at the University of Liverpool' and the Liverpool Scholars programme.

A desirable recommendation to ensure that the roles and responsibilities for the various deliberative bodies were clear and distinctive in the context of the management of collaborative activities was addressed through the University's review of its approach to the management of collaborative provision in the light of the Quality Code, *Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education with Others*. As a result of the work of a task and finish group, new collaborative provision processes were introduced to clarify the roles and responsibilities of different bodies in the approval and management of quality and standards on collaborative arrangements. The new approach included the introduction of a Due Diligence Panel designed to make independent recommendations to the SMT on the approval of collaborative partners. This allows approval of the academic and business cases to be conducted separately.

An advisable recommendation relating to reporting on collaborative arrangements was also addressed via the introduction of the new processes, which have enabled more timely reporting. Similarly, a desirable recommendation that the University should robustly manage international developments was covered by the redeveloped procedures.

To address an advisable recommendation about security measures for assessment on LOE programmes, the University has put practices in place to monitor student performance and promote awareness of the need for academic integrity.

In response to a desirable recommendation to develop and support models of integration between research and teaching across the full range of its curricula, research-led teaching is now included as one of the principles in its Learning and Teaching Framework.

The report also recommended that it was desirable for the University to find ways of working with the Liverpool Guild of Students to enhance and consolidate the Guild's provision for the University's cohort of taught and research postgraduate students. Through the Guild Liaison Sub-Committee and the Student Representation and Engagement Sub-Committee, the University and the Guild continue to plan how to work with postgraduate students.

The QAA mid-cycle follow-up to Institutional Audit in May 2012 noted progress being made by the University in addressing recommendations including with respect to collaborative arrangements and changes to annual monitoring. These and other responses are considered in more detail in relevant sections of this report.

The University's collaboration with Xi'an Jiaotong University in the setting up of XJTLU was considered in the 2012 QAA Review of Transnational Education in China. The University received three recommendations from the review and two positive features were identified. In response to recommendations about the XJTLU annual monitoring review process and the University's monitoring of the accreditation arrangement, the University now undertakes a yearly visit during which the XJTLU internal annual monitoring is discussed. An action plan for the period of accreditation records actions from all annual monitoring and this is received and considered by the University. A recommendation about XJTLU's development and implementation of grading, moderation and external examining processes saw XJTLU approve an action plan for moderation and examinations in 2013. This is monitored by the University which continues to have a Chief Institutional Moderator to maintain oversight of assessment processes.

For the November 2014 QAA Review of Transnational Education in the Caribbean (Trinidad and Tobago), the University was the subject of a case study 'Delivering TNE in partnership with a specialist online learning provider', which looked at the collaboration with LOE.

The University's London campus was considered within the QAA Thematic Review of London Campuses, July 2014. The report for the University was largely positive, though it noted that the student experience was not directly comparable with that at the main Liverpool campus due to the temporary nature of the teaching accommodation in 2013-14. This was addressed with the opening of the new London campus in September 2014. A review of the student experience at the new campus has been undertaken and received by the Student Experience Committee (SEC) in June 2015.

## Explanation of the findings about the University of Liverpool

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Findings

1.1 The University's approach is based on its Codes of Practice for Taught and Postgraduate Research provision, which cover the full set of award titles offered and which are aligned with the FHEQ. The Code of Practice on Assessment (CoPA) and relevant ordinances define University taught awards, their standard and their credit value, with each qualification allocated to the appropriate FHEQ level. Credit is used in a way that aligns with the National Credit Framework. The Code of Practice also covers the naming conventions for joint honours and major minor awards in line with the naming conventions of the FHEQ. The Postgraduate Research (PGR) Code of Practice (PGR CoP) is aligned with Level 8 of the FHEQ.

1.2 Programme specifications show the relevant FHEQ level and refer to relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. Programme approval processes, periodic review and external examiners ratify the alignment. As new benchmark statements are published, programme teams review the new benchmark and confirm whether programmes are still aligned or whether modifications are required. Programme specifications define the programme's learning outcomes and indicate how these are delivered and which modules deliver them. They also show the learning outcomes of exit awards.

1.3 The procedures in place would allow the Expectation to be met. The team tested the Expectation primarily through scrutiny of University documentation, but also by asking questions of staff during the visit.

1.4 The CoPA clearly defines the requirements for the achievement of taught awards in relation to level, credits required at each level and the level of achievement required. The PGR CoP is clear about the requirements for a Level 8 award (PhD). The University defines the MPhil as a Level 8 award differentiated from the PhD in size and scope but not in the requirement for originality. The approach adopted is consistent and logical, as the MPhil requires the same level of work, but less in quantity.

1.5 Much work has been done to ensure that taught master's awards are properly covered by credit frameworks and clear rules about classification. The MRes has been defined as a postgraduate taught award as part of the establishment of a common framework for postgraduate taught awards, MRes and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) awards. These rules also provide for more flexible means of gaining an award.. Programme specifications refer to the FHEQ and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements and external advisers on programme approvals, external examiners and external advisers on periodic reviews refer to these external reference points in their reports.

1.6 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

**Findings**

1.7 The CoPA and the PGR CoP in conjunction with the ordinances constitute the framework underpinning the standards of University awards, since they set out the requirements for achievement in terms of credits, level and nomenclature. The Ordinances list the award titles the University offers, but it is the CoPA that establishes the framework for these awards, including a number of models which programmes can adopt, and which are clearly indicated in the programme specification. The CoPA is regularly discussed and updated via the Assessment and Feedback Working Group (AFWG) reporting to AQSC, Education Committee (formerly SEC until September 2015) and Senate, where appropriate.

1.8 The team tested whether the Expectation was met primarily through scrutiny of the University's documentation, in this case principally the two relevant Codes of Practice.

1.9 The Codes of Practice set out clearly the academic framework and detailed regulations for the award of academic credit and qualifications. They also cover marking scales and descriptors; model frameworks for different types of programme; regulations for the conduct of examinations; guidance on progression; appeals; external examining; the assessment of group work; classification; adjustments for disabled candidates; academic integrity; mitigating circumstances; and feedback and flexibility for those with sporting talent.

1.10 The University's documentation referred to a discussion about the use of compensation, which suggested that where failed modules are compensated, there should still be explicit consideration of whether programme learning outcomes have been met. Some examination board minutes do show that this issue was considered by the board and minuted accordingly. Staff confirmed that this was indeed the case and that reference is made to the programme specification to ensure that all learning outcomes have been met. They gave examples of cases where failure of particular modules had led to the award not being made. The Ordinances also cover situations where students study for credit rather than for an award at postgraduate level in the form of CPD.

1.11 The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

**Findings**

1.12 The University's definitive record of each taught award, including MRes and Taught Doctorate awards, is the programme specification. The University admits to some difficulties in maintaining and updating programme specifications, but these have been addressed by the 2014-15 decision to hold all these documents on a central website. There are formal systems for checking and approval on the part of the institution.

1.13 The University appears to have in place an adequate system for maintaining and keeping up to date a definitive record of each programme, which is readily available to staff and to alumni.

1.14 The team tested the Expectation through scrutiny of documentation provided, especially programme specifications.

1.15 The programme specifications are indeed all available on the central website and appear to be comprehensive and up to date. They are clear about FHEQ levels and links to Subject Benchmark Statements and also map learning outcomes against modules.

1.16 However, the team noted that some of the documents are extremely lengthy (70 pages for an undergraduate programme) and learning outcomes are not clearly mapped, rendering the programme specifications less useful to students than they might be. The team was of the view that this was not in itself a problem, if the learning outcomes were readily available elsewhere. However, students the team met did not seem to be aware of programme specifications and did not use them. Staff were clear that programme specifications were the definitive official record, used in professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) accreditations and in judging whether candidates eligible for compensation had met the learning outcomes of the programme. However, they did not regard programme specifications as aimed at students, although they are readily available to them. Staff referred instead to the material available on VITAL (the virtual learning environment), while acknowledging that it was a module-based system. Students felt they had good module information on VITAL and, in some cases, were aware of programme handbooks, but these in reality do not include programme learning outcomes, nor are they included in the template for programme handbooks. This means that students do not have easy access to the learning outcomes of their programme and this finding supports the recommendation in paragraph 3.16.

1.17 In the view of the team the Expectation is met. The University uses the programme specification as the definitive record of the programme and has effective systems for keeping them up to date. However, the team also concluded that programme learning outcomes are not readily available to students. This issue is developed in further detail in Part C on the quality of information about learning opportunities, where it helps support a recommendation.

**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**

1.18 The regulatory framework and processes for the approval of programmes are overseen for taught programmes by AQSC and for research programmes by Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee (RKE). The framework sets out requirements for all awards and comprises the University Ordinances, the CoPA and the PGR CoP, including the Framework for Online Professional Doctorates. The University continually monitors and enhances these arrangements, including their compliance with the Quality Code, through the work of the Quality Assurance Process Review Group (QAPRG) and the Postgraduate Research Working Group (PGRWG) whose function has recently been replaced by a new Postgraduate Research Committee (PGRC).

1.19 Processes for programme approval and modification are articulated in the Quality and Enhancement Framework (QEF). It provides staff with clear guidance and explicit advice about University requirements, including with respect to alignment with external reference points and reports from external advisers, incorporating their input on academic standards.

1.20 Faculty AQSCs (FAQSCs) have responsibility for ensuring that programmes are properly documented, have had satisfactory external review and that academic standards are ensured. Once endorsed by FAQSC, final approval is made at University level by AQSC.

1.21 The consideration and oversight of academic standards incorporated into the framework and processes for approval of programmes would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.22 The team reviewed the operation of programme approval processes by reading documents and in meetings with academic and professional staff. Written evidence included framework information and programme-level documents, external adviser reports and committee minutes concerning approvals of new programmes and modifications of existing programmes.

1.23 The frameworks are comprehensive and provide useful templates, guidelines and flow diagrams that enable staff involved in programme design and approval to navigate the key decision points and the order in which they should happen. It was apparent that staff were familiar with the approval process. Commentary on alignment with external reference points concerning UK threshold standards was evident in templates completed by external advisers and by programme designers. The regulations at faculty level governing the nomination, appointment and approval of external advisers are clear, and the team saw examples of constructive reports from external advisers which were used by the University to help improve programmes. However, the team has concerns that the University might not always follow its guidelines precisely in ensuring the independence of external advisers. This is explored further under Expectation B7.

1.24 The review team concludes that through the systematic consideration of information from external advisers and from within the institution, the University can ensure that

academic standards are set at a level that meets the UK threshold standard for qualifications. Consequently, Expectation A3.1 is met and the risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.25 The CoPA sets requirements for academic awards, including progression requirements, rules governing degree classification, failure in assessment and boards of examiners. Appendix H sets out the parameters of the External Examiner System for Taught Provision, including the areas on which external examiners are expected to comment in reports. These areas include UK threshold standards (the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements), that assessment is rigorous and in accordance with CoPA, and that students are tested fairly against the intended learning outcomes of the modules and programme. The CoPA is also clear that students must pass all learning outcomes.

1.26 The PGR CoP includes guidance on the Criteria for Examining a Research Degree Thesis and this includes specific reference to the FHEQ Level 8 and expectations of examiners.

1.27 A key component of programme design and approval is the programme specification. This requires a clear indication of learning outcomes and in which modules these will be achieved. Programme specifications also require learning outcomes for all interim exit awards (such as CertHE, DipHE, bachelor's ordinary, PG Award, PGCert and PGDip) to be made explicit.

1.28 References to relevant PSRBs and Subject Benchmark Statements are also required in programme specifications. Programme specifications are confirmed through the approval process, which includes reports from external reviewers. Module specifications indicate how module learning outcomes are assessed. Once a new programme proposal has progressed locally through the relevant board of studies and FAQSC, final institutional approval rests with AQSC.

1.29 The design of programme and module development processes and examining processes would enable this Expectation to be met.

1.30 The review team studied documents relating to programme approval and assessment processes, including a range of programme specifications, external examiner reports and records of assessment board decisions. The review team met staff involved in programme approval, and in setting and marking assessments and the working of assessment boards. The review team also spoke to students about their experience of assessment.

1.31 From consideration of a sample of published programme specifications, there was evidence that these had been completed in full, indicating what was required of a student for each award and how learning outcomes would be assessed. Relevant external reference points, such as PSRBs and Subject Benchmark Statements, were indicated, and the

learning outcomes for interim exit awards were set out in full. There was also clear mapping of programme-level learning outcomes to modules.

1.32 Students were unaware of programme specifications and staff confirmed in meetings that, although students had access to programme specifications, they were not the intended audience (see Expectation A2.2 and the recommendation in paragraph 3.16). Students did confirm, however, that module-level information was accessible and this was the primary source of information they used to understand expectations around assessment.

1.33 Samples of minutes from board of examiner meetings showed discussion taking place regarding whether learning outcomes had been met in individual cases, for example at programme level where failure in a particular module might otherwise be compensated. The staff that the review team met confirmed that the programme specifications were used to inform these decisions. This indicates consistent adherence to the CoPA.

1.34 Chairs of board of examiner meetings receive training and an example was provided of a new chair shadowing an experienced chair prior to chairing a board. Refresher training is offered and annual regulatory updates are provided.

1.35 Reports from external examiners also confirm that assessment procedures measure student achievement appropriately against the intended learning outcomes and that academic standards have been met.

1.36 The review team concludes that Expectation A3.2 is met. The associated level of risk is low because appropriate rules, policies and processes are in place and are appropriately communicated and applied.

**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**

1.37 The University defines its processes for programme monitoring and review in the QEF which lays out procedures for Annual Subject Review (ASR) and cyclical periodic review. It sees these formal reviews as the vehicle for ensuring that academic standards are being achieved and maintained.

1.38 ASR for undergraduate and postgraduate taught provision operates at the subject level for groups of cognate programmes offered by academic units. The appropriate reporting unit (usually a department or school) is determined by the faculty. Separate processes for undergraduate and postgraduate taught provision are defined and reflect the two different teaching patterns within an academic year. Authorship and processes for generating ASRs may vary between reporting units but in all cases there is an explicit requirement for student input. The broad areas for inclusion in the ASR are identified in a standard template accompanied by an extensive menu of points for consideration, provided as an aide memoire for reporting units.

1.39 FAQSC receives ASR and student commentary from all reporting units and provides feedback. In addition, a faculty-wide summary report is compiled using a standard template, for consideration by AQSC, which provides responses to faculties and is responsible for oversight of any University-level actions arising from the process.

1.40 Periodic review takes place on a six-year cycle and operates at department or school level managed by the parent faculty. Extensive guidelines are provided to support units undergoing periodic review. Roles and responsibilities throughout the process are clearly defined including the membership of periodic review panels which require a student member (a Guild Sabbatical Officer) and a subject expert from another UK higher education institution. The evidence base includes an external reviewer assessment form which explicitly requires comments on academic standards and the requirement for consideration of standards is also explicit in published guidelines. The recently reintroduced process for periodic review of PGR provision operates at School or Institute level and is broadly parallel to the process for taught provision but draws on an appropriate evidence base for the different focus.

1.41 Annual and periodic monitoring arrangements for collaborative programmes are defined in the published taxonomy and in formal agreements.

1.42 The processes for monitoring and review of programmes described in the QEF include the necessary elements to explicitly address whether UK academic threshold standards and institutional standards are being maintained.

1.43 The review team examined ASR and periodic review documents, and committee minute papers and action plans that reported their outcomes. It also held discussions with students and academic and professional staff to evaluate the extent to which academic standards were considered within the monitoring and review of programmes.

1.44 Reports from the external adviser within periodic review require commentary on the academic standards of the programmes under review via a reporting template. The consideration of academic standards in the published guidelines has also been recently strengthened. Periodic review therefore contributes to enabling the University to meet Expectation A3.3; however, the six-year cycle of periodic review limits its value in ongoing maintenance of standards.

1.45 ASR reports are reflective documents which have an enhancement focus. Consideration of reports at faculty level is rigorous, providing feedback to reporting units which facilitates academic maintenance and development. Summary reports also enable the University to capture the main themes and features of good practice for institutional action. Reporting on external examiner reports in ASR varies between reporting units with most reports extracting key issues or features of good practice raised by externals. The team notes that guidance has been slightly modified in its latest edition to ask reporting units to consider academic standards in ASR.

1.46 The report template requires external examiners to comment on the academic standards of programmes, and in most cases, this information is returned although sometimes very briefly and without reference to the FHEQ or Subject Benchmark Statements. In addition, ASR reports and FAQSC summaries do not capture this information explicitly. The team read and heard that the Teaching Quality Support Division (TQSD) produces an overview of external examiner reports across the University. This report previously contained a narrative commenting on external examiner input on academic standards. However, in the recently revised reporting template this narrative has been replaced by a table of key information and a more general commentary which, the team concludes, is less effective in enabling the University to ensure academic standards are monitored.

1.47 The review team concludes that while the University does meet the Expectation, it could significantly strengthen its existing processes, and there is a moderate risk. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that the University should modify annual monitoring processes to explicitly record consideration of the maintenance of academic standards.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Moderate**

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.48 A number of the University's processes make explicit the contribution of an external expert. These include programme approval and major modifications which use external reviewers; assessment processes for both taught and research provision which make full use of external examiners; and the role of an external academic on periodic review panels. There is clear guidance provided on the expectations of the role of external examiners at both taught and postgraduate research level.

1.49 In addition, the ASR process notes in the guidance that external examiner reports should form one of the reference points in the commentary.

1.50 The University also has a number of programmes that are accredited by PSRBs.

1.51 Guidance is in place for the nomination and appointment of external reviewers in programme approval and modification, external panel members in periodic review and external examiners. For programme approval and modification, one of the two external reviewers is permitted to be an external examiner within the Department/School (or, in the case of major modifications, engaged on the programme undergoing modification) but when that is the case, the other external reviewer must not have been an external examiner or external reviewer for modules or programmes within that unit in the previous three years. The other criteria specified are that the external reviewer should be a senior academic from a UK higher education institution and should have expertise in the subject area under consideration. Approval is by the Head of the school or institute concerned, and TQSD.

1.52 The only stipulation for external periodic review panel membership is that the external must be a member of academic staff with relevant subject or discipline expertise from another UK higher education institution; this nomination is approved by the Faculty Director of Operations.

1.53 For external examiners, the guidance for nomination is set out in the CoPA Appendix H and closely aligns with that of *Chapter B7* of the Quality Code, although with the exception that recent or substantive research collaborations have recently been removed as an impediment to appointment as an external examiner. External examiner appointments are approved within the Faculty except in instances where a conflict with Appendix H has been identified, in which case approval is sought from the Pro Vice Chancellor for Education.

1.54 The design of the University's processes for programme approval, review, modification and assessment includes the requirement for external comment and the University response to that comment and, to that extent, they would enable the Expectation to be met. The review team has some reservations, however, regarding the transparency of the appointment process and whether the guidance ensured sufficient independence of the external appointees.

1.55 The review team explored the approach by analysing relevant policies and procedures, examples of documentation from programme approval and major modification ASR and periodic review, external examiners' reports, and evidence relating to the approval of external examiners. The team also met a range of staff to discuss the use of externality in assuring academic standards.

1.56 From the examples provided, there is consistent use of external reviewers in major modifications and programme approval and evidence that comments are elicited on key points relating to proposals, though some more fully than others. In most cases, a detailed response has been prepared by those making the proposal, answering the points raised by the external reviewers. In instances where responses have not been sufficiently robust, this has been identified.

1.57 Periodic review reports explicitly record comments from the external reviewer. ASR reports also show evidence of consideration of external examiner comments.

1.58 The external examiner report template explicitly asks for comment on academic standards and assurances that UK and University expectations are being met. With varying detail, external examiners confirmed these in the sample provided.

1.59 The accreditation process by PSRBs provides a further dimension of externality. The PSRB will normally and where appropriate make conditions and/or recommendations for re-accreditation and the University must respond to the PSRB's satisfaction to maintain its accredited status.

1.60 However, the review team queried the independence of the externals used across processes and the transparency of appointment. The team saw an example of a major modification for which very brief comments were provided by a current external examiner, and where the other external reviewer was from a local higher education institution with which the University of Liverpool had, until recently, an accreditation agreement. While this was not against the guidance set out in the process, the review team considers that the University might review its position to ensure that it was secure against challenges regarding independence.

1.61 Similarly, the review team considers that the removal of recent or substantive research collaborations as an impediment to appointment as an external examiner could leave the University open to challenge on the independence of such external examiners as now qualified for appointment under this change. On further discussion, the University provided indicative examples in which a research collaboration would be considered to be too close and, again, the University might usefully revise its policy and guidance to make its appointment criteria clear.

1.62 The review team also noted some examples of two external examiners being drawn from the same department of another institution, despite CoPA Appendix H being clear that this would be considered a conflict. The process by which such decisions are made does not allow for openly recorded debate and, in the instances where this was noted, and in the context of the documented policy, the circumstances did not seem to the review team to justify the decision. Thus, the review team is of the view that the University should reconsider the process by which it debates and agrees appointments that present a conflict and the grounds on which it is reasonable to make such an appointment.

1.63 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met as, for the most part, appropriate policies and procedures relating to externality are in place to inform the key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards. However, owing to the reservations noted for some aspects, the review team **recommends** that the University strengthens criteria, guidance and procedures for the appointment of external reviewers and examiners

to ensure that the process of appointment is transparent and the appointees are sufficiently independent. Thus, while the Expectation is met, the level of risk is considered moderate.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

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

1.64 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.

1.65 All of the seven Expectations in this area have been met. However, the team makes recommendations in two areas (Expectations A3.3 and A3.4). These relate to the modification of annual monitoring processes to explicitly record consideration of the maintenance of academic standards, and the strengthening of criteria, guidance and procedures for the appointment of external reviewers and external examiners to ensure that the process of appointment is transparent and the appointees are sufficiently independent.

1.66 In each case, the risk level was judged to be moderate. Both of the recommendations can be met by the University by strengthening its current procedures and ensuring that they are implemented consistently. This will not require or result in major structural, operational or procedural change.

1.67 Accordingly, the review team concludes that the setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards at the University **meets** UK expectations.

## 2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.1 The University publishes procedures for programme development and approval which identify key stages and responsibilities in the process and involve two stages - outline planning which uses an online platform, and a more comprehensive new programme and subject component approval process. The latter does not use the online platform but it is used for developing some of the subject components such as module specifications.

2.2 The outline planning process initially involves the proposal being assessed by a range of stakeholders including marketing, libraries, computer services, TQSD, and academic managers at department/school and faculty level. Outline approvals of programmes are forwarded for endorsement by the Faculty Senior Management team and signed off at University level by the SEC (and now EC).

2.3 Programmes with outline approval are developed within the remit of boards of studies. Defined documentation is required, which includes reports from two external advisers and responses to their comments. Once endorsed by the board of studies, new programme proposals are examined by FAQSC which considers and responds to proposals before submitting recommendations to AQSC for University-level sign-off.

2.4 Programme development in collaborative provision is considered in the light of the Taxonomy of Collaborative Provision and Partner Approval Process Guidance. The approval process may follow the same procedure as for internal programme development or additional requirements can be requested, such as a partner visit. This is determined by the Collaborative Provision Sub-Committee (CPSC) which approves collaborative programmes on behalf of the University.

2.5 The documented processes and associated guidance for those involved in proposal and approval provide the means for the University to meet Expectation B1. The review team tested this approach by talking to students and academic and professional staff in meetings, in addition to reading documentation concerned with programme approval and modification.

2.6 Documents provided allowed the team to review the work done by the University to develop a policy for systematic inclusion of students in programme design and approval. When implemented, this policy will make a positive contribution to the available opportunities for student engagement in their learning (see the affirmation under Expectation B5).

2.7 The team was able to see the assiduous way in which programme proposals and modifications for both in-house and collaborative arrangements are subject to scrutiny by FAQSC involving critical evaluation by internal reviewers and consequent amendment of programme specifications before sign-off at University level. Through the work of the CPSC it is apparent that the University takes a diligent approach to the approval of collaborative programmes.

2.8 TQSD work with departments and schools during programme approval. Training and support for staff involved in programme and module design is provided through the Educational Development (Ed Dev) division within the Centre for Lifelong Learning (CLL), via formal modules in the Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (PGCert) and Certificate in Professional Studies (CPS) courses and through continuing professional development and online resources. Ed Dev also contributes to curriculum design by attending Faculty SEC (now Faculty EC). The team learned that staff, in particular new members of staff, valued the support and advice provided.

2.9 The University evaluates and enhances its processes for programme approval through the QAPRG which collects comprehensive reports from FAQSCs and commentary from external reviewers on the operation of programme approval. The team saw how this input is translated into modifications to the programme approval process and thus contributes to the good practice described under Expectation B8.

2.10 The robust processes, supported by appropriate training and guidance and mechanisms for ongoing enhancement, allow the University to meet Expectation B1, demonstrating an effective approach to the design, development and approval of programme. The level of risk is therefore low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**



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

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

**Findings**

2.11 The University has comprehensive admissions policies, which set out the roles and responsibilities of individuals and committees involved in each stage of the admissions process. Policies outline key deadlines and what applicants can expect at each stage, and address equality and diversity issues. Information is provided to departments on the process for informing prospective students of any changes to a programme prior to entry.

2.12 Admissions policies for collaborative partners are outlined in institutional agreements. For online programmes run in conjunction with LOE there is a separate Online Admissions Policy with responsibility for admissions delegated to LOE, but made against defined criteria and subject to University sample monitoring. A specific Degree Admissions Policy applies to PGR student admissions and forms part of the PGR CoP. Recruitment is also covered in the compulsory half-day workshop 'Supervising PGRs'.

2.13 Most taught programme admissions decisions outside clinical areas are made centrally using agreed criteria, with cases which lie outside these referred for academic decision.

2.14 A range of materials are available to prospective students including the online prospectus and website which include information about entry standards, modules, fees, bursaries and scholarships, and programmes. Applicants can take advantage of open days, campus tours and 'applicant discovery days' to visit the University and meet staff and students. September 2014 saw the launch of the My Liverpool portal which allows current and prospective students to view the extracurricular activities on offer and opportunities for skills development. The complaints procedure for undergraduate and postgraduate entry is available on the website, and explains procedures for both appeals and complaints about admissions.

2.15 The University makes an explicit commitment to widening participation. The UK Recruitment and Educational Opportunities teams run schools liaison activities and the Liverpool Scholars programme supports students from traditionally underrepresented backgrounds with applications and entry.

2.16 The University's clear admissions policies and procedures, and the range of information it makes available to students to support effective recruitment, selection and admission would allow it to meet the Expectation.

2.17 The team tested this Expectation by reviewing documentation including admissions policies, the online admissions complaints process, the online prospectus, student journey models, and information around Liverpool Scholars. The team also met a range of current students and staff, including managers of academic units and student administration.

2.18 Mechanisms are in place across the University to ensure adherence to admissions policies. The Head of School is responsible for the integrity of the admissions process, appoints admissions staff, and ensures that admissions tutors understand and support the

principles of fair admissions as set out in the relevant policy. Entry requirements are outlined by the Head of School, and implemented by the admissions tutors who also sit on the Admissions and Widening Participation Committee (AWPC). Admissions committees at faculty level monitor adherence of practice to University policy requirements.

2.19 The PGR Degree Admissions Policy has recently been updated. PGR students met by the team reported comparable experiences of the admissions process, and their reports were in line with the University's documented procedures.

2.20 The online prospectus and information about the application process are complemented by comprehensive 'step-by-step guides' which explain each stage of the admissions process. Students are also offered an online readiness orientation to prepare them for studying. A new policy on Engaging and Consulting Students in Curriculum Development and Approval provides guidance on how changes to a programme would be communicated to prospective students who have applied for a place on the programme in question.

2.21 The University's complaints policy and procedure clearly details relevant information. A new online admissions complaints process was approved in May 2015. Notable changes include the addition of a published timescale for complaint response. The Head of Admissions Policy and Strategy has overall responsibility for complaints and appeals relating to admissions. An annual report on any admissions appeals and complaints is received by AWPC.

2.22 The University has a strong track record in widening participation and exceeds its benchmarks. The Liverpool Scholars programme offers prospective students a range of activities and a dedicated tutor to support them. The commitment to widening participation has a strong emphasis on its long-standing relationship with the local area, and extends to various underrepresented groups, including mature and part-time students. A focus on improving retention of mature students is being facilitated through the Go Higher programme.

2.23 The University meets the requirements of Expectation B2 and the risk is low. It has clear policies and procedures which are effectively implemented across various levels. Comprehensive information for prospective students is made available throughout the admissions process to support applications to study at the University, and a clear commitment to widening participation is demonstrated.

**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 Framework for Learning and Teaching sets out the commitments underpinning the Policy on Academic Quality and Enhancement in Learning and Teaching, including working in partnership with students. The QEF identifies strategic goals; its guidance document links to relevant components of the Expectation, to external reference points and to relevant processes. A Student Charter and a Student Engagement Framework outline students' responsibilities for contributing to the University's educational goals. Supporting strategies include an Employability Strategy, a Technology-Enhanced Learning Strategy, a Wellbeing Framework, a Policy on Module Evaluation, a Peer Observation of Teaching Policy, and documentation on the academic adviser role.

2.25 The Education Committee provides institutional oversight of these policies, supported by the work of the QAPRG which reviews approval and monitoring processes. The relationship between EC, which aligns its agenda and terms of reference with the Learning and Teaching Framework, and AQSC reflects a working distinction between strategic enhancement and operational quality assurance. The implementation of enhancement plans is the responsibility of EC, but it is AQSC that oversees action plans arising from faculty ASR Reports.

2.26 There are faculty student experience leads and Education Committees (formerly faculty SECs), chaired by the leads, who sit on EC. ASR and periodic review provide oversight of the quality of learning and teaching and its enhancement. The University is developing a tool to evaluate the impact of the Learning and Teaching Framework at faculty level. The implementation of the University's educational policies is also subject to student evaluation in Staff-Student Liaison Committees (SSLCs).

2.27 There is a new policy on Reasonable Adjustments and Support for Disabled Students. The Disability Support Team identifies reasonable adjustments needed by individual students and produces student support information sheets to summarise these requirements.

2.28 VITAL, the University's virtual learning environment (VLE), has a specified minimum standard of information (the VITAL baseline) to be provided at module level. This specification was designed with input from the Guild, Library, the Computing Services Department (CSD) and the eLearning Unit and consists of module staff details, a module overview page, reading lists, learning resources, assessment resources and coursework and exam feedback.

2.29 New academic staff with teaching responsibilities are required to undertake the CPS at Level 6 or the PGCert at Level 7.

2.30 Ed Dev and the eLearning Unit within the CLL provide central support for learning and teaching, offering CPD in departments, faculties and at University level. They also work with individual staff and faculties to support learning and teaching projects, curriculum review and development, and dissemination of innovative learning and teaching.

2.31 The University of Liverpool Teaching Recognition and Accreditation (ULTRA) scheme supports accreditation of existing staff by the Higher Education Academy (HEA). There is a National Teaching Fellow network, and teaching prize-winners are required to disseminate their recognised expertise. Ed Dev organises and hosts an annual Learning and Teaching Conference. All staff have an annual personal development review (PDR) where they can reflect on practice and necessary staff development is discussed.

2.32 Strategy for teaching estate is coordinated with faculty educational plans. Investment in a central teaching laboratory has sought to enhance learning opportunities in the physical sciences and a number of other building programmes for teaching facilities have been completed. The Guild liaises formally with facilities management over the provision of physical resources. Facilities, Residential and Catering Services report to EC with an action plan raised from analysis of NSS results.

2.33 For some years the University has operated an integrated timetabling system. This has improved space use but the University acknowledges that the move to a centralised approach has led to some staff and student dissatisfaction.

2.34 The University library offers a service from four sites, two at the main Liverpool campus, one at the Veterinary School's Leahurst campus and one at the London campus. It has recently been awarded the Customer Service Excellence standard. User support is offered at the helpdesks, and through the provision of a roving library assistant service. There is a team of Liaison Librarians who are actively engaged with staff and students at faculty, school and department level. The Library has recently rolled out 'Resources for Courses' which is intended to ensure programme materials exist in sufficient numbers when they are required by students. Library staff serve on relevant University and faculty committees.

2.35 CSD supports learning and teaching across the University. Schools, institutes and departments have the opportunity, as part of the planning process, to contribute to the CSD three-year plan. Consultation includes quarterly meetings with school and institute managers to review strategic and operational requirements; with senior business partners across the professional services; and at faculty planning support team meetings.

2.36 The components of the University's framework for learning and teaching are relevant, current and comprehensive and would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.37 The review team tested the University's implementation of its approach to teaching and learning through discussions with students and staff and by reading documentation.

2.38 The University has effective processes for the annual monitoring of the quality of student learning opportunities, informed by external views and student evaluations. It also has effective processes for identifying and implementing strategic enhancements and developing the expertise of its teaching staff. Guidance on ASR and periodic review frames evaluation in terms of enhancement themes.

2.39 Professional Services are involved in the sign-off of outline approval for new programmes and confirm that there are appropriate resources in place. The alignment of learning resources with learning outcomes is assured by annual and periodic monitoring, as well as by student evaluation through representatives attending SSLCs. The ASR template and aide memoire do not explicitly refer to learning resources, but the template for periodic review reports does. SSLC agendas and minutes contain items on the library.

2.40 Student enhancement projects are led by student representatives, supported by Student Voice Coordinators (see Expectation B5), and represent an additional, formal route to enhancement alongside the action plans generated by annual and periodic monitoring.

Some students suggested that there was uneven departmental support for student enhancement projects but the team was provided with examples of projects and their impact.

2.41 Ed Dev plays a significant role in developing learning and teaching. The membership of the Director of CLL on EC and the contribution of other CLL staff to key committees ensures that staff development is taken into consideration in the development and implementation of strategy. The CPS and PGCert curriculum and assessment are updated to promote alignment with University policies and strategic priorities, for instance to support the new Academic Integrity Policy, the VITAL baseline and PGR supervision expectations. The team heard that the CPS and the PGCert helped new academic staff with confidence and making improvements to teaching and assessment.

2.42 iTeach, hosted on the educational development website, is an extensive repository of scholarship and good practice in learning, teaching and assessment. iLearn is the complementary portal for resources supporting student transition to, and development of, learning in higher education.

2.43 Staff have regular PDRs and engage in peer observation of teaching, which is being enhanced with a cross-faculty dimension. There is a well-attended annual Learning and Teaching Conference, at which students have opportunities to present alongside academics.

2.44 Some students raised concerns about the quality and capacity of some teaching facilities, and the impact on the timetable of increasing student numbers. The team heard that the University is developing a new Estates Strategy alongside its new Education Strategy to better align capacity with recruitment. The Estates Strategy Board has Guild membership.

2.45 Some students confirmed the uncertainty about the authority of timetabling information distributed across a number of online platforms. The team heard that the University uses NSS and other survey data, as well as regular meetings with Guild officers, to acquire student views about timetabling, and to address emerging issues.

2.46 Library facilities receive positive feedback from students, and students highlight the effectiveness of the Library's responsiveness to their needs. Students are also appreciative of the use of VITAL to provide learning resources at modular level.

2.47 The University has created and reviews policies and frameworks for the provision, assurance and enhancement of student learning opportunities, takes an informed approach to developing its staff as teachers and managers of learning, and has systems for ensuring that the learning resources available to students are aligned to its programmes. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

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

**Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement**

**Findings**

2.48 Enhancement of the student experience forms one of five strategic priorities described in the Strategic Plan. Institutional decision-making related to the student experience is undertaken through the committee structure and involves students or Guild representatives. Relevant roles and responsibilities relating to student support are set out in the Student Charter.

2.49 Programme approval considers the way in which a programme's design enables and supports student learning, development and achievement. Student progression is facilitated by holistic programme design that enables progressive learning and increasing student independence in a coherent way.

2.50 There is a Wellbeing Framework with 'a range of specialist, targeted and universal support services'. Policies and practices relating to equality and diversity include the Dignity at Work and Study Policy and the Equality and Diversity of Opportunity Policy. All student-related policies and procedures, as set out in the Student Charter, are underpinned by a commitment to equality. Staff development on equality and diversity is available, and there is a focus on inclusivity in the CPS and the PGCert, and in programme design and approval.

2.51 In line with the policy on Reasonable Adjustments and Support for Disabled Students, the student record carries information about reasonable adjustments. This is communicated to disability coordinators in Schools, and recorded in class lists supplied to tutors.

2.52 The Induction Working Group has used a 'student journey' model to propose guiding principles for induction. These extend to transitions within the student's programme, and beyond graduation. Students are inducted during Welcome Week, which targets different cohorts of students, including those recruited through widening participation (WP) initiatives. There is alumni mentoring for WP students in their second year, peer mentoring for first-year undergraduates and employability bursaries available for WP undergraduate students to enhance their employability. Online students have access to a Student Readiness Orientation. English language support is provided to international students through pre-sessional and concurrent programmes, and evaluation of this is reported to EC. iLearn provides online support to help students adjust to Level 4 by providing resources aimed at the development of a range of academic skills, including digital literacy.

2.53 The academic adviser role is central to the University's approach to supporting students in their academic, personal and professional development. Each school or department manages the academic adviser and student relationship locally, but the role is set out in the Academic Advisor Handbook which specifies a baseline for formal engagements with students. The role is also explained in student handbooks. Online students are supported by a Student Experience Team and a LOE Writing Centre.

2.54 Processes for considering students' academic progression are in place and outlined in the CoPA and PGR CoP. Academic progress is monitored formally through boards of examiners and attendance and engagement is monitored at school level, using the student attendance framework.

2.55 The University takes an approach to employability, including for postgraduate taught and PGR students, which integrates disciplinary and employability skills. The strategy for enhancing student employability, which informs bespoke subject employability plans, was being reviewed by a cross-University working group during 2015. An online portal, My Liverpool, and a programme planner are designed to support co and extracurricular development opportunities, as well as the development of the transferable skills identified in the strategy. The University's approach to employability is reviewed via ASR and periodic review.

2.56 The University has arrangements in place which would appear to enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. The team tested the Expectation in discussions with staff and students and by reading relevant documentation.

2.57 Students reported that induction arrangements addressed both social and academic aspects of the transition into higher education. The team learned of continuing induction throughout the programme in Chemistry, an initiative that had emerged from the Induction Working Group, and which supports progression. Students articulated ways in which they were being helped to progress in their studies, including skills modules, formative assessments, progress tutorials, peer-review exercises and guidance from academic advisers.

2.58 A report by the Student Voice Coordinators (SVCs) (see Expectation B5), students met by the team and a bespoke question added to the NSS by the University had revealed some inconsistency in the academic adviser role and comparatively low levels of student satisfaction. Students reported a schedule of meetings with academic advisers in the first year, but some students in subsequent years experienced less engagement. The team heard that the academic adviser scheme is working well in some, but the student experience can be patchy as the system is still 'bedding in'.

2.59 A review of the academic adviser role, undertaken by Ed Dev working with the Guild, had reported to SEC in June 2015 and made recommendations covering recording of contacts and outcomes, the creation of guidance to academics about references for students, the creation of an appropriate framework for postgraduate taught students, the acquisition of data on the impact of the academic adviser framework, and a guide for students on the purpose of the role. The review team was satisfied that the University is taking steps to improve the implementation of the academic adviser role.

2.60 Employability is embedded in core modules, and may also be addressed in academic advisers' scheduled meetings with students. Updating of the curriculum draws on industrial liaison and benchmarking against employer needs. The team saw examples of subject employability plans.

2.61 Student support services have effective links with the Guild and with academic staff, through regular liaison, membership of relevant committees, posts embedded in Faculties and Schools and reflective practice groups. The review team heard that Student Support in the University has a 'local face'.

2.62 The Expectation is met and the risk is low because the University has arrangements to support students in the development of their academic, personal and professional potential, and these arrangements are subject to systematic review and enhancement.

**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**

2.63 The Student Engagement Framework defines the University's approach to engagement with students. Student representation is the responsibility of the Student Representation and Engagement Sub-Committee (SRESC) which reports to the EC (and previously SEC). Both have student engagement and representation within their remit. The four elected student representative officers sit on senior University committees and the Guild President has a seat on University Council. Guild officers highlighted the Guild's ambition for student representation on Planning and Resources Committee (PRC).

2.64 The University has worked with the Guild to develop a revised Code of Practice for Student Representation. It covers representation at all levels and also summarises the expectations of collaborative partners. The University acknowledges that more needs to be done to engage postgraduate students. Students in London and Singapore have the same staff-student liaison meetings as in Liverpool, and there is also a London Student Forum.

2.65 Students are involved in enhancement and quality assurance activities such as programme approval, ASR, periodic review and module evaluation. Online students complete end-of-module evaluations that feed into the module report which also includes details of moderation, instructor comments and module KPIs. The overall report is discussed at boards of studies.

2.66 The Student Charter commits the University to providing opportunities for student participation in programme management; it commits the Guild to making available advice and support for the election and training of student representatives. The elected Guild officers regularly meet the senior management team, and the Head of Student Services every three weeks. Council and Senate include student representatives and the majority of committees provide for membership by Guild officers, student representatives or SVCs. SVCs are Guild staff members recruited to support both student representatives and staff who coordinate representation within their department or school. There is one per faculty and the relevant SVC sits on appropriate faculty committees.

2.67 Online student representatives fulfil a similar role, but collect feedback by email and through discussion boards. Student feedback via surveys is an important part of engagement and students are involved in reviewing the resultant action plans through their membership of the relevant committees.

2.68 Students are involved in ASR action planning, and at periodic review they can comment on planned changes to their programme. SSLC minutes inform the ASR report and guidance identifies the value of involving the SSLC chair and/or student representatives in compiling the report. Students can also be involved in writing the self-evaluation document as part of periodic review and attend a meeting with the review panel, which includes a Guild representative.

2.69 New measures have been taken to enhance student representation including via VITAL, text walls and online evaluations. A new policy in Student Engagement in Curriculum Development and Approval is being developed. The University has identified the challenge of ensuring that student engagement opportunities are available equally across the student body and that take-up is increased. It is also considering how it might better review student



evaluation data and NSS results at institutional level. The Liverpool Doctoral College (see Expectation B11) is intending to use new methods to engage PGR students.

2.70 There are a number of ways by which students are encouraged to engage with their learning experience and wider institutional processes. The University has worked with the Guild to produce policy documents to underpin student representation and engagement, and various committees oversee and implement this area of work.

2.71 The team tested the Expectation through meetings with senior managers, academic and professional staff and students, including Guild officers, student representatives, PGR students and those at collaborative partners. The team also met an SVC. Reviewed documentation included student engagement policies, and evidence of procedures in practice, including minutes from SSLCs and other key committees.

2.72 The enhancement of the student experience is embedded in the Strategic Plan's key priorities and a number of underpinning sub-strategies and policies. These include the Code of Practice on Student Representation, drawn up by the Guild and the University, and the Student Engagement Framework. EC and SRESC have student engagement and representation within their remits, and student engagement mechanisms are routinely reviewed and evaluated.

2.73 The Student Engagement Framework is developed and overseen by SRESC, with input from the Guild, and approved by Council and Senate. In developing an implementation plan for the Framework, forums were held with a range of stakeholders who were asked how it could be applied in their areas. The team noted that groups of students they met were not aware of the Student Engagement Framework, and nor were members of University academic staff.

2.74 Students are able to give feedback on their experiences across different levels of the University. Guild officers are represented on senior committees but expressed a wish for student representation on the PRC. During the review visit, Guild officers agreed that progress has been made in this area and it was confirmed that membership of PRC will be kept under review by the University.

2.75 At departmental level there should be a minimum of one course representative per programme per year at taught level, and at least one course representative per department at PGR level. Course representatives sit on SSLCs, and may also be invited to sit on FAQSCs.

2.76 Programme representatives may meet with departmental heads to develop student-led enhancement projects. These are Guild-led and involve representatives identifying a key priority within their department which they work on throughout the year. At the time of the review visit, outcomes of projects from 2014-15 were being considered by faculty-level committees prior to review by University committees.

2.77 SVCs meet regularly with the Pro Vice Chancellor for Education, attend faculty-level committees, provide training and guidance for course and faculty representatives, and support the Guild officers. They also write an annual report which is considered by SRESC. The review team heard that SVCs support sharing of good practice between academic departments by liaising over quality assurance practices and promoting student-led enhancement projects.

2.78 Concerns were raised by students regarding a lack of student input into curriculum design. In response, a policy has been developed by the QAPRG to promote student engagement in programme design and approval. This was approved at AQSC in September 2015 and was being considered by faculties at the time of the visit.

2.79 In the ASR process, students are offered the opportunity to produce a commentary on the draft report and this is considered by FAQSC with the ASR. Outcomes of the process should be communicated to students via SSLC and FAQSC. However, the team heard from students that they were unaware of information about or from the ASR process being systematically communicated to students. During the review visit the University outlined an aim to use the newly introduced student-led enhancement projects to engage the student body in each subject area in developing action plans responding to student feedback.

2.80 Students felt that data collected on module evaluation questionnaires is not analysed or used consistently across all programmes, and suggested that this may lead to differentiated responses to student feedback. The University acknowledges that consideration of module evaluation questionnaire results at institutional level could be strengthened. The team observed that despite the minimum expectations for module evaluation being set out in the Policy on Module Evaluation, there is inconsistency across the University. It was noted that work is underway to promote standardisation using survey automation software.

2.81 The team could not identify a systematic and consistent method for providing feedback to students on the actions taken in response to module evaluation questionnaires. Students met by the team were not aware of outcomes of module evaluation being communicated to them. Certain subject areas post the outcomes of module evaluations and consequent changes on VITAL and others discuss outcomes at SSLC meetings. However, the team was unable to identify a consistent and effective approach. The team therefore **recommends** that the University develop a systematic approach to making taught students aware of responses to their feedback on learning opportunities.

2.82 Student involvement in both undergraduate and PGR periodic review is primarily organised via the Guild, whose officers take the role of student panel member. The review team heard that current students do not take on panel membership for three-day periodic reviews primarily because of the time commitment. In the case of undergraduate periodic review, and as a result of revisions to the process focusing particularly on student engagement, and approved by AQSC in April 2015, input is now sought from the wider student body through a student commentary on a self-evaluation, participation in the student-focused event, and contribution to the action planning following the review. The University agreed that it is keen to further strengthen student input in the periodic review process. Periodic review for postgraduate research students has been reintroduced following a three-year gap but the review team noted that the student input in this process is less well developed.

2.83 Some students were aware of opportunities for student engagement in quality assurance processes. However, in a number of areas the review team was made aware of scope for more effective and comprehensive student participation. The team heard that steps are being taken to promote student engagement in programme design and approval, and efforts are being made to promote student engagement with the ASR process and improved involvement in module evaluation. The University has also recently revised the periodic review process to develop student engagement. The review team therefore **affirms** the work underway to include students in programme design and approval, annual monitoring and periodic review processes.

2.84 Student engagement is clearly defined and policy is appropriately monitored. The University is also taking steps to improve student involvement in programme design, approval, monitoring and review. Work undertaken in collaboration with the Guild in relation to student-led enhancement projects, and the support provided by the SVCs, offers student representatives support and training. Progress can still be made to ensure that students are

made aware of responses to their feedback. Nevertheless, the review team concludes that the University's policy and practices meet the requirements of Expectation B5 and the risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

**Findings**

2.85 Assessment regulations, policies and procedures are set out in the CoPA for taught awards and the PGR CoP for research degrees. These are comprehensive documents covering all main areas related to assessment and regulation. A number of them deal specifically with ensuring parity of opportunity, for example for students with disabilities or mitigating circumstances. The distinctive nature of provision such as XJTLU is recognised with additional, bespoke arrangements in place to assure the University of assessment practices for those students.

2.86 The CoPA opens with a comprehensive glossary of terms including different assessment processes (diagnostic, formative and summative), assessment criteria, assessment methods and assessment strategy. It also defines what is meant by particular types of assessment task such as examination, marks scaling and moderation of marks. It presents clear and comprehensive information around key areas, including assessment strategies, grading criteria and marking, and academic framework regulations.

2.87 A series of appendices provide complementary guidance, policies and procedures, stating the year and to which cohorts they apply. These include the Assessment Appeals Process, systems for the classification for various types of degree, Academic Integrity Policy, Policy on Mitigating Circumstances, Policy on Feedback, and Policy on the Assessment of Group-Work for Taught Provision. The PGR CoP provides the equivalent information for research degrees, and the awards to which it applies are listed at the beginning of the document. As with the CoPA, links are provided to relevant appendices and Ordinances.

2.88 Programme specifications require assessment tasks to be mapped to learning outcomes, providing clarity on how a student will be expected to meet the learning outcomes of the programme. Staff are provided with training for their roles in assessment, including assessment design, marking and moderation, regulatory and policy requirements, and specific roles such as chairing boards of examiners.

2.89 In addition to external academic staff at the approval and periodic review stages of programme development, external examiners form a key role in the review of assessment.

2.90 The Policy for the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) was revised in 2014 and the new version came into place at the time of the review. Training for staff was scheduled for September 2015. The policy does not offer Advanced Standing but can be used to gain access to a programme or exemption from a study for a proportion of an undergraduate or postgraduate programme. Level 2 units (normally the school) have a lead for RPL within that school. S/he nominates an assessor and an adviser who must be independent from each other to assist in the management of the process.

2.91 The University's arrangements for policies, procedures, regulations and guidance for assessment and RPL would enable the Expectation to be met.

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

2.93 Expectations around assessment and feedback are set out in the CoPA. Although the policy currently references the QAA *Code of practice: Section 6* and precepts therein from 2007-08, the University provided evidence that it has formally checked alignment with *Chapter B6* of the Quality Code, that it is satisfied that the policy remains appropriate, and that it could update the reference accordingly.

2.94 The CoPA notes that the dates for submission of assessment and when students can expect to receive feedback must be published; a period of three working weeks is considered to be an appropriate maximum. The excerpts provided of module handbooks illustrated in varying degrees the information that students were given around assessment criteria, expectations around academic integrity and what was expected from the task they were set. Although the dates for submission were marked, dates for return of feedback were not always clear. In meetings, students confirmed that feedback was returned within three weeks and often sooner but noted that the scheduling of relative assessment tasks meant that they still did not always receive feedback in sufficient time to inform their next submission. From meetings with staff, this appeared to be a challenge in the modules delivered over a shorter period of time.

2.95 In the past, the Guild has made a series of recommendations to the University around feedback. Students reported that while there is still some inconsistency, feedback practices have improved.

2.96 The design of assessment is considered as part of the programme approval process and programme specifications demonstrate the mapping of learning outcomes to assessment tasks. These are considered by external reviewers in both approval and review processes. The report template used by external reviewers asks about the appropriateness of the proposed teaching and learning, and assessment strategies, and examples provided confirm that this question is addressed by reviewers in reports.

2.97 Staff are supported in the design of assessment and marking and moderation. These are included in the HEA-recognised CPS programme which all teaching staff must take as a minimum. Staff that the review team met were able to articulate clearly the benefits of the CPS and PGCert programmes in helping them with effective assessment design and practices. The University was also one of eight institutions that took part in a HEA pilot project on Transforming Assessment in 2013-14 and the benefits of this were noted.

2.98 In May 2015, the QAPRG began work on improving oversight of the Recognised Teacher status which all staff involved in teaching and assessing must have. Staff involved in online delivery and assessment with LOE are monitored through their first assessment and only after that point can they be considered as Recognised Teachers. Staff associated with the delivery of provision with a partner noted the support they received from the University in learning, teaching and assessment.

2.99 The Guild makes a number of comments around assessment design, including the role of students. In meetings, students commented on the timing of assessment in some instances, although academic staff provided examples of effective strategies that were in place in some parts of the University to avoid the difficulties that students raised. The review team noted there is mixed custom around this area and there are opportunities for dissemination of good practice.

2.100 The Academic Integrity Policy, to support students in assessment, was recently revised and a symposium to present the revised version was offered for staff. This was followed up at the end of the first semester with a reflection on the new policy.

2.101 Students who met the review team articulated clearly how their programmes covered academic integrity at both undergraduate and postgraduate taught levels, providing illustrative examples. Students studying an online programme have to take an online module before starting at the University, and this includes academic integrity. There are further modules which become mandatory for students who have had cases of academic misconduct investigated, at two different levels depending on factors such as the level of severity and previous history. In addition, the Library offers a number of sessions to support students in sound academic practice.

2.102 Strict guidelines set out the extent of teaching and assessment that can be carried out by PGR students, and the support and mentoring they will receive, in both the CoPA and the PGR CoP. In particular, all work marked by postgraduate students or postgraduate/postdoctoral research staff must be 'appropriately moderated' and postgraduate students and postgraduate/postdoctoral research staff are not permitted to act as the sole examiner of any summatively assessed work. There is also specific guidance and training around teaching and assessment for research students, although the review team heard that experiences were not consistent (see Expectation B11).

2.103 Chairs of boards of examiners are required to undergo training. The review team explored this with staff in meetings, who outlined a process by which a new Chair can shadow an experienced Chair. There was also confirmation that training is provided in advance of chairing and that regular refresher training is provided in addition to annual updates on any changes to the CoPA.

2.104 The review team also saw records of boards of examiners that indicated careful consideration in determining outcomes.

2.105 The role of external examiners in boards of examiners and the Code of Practice on the external examiner system are both set out in CoPA. The role of an external examiner in the board includes that they should 'ensure that the assessment processes are appropriate, fair and fairly operated and are in line with both institutional regulations and published programme guidelines'. Excerpts from minutes of boards illustrate external examiners fulfilling this requirement with constructive comments regarding assessment and confirmation of sound practices. External examiner reports that were provided to the review team all indicate some level of such assurance.

2.106 For XJTLU programmes, the University appoints a member of staff internally to act as chief institutional moderator alongside the chief external examiner. This role is to scrutinise the operation of assessment and examining processes and is in addition to subject-specific staff who are also involved locally. Expectations around the role are clear and reports showed duties effectively being covered.

2.107 Boards of studies, with advice from boards of examiners and external examiners, are expected to monitor the effectiveness of assessment strategies on an ongoing basis. In addition, the AFWG reports to AQSC to support the CoPA, and the PGRWG reports to RKE, which considers the PGR CoP. Notes from these working groups illustrate effective practice.

2.108 The policy for RPL is clear and has been written to reflect the requirements of the Quality Code. There is comprehensive guidance and an adviser can support applicants. An assessor, independent from the adviser, will make an assessment decision on the application and this will be verified by the relevant board of studies. While the revised policy has yet to be fully tested, it is carefully designed, involving a number of suitably qualified

staff with appropriate expertise and independence, it appears robust, and staff confirmed that the principal changes were clarifications to expectations and roles.

2.109 The review team considers that the University's approach to assessment is appropriate and that the processes are effective in allowing students to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the learning outcomes. There is also evidence of the support in place for staff to enable sound practice in assessment design. Thus, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

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

### **Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining**

#### **Findings**

2.110 The CoPA Appendix H sets out the external examiner system for taught provision; the PGR CoP Appendix 8 sets out the policy on research degree examinations and examiners. These two documents define the role and requirements of external examiners for taught and research awards. They also provide criteria regarding the expertise and experience required for the appointment of external examiners. This includes fluency in English and any other relevant language for programmes delivered and assessed in another language and the criteria are, for the most part, aligned with the Indicators of *Chapter B7* of the Quality Code.

2.111 For taught provision, the Senate gives faculties delegated responsibility for the appointment of external examiners. Authority for approval rests with the faculty Pro Vice Chancellor or his/her nominee and appointments are then reported to the FAQSC. For research degrees, the Faculty Director of Postgraduate Research is responsible for approving the appointment of examiners, including external examiners.

2.112 For taught provision, external examiners are appointed at subject, programme and award level and the responsibilities of each of these designations are defined; one external examiner can hold more than one of these designations. An external examiner must be involved in any decision for which an award is being made by a board of examiners and provision can be made for remote attendance at boards to ensure the involvement of an external examiner. Appointments are made for a year at a time and normally renewed annually for a four-year period or a five-year period on programmes of five years' duration. Provision is in place for exceptional one-year extensions to the period of appointment. There is also the opportunity to terminate a contract mid-session if necessary.

2.113 External examiners for taught provision are required to report annually - or more frequently where there is more than one cohort - on a standard template. The report includes confirmation that threshold academic standards are being met in relation to the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements; comment on whether assessment processes are fair, robust and in accordance with the University's regulations; comparability of standards with the rest of the UK sector; good practice and innovation; and opportunities for enhancement. Reports are considered by student experience leads, who prepare a report for FAQSC. Student experience leads also approve the response to the external examiner. Boards of studies consider reports and responses; in addition, they take ASRs which include reflection on external examiner reports.

2.114 Faculties report annually on external examiner reports received across the faculty via their overview report from the ASR process. TQSD produces an annual overview at institutional level for AQSC.

2.115 A directory of external examiners across the University is published online by the Student Administration and Support Division (SAS) for the information of students. In addition, the name of the external examiners and their home institutions are published in programme specifications. In June 2014, the University took the decision to make external examiner reports and responses available to all students through its VLE. Previously, this had been restricted to the student representative system through forums such as boards of studies.



2.116 The University's policies and procedures would enable Expectation B7 to be met.

2.117 The review team considered the University's approach by analysing key policies and procedures, and scrutinising examples of the policy in action, including the appointment process, external examiner reports and responses. The team also met students and staff to discuss the operation of all aspects of external examining.

2.118 The criteria set out for appointment of an external examiner are clear, but the way in which appointments are currently managed through an electronic work management system means that although there is a record of whether a nomination has been approved, there is limited transparency around discussions informing that decision. Although the directory of external examiners provides some information on the appointments made, this is limited to the name and institution of each external examiner.

2.119 The University makes the external examiner responsible for confirming that there is no conflict in taking up an appointment, including whether the appointment might lead to a reciprocal agreement. In meetings with staff, clarification was provided that reliance is also placed on schools and departments at the University to be aware of and clearly identify any potential conflicts during the nomination process to enable an informed decision; further, those responsible for approving external examiner nominations noted that no issues had subsequently been identified that had implications for the initial approval.

2.120 The review team did note some examples of two external examiners being drawn from the same department of another institution, despite CoPA Appendix H being clear that this would be considered a conflict. The University was able to provide a response on each of these but acknowledged that greater transparency around the appointment process would be helpful (see recommendation under Expectation A3.4).

2.121 Similarly, the review team considered that the removal of recent or substantive research collaborations as an impediment to appointment as an external examiner left the University open to challenge on the independence of such external examiners as now qualified for appointment under this change. Reassurance was provided with indicative examples in which a research collaboration would be considered by the University to be too close. The review team considers that the University might usefully revise its criteria and guidance to make this clear (see also Expectation A3.4).

2.122 External examiners are advised through their appointment letter that they can contact the Vice-Chancellor with any serious concerns. The CoPA Appendix H notes that external examiners may also make recourse to the QAA Concerns Scheme and all external examiners are provided with a link to the TQSD website and asked to review the CoPA Appendix H prior to accepting the terms of their appointment.

2.123 External examiner inductions take place locally at present. The examples provided indicate that this is taken seriously and that the key areas are being covered. Further, the external examiner report template asks external examiners, if they attended the induction event, to confirm whether it was helpful. The University has indicated that it plans to move to a centrally run induction in the future.

2.124 The external examiner report template is designed to reflect the requirements of the role and provide the assurances that the University requires. The sample provided indicated that these are completed with varying amounts of detail, although evidence was provided of instances where reports were returned to external examiners owing to some sections not having been completed.

2.125 An overview report is produced by TQSD, although the format has changed as the University has sought to reduce duplication with the faculty overviews. One consequence of

the change in format of the overview report is that there is no longer annual confirmation at institutional level that all programmes meet academic standards (see Expectation A3.3). It is not clear either how the University might identify issues that re-emerge in successive years, particularly as a number of external examiners comment in reports that they are in the first year of appointment so cannot comment in relation to the previous year. The review team therefore **recommends** that the University strengthens monitoring and oversight of external examiner reports to ensure that they are sufficiently informative and that recurring issues can be identified.

2.126 Reports are scrutinised at boards of studies. Responses to external examiner reports must be approved at faculty level and the review team saw examples of non-approval of responses. Until 2013-14, responses took the form of a brief letter. This has been amended for the 2014-15 cycle so that the response is made directly against the relevant section on the external examiner's report, enabling greater transparency in response, although this has yet to be implemented by all subjects.

2.127 For XJTLU, the University has both a chief external examiner and a chief moderator in place. Although, owing to a late resignation, there was not a chief external examiner for the 2013-14 academic year, the chief moderator, working with the subject-level external examiners, ensured that there was no compromise to the overall process. The review team saw evidence of how the roles of chief external examiner and chief moderator complemented each other in the examining process.

2.128 As noted above, the decision to make external examiner reports and responses available to all students on the relevant modules is a relatively recent one and the University noted that work is ongoing to ensure that students studying with partner providers have access to information about external examiners and reports. None of the students that the review team met were aware of who their external examiner was and how they might find that information. Further, only one was aware of external examiner reports and none had any knowledge of responses to reports. The review team met staff from a partner provider who noted that external examiner reports are only discussed with students if they lead to modifications. The University acknowledged that this was an area in which practice was still developing and outlined other planned activities to communicate clearly to students about the external examining system. The review team **affirms** the work being undertaken to ensure that students, including those at the University's partners, are aware of and can readily access the name of their external examiner, their reports and subsequent responses.

2.129 Most of the University's policies and procedures in this area are sound and adhered to. The review team has some reservations regarding the criteria, guidance and transparency of external examiner appointments and some aspects of institutional oversight. The review team also notes that work to ensure that students are aware of and can readily access the name of their external examiner, their reports and subsequent responses is still in the early stages of development. Therefore, while the Expectation is met, the risk is moderate.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Moderate**

**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**

2.130 Programme monitoring and review comprise two elements set out in the University QEF, ASR and periodic review, which follows a six-year cycle. For collaborative provision, the Taxonomy of Teaching and Learning Collaborative Provision describes the requirements for annual and periodic monitoring and for revalidation of programmes with oversight from CPSC.

2.131 The reporting unit for ASR is determined by the overseeing faculty. A handbook specifies the scope of the ASR and includes three main elements: submission of an ASR report from each unit; a faculty ASR summarising all the reports received from its reporting units; and feedback from the FAQSC to its reporting units and from AQSC to both the FAQSC and the individual reporting units within the faculty. The contribution of the student voice to the process is also required and is provided through consideration of the ASR at the first SSLC of the academic year for undergraduate programmes and for postgraduates at a meeting timed in relation to the availability of the ASR. The SSLC with the support of the Student Guild submit a commentary on the ASR to the FASQC.

2.132 The content of the ASR requires an evaluation of what has gone well, a reflection on issues that have arisen, reporting on actions from previous ASR, and actions relating to KPIs such as NSS data. The handbook provides help in identifying areas expected to be covered, and sources of evidence including external examiner reports, and KPIs available from the business intelligence dashboards including data on student numbers, degree outcomes, employment data, and student satisfaction.

2.133 Periodic review of the quality and standards of taught programmes offered by departments and schools considers the curriculum; the learning environment; support for students; staffing; and quality management and enhancement. There may also be a thematic element which aligns with a strategic aim of the University. Periodic review is regarded as constructive, student-focused and is expected to make use of external input and management data. Periodic review panels therefore include an external member, a Guild officer and representation from professional services as well as University academic staff.

2.134 Postgraduate research periodic review has had a three-year hiatus and has just been reintroduced. The process is broadly parallel with that for periodic review of all taught provision with some adjustments to reflect the different nature of the provision.

2.135 The regular and systematic approach to monitoring and reviewing programmes provides the necessary mechanisms for the University to meet Expectation B8, and by meeting students, academic and professional staff and reading documents, the team was able to review the operational effectiveness of the policies and processes.

2.136 The team read a number of ASRs and was able to see how positive experiences and issues raised in the reports are aggregated at faculty level. The feedback process from faculties contains elements specific to the unit but also places them in a faculty and University-wide context, enabling dissemination of good practice and raising awareness of wider issues. It was also clear that the University considers institutional actions at AQSC on

issues emerging from ASR, as well as receiving action plans from reporting units, and reviewing and enhancing the process through the work of QAPRG.

2.137 ASR provides a reflective review of student learning opportunities in subject areas. The reports rely heavily on qualitative evaluation of the previous year and although KPIs, including NSS and PTES scores, were referred to in most reports, other information suggested in the guidelines, such as student complaints and appeals, employment statistics and degree results, were not usually apparent. The team was of the view that a more systematic and consistent approach to the use of data in ASR could be beneficial.

2.138 The student voice directly influences the content of ASRs for some subject areas, which include responses to issues raised by students. In other reports this is less explicit. A number of student representatives met by the team confirmed that they had commented on ASRs and an SVC confirmed that they had been involved in compiling comments on ASRs from student representatives. The team also read minutes showing discussion of ASR at SSLCs. However, students the team talked to were unaware of how the outcomes of ASR impacted on their programmes and this supported the affirmation reported under Expectation B5. ASRs from collaborative partners specifically include a section on feedback from students.

2.139 The cornerstone of periodic review for both taught and postgraduate research degrees is a self-evaluation document (SED) produced by the unit undergoing review. Recent changes to guidelines have strengthened the requirement for student engagement in periodic review. The team was able to read examples of SEDs for taught and PGR provision and saw evidence that students had been given opportunities to comment on the document. Students also contribute to the periodic review event through meetings with the review panel and their views are reflected in outcome reports. The panel includes a student panel member but the team learned that this is always a sabbatical officer of the Guild due to difficulties in obtaining reliable attendance from other students and concerns about the time commitment required (see Expectation B5, paragraph 2.84). The SED follows a template and guidelines. Examples seen by the review team addressed the specified topics effectively but varied in style, particularly with regard to the inclusion of management information. The team saw that recommendations from reports translate into action plans, progress against which is monitored by FAQSC and AQSC.

2.140 Policies for monitoring changes to programmes and dealing with the closure and withdrawal of programmes are clearly articulated in the QEF. The team saw and heard about the arrangements made to support students during programme withdrawal, including those with partners, and learned that these arrangements are overseen at faculty level. Minor and major modifications to programmes are determined at boards of studies and monitored by faculties. The review team was satisfied that robust processes are operated whereby the faculty monitors programmes to ensure that curricula are maintained unless formal processes are invoked to approve changes. Approved modifications are signed off by AQSC on behalf of the University.

2.141 The review team was impressed by the use of feedback mechanisms from external and internal staff involved in reviews to inform the University about its processes for annual and periodic reviews, and its ongoing efforts to enhance its review and monitoring mechanisms. In particular, the role of the QAPRG in developing and improving the University's approach to quality assurance was **good practice**.

2.142 The review team concludes that the procedures for annual subject review and periodic review meet Expectation B8. The University has clear policies and procedures which are operated and supported effectively so that the risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

**Findings**

2.143 The University has separate procedures for appeals, which are included in the CoPA and PGR CoP, and for complaints which are published on the SAS website. There are also procedures for complaints about admissions to undergraduate, postgraduate and online programmes (see Expectation B2).

2.144 A new Student Complaints Policy and Procedure, effective from September 2015, has been benchmarked against the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) framework, and directs students to the Student Charter, the Dignity at Work and Study policy, and the appeals procedures.

2.145 The University offers opportunities for early resolution of appeals by encouraging students to consult the chairs of exam boards, and of complaints by encouraging students to raise issues informally with staff responsible for the area concerned. The Student Complaints Policy and Procedure now includes deadlines for making responses to complainants at each stage of the process, consistent with OIA guidance. The Assessment Appeals Procedure also has guidance on timescales for handling appeals.

2.146 Information about appeals and complaints is available to students in web and hardcopy forms, and advice is provided by the Academic Compliance Team, who will also refer students with appeals or complaints to the Guild for independent advice. Online students are initially directed to LOE student support.

2.147 Students receive written outcomes, including the right to further review where the process is not exhausted.

2.148 The Academic Compliance Team maintains a record of upheld appeals, and identifies common issues and concerns. The ASR template requires departments to report on actions in response to student complaints and appeals.

2.149 The Academic Compliance Team monitors boards of examiners' compliance with appeal recommendations. For online students, data about appeal outcomes is shared with academic leads and board chairs. There is an annual Complaints and Appeals report to Senate. Procedures and policies are reviewed by the AFWG.

2.150 The design of the University's approach would allow the Expectation to be met. The team tested the Expectation by meeting staff and students, and reading documentation including relevant policy and procedures, reports on their operation, and deliberations on the updating of the University's approach.

2.151 The University provides all students with opportunities to raise matters of concern, and it has formal procedures to ensure that students do not risk disadvantage in doing so. Students are provided with opportunities to resolve issues informally, and the University has taken steps to ensure complaints and appeals are dealt with in a timely fashion. Documentation is clear and accessible.

2.152 Data about appeals and complaints is reported to the relevant assessment boards and University committees, and is reflected upon in annual monitoring. Procedures and policies are regularly reviewed.

2.153 Some students the team spoke with, including PGR students and students from Truman Bodden Law School (a collaborative partner), were not familiar with specific appeals and complaints procedures, but they knew where to find information and seek advice as necessary.

2.154 Some students questioned whether the approach to PGR progress monitoring via the PGR toolbox (a student record system for PGR students) enabled them to raise concerns about their supervision without risk of disadvantage. The team heard that PGR students who are experiencing problems with their supervision are directed to school/institute PGR directors, and then, if necessary, to the complaints procedure. The complaints procedure also identifies the Annual Progress Review (APR) for PGR students as a channel for resolving problems with supervision.

2.155 The University has procedures for dealing with academic appeals and student complaints which are fair, accessible and timely. Accordingly, the Expectation is met and the risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

**Findings**

2.156 The University has a large portfolio of collaborative arrangements including validations, accreditations, franchises, articulations, exchanges, dual awards and joint and dual PhDs. It operates a joint campus at Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU) in China and runs a range of online programmes at postgraduate level with Laureate Online Education (LOE), both involving a substantial number of students. Partners range from further education colleges through UK and foreign universities to private sector organisations.

2.157 Collaborative provision is governed by the Collaborative Strategy agreed by the University in 2014. Its approach has taken account of *Chapter B10* of the Quality Code and there is a risk-based taxonomy for the treatment of collaborations. The University maintains a collaborative register. The taxonomy determines the treatment of the collaboration and on whose authority arrangements can be signed off. Collaborative Programmes Committee (CPC), until recently CPSC, has overall responsibility for oversight of collaborative provision.

2.158 When new arrangements are under consideration, the process of approving the partner is separate from approval of the programme which follows normal University procedures. Partner approval work is undertaken by the Due Diligence Panel which makes recommendations to the SMT. Major new strategic developments also require the approval of Senate and Council. There is a legal agreement for every partnership and in some cases supporting quality assurance and other supplementary agreements. The agreements contain clauses setting out the arrangements for termination of the agreement and how any students would be taught out. Staff the team met also confirmed that due diligence involves consideration of how students could be allowed to complete their programmes if key staff left the partner organisation or a partner was unable to continue to teach all the students remaining on the programme at the point of terminating the agreement. There are also clauses about the need for the University to approve publicity materials and oversight of this is managed through the ASR process. Agreements also prohibit any serial arrangements without formal permission from the University, although in reality there have been no serial arrangements agreed by the University.

2.159 Responsibility for academic standards remains with the University and this is stipulated in contractual agreements. The programme approval process for collaborative programmes as for on-campus programmes ensures alignment with the FHEQ. However, the approval route is different, with CPC now having delegated authority to approve new collaborative programmes.

2.160 Normal quality assurance arrangements - external examining, ASR and periodic review - apply to collaborative programmes. Annual monitoring is undertaken at faculty level, managed by FAQSCs, or at institutional level, monitored by CPC, as defined by the taxonomy. Marking, moderation and external examining are undertaken in line with normal University requirements. XJTLU has some special arrangements in relation to examining, as there is a chief internal moderator and a chief external examiner who observe the examining process and attend boards of examiners, reporting annually to XJTLU's Learning and



Teaching Committee but all subject to CPC's oversight. ASRs are done on a Partnership pro forma which reviews progress of students from articulations and requires the host school at the University to comment on the partnership and how well it is working. The pro forma has recently been revised to ensure consistent and thorough review. Study abroad, Erasmus+ partnerships and placements are reviewed by the relevant department within its ASR report, with the study abroad team completing an annual monitoring report at institutional level. Periodic review is normally incorporated into the review of the relevant University area with the precise requirements defined in the taxonomy. Partnership renewal is based on the outcomes of a periodic visit which takes place on a different cycle. Where a partnership involves programmes which are not taught at Liverpool, the University will appoint a suitably qualified external consultant to work on the development of the programme and then subsequently to moderate assessments and marking. External examiners would also operate in the normal way.

2.161 Liverpool International College, which offers pre-entry programmes for international students, is not included in the collaborative register, as it does not offer Liverpool credits or awards.

2.162 Partnerships are supported by link tutors who are responsible for operational liaison and have regular contact with the partner. There are also clearly identified staff in TQSD who are responsible for particular partnerships and supporting the staff involved. The University has instituted Joint Liaison Groups to ensure better liaison.

2.163 Placements are not part of the collaborative strategy. These exist in a number of forms including years in industry or smaller placements in the form of a module. Indeed, over 500 students take short-term placements as part of an academic module within their programme. The Careers and Employability Service is developing a University-wide Code of Practice for placements which will focus on operational aspects such as insurance, health and safety and learning agreements. Until this comes into effect, local procedures apply to the approval, running and monitoring of placements.

2.164 The University's well-designed system for managing working with others would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.165 The team used documentary evidence provided and the supporting documents, especially policy statements and examples of policies in action. It supplemented this with meetings with staff and students, including one meeting with students and one with staff from one of the University's partners. The team also made use of the QAA reports on China (2012) and the Caribbean (2014), as well as Higher Education Reviews of three further education colleges the University works with.

2.166 Scrutiny of partner approval documentation showed that the process is thorough and follows University procedure. All aspects of the arrangement are considered and documented in some detail. Conditions are set for the arrangement to go ahead. There are legal agreements in place for all collaborations and in some cases these are supplemented by programme agreements, quality assurance agreements and agreements relating to specific features of the arrangement. These cover the necessary areas, including termination, assessment and examination, and standards.

2.167 Periodic and annual monitoring visit reports are very thorough and there are mechanisms for ensuring recommendations are followed through. QAA reports are also taken into account and reported to CPC. Reports from review visits for single subject partnerships are reported to the relevant board of studies, but those for multi-subject visits go to CPC. Indeed, it is clear from CPC minutes that the Committee is effectively monitoring all quality assurance arrangements relating to collaborative provision.

2.168 Annual monitoring reports for collaborative programmes use a recently updated pro forma. These reports are prepared by the partner, but include a review of how the relationship is working from the link tutor as well as confirmation that publicity materials have been checked. Scrutiny of examples showed that the process is reasonably thorough and reviews student performance on these programmes.

2.169 At Truman Bodden Law School (TBLS), which offers a Liverpool LLB (also a Qualifying Law Degree), the curriculum is similar but not identical to the University's. Local staff set and mark coursework, subject to moderation by University Law School staff. In contrast, examinations are set by local staff, but are subject to approval by TBLS staff, who undertake marking to ensure equivalence of standards. This is facilitated via a VLE, which allows easy sharing of student assessments. All assessment is also subject to normal external examining arrangements. The board of examiners is held in the University Law School.

2.170 The reports of the Chief Internal Moderator and the Chief External Examiner for XJTLU show that their review of the examining and examination board process is thorough and provides a useful source of additional reassurance as well as suggestions for improvements. Reports go initially to XJTLU's University Learning and Teaching Committee, which is responsible for any follow-up action. However, there has been monitoring by CPC, with XJTLU sending a formal letter of response to Liverpool in the latest cycle rather than responding through ASR. The team was also able to verify that normal external examining arrangements apply to partners and that external examiners' reports for collaborative provision are monitored by FAQSCs.

2.171 The ending of the partnership with Istanbul Bilgi University provided useful information on the care taken by the University to protect the student experience during the close down. An agreement was reached with the partner on how the teach-out would operate. Meanwhile, all normal quality assurance procedures remained in place with support from TQSD. It was also made clear that training and development support for staff at Bilgi University remained in place during the period.

2.172 Link tutors the team met had regular contact with partner staff both informally and through periodic meetings and Joint Liaison Groups. Staff at TBLS confirmed that they had regular contact with both administrative and academic University staff. In addition, visits took place in both directions. It was also confirmed that TBLS received guidance on the implementation of new policies from the University. Staff in the CLL confirmed that they provide training and development activities for staff in partner institutions, including online provision and video conference. In the case of XJTLU, CLL had delivered the PGCert programme there, but was now supporting XJTLU to provide its own. Staff at partners need to meet the standards required to become recognised teachers of the University, and as such are required to adhere to the University's Codes of Practice and regulations. It would also be expected that the University school would be involved in agreeing appointments. Joint liaison groups exist for many partnerships and their minutes are reported to CPC.

2.173 Although Liverpool International College (LIC) is not classified as collaborative provision, the relationship is close and there are good mechanisms for liaison and for ensuring that the programmes remain appropriate, that the standards are appropriate for automatic entry to University programmes and that the student experience is monitored. LIC is also subject to review by QAA under the Educational Oversight process. The team accepts that the University's decision not to include LIC in the Collaborative Register is compatible with *Chapter B10* of the Quality Code.

2.174 The team came across no evidence that there were any issues with placements and was told by staff that schools and institutes involved with placements all had monitoring

arrangements in place. There is not yet an institution-wide Code of Practice in place, although development is in process. There was limited evidence from students about the quality of placements, but the team confirmed that appropriate support is in place.

2.175 The management of higher education provision with others would appear to match the policy and procedures. The University is professional in its management of work with partners. It has clear procedures and clear designation of responsibilities, and the procedures are followed. The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

## **Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees***

### **Findings**

2.176 The University is a research-intensive institution with a steadily rising number of PGR degree students. It is developing a new research strategy as part of the redevelopment of the Strategic Plan. Aims include a growth in PGR numbers, the provision of better and more focused training, and better communication with, and networking for, students.

2.177 Policies and procedures for PGR students are set out in the PGR CoP. The PGRWG, which reports to the RKE, is responsible for updating policies and procedures. Relevant information is communicated to students in a PGR Handbook and via the website of the PGR Student Team of Student Administration. There are separate handbooks for each of the principal collaborative agreements for PGR provision.

2.178 PGR provision is managed at faculty level, by faculty PGR directors, school PGR directors, and faculty student experience managers. The PGR Admissions Policy has recently been updated in consultation with the faculties, who manage marketing, recruitment and admissions. The induction of PGR students has been reviewed using a 'student journey' model to identify principles for supporting transition, with induction delivered at school level.

2.179 The Liverpool Doctoral College (LDC), opened in 2015, is designed to enhance PGR training, employability and the research environment by providing central oversight of PGR provision.

2.180 The PGR CoP sets out appointment criteria for supervisors and the minimum number of supervisors required for each student. It also details the responsibilities of supervisors and students regarding frequency of meetings, record keeping (via the PGR Toolbox, a University-wide tool used to monitor progress), and how records of supervisory meetings might contribute to APR. Supervisors undertake mandatory training, and refresher training is provided by the CLL. New members of staff serve initially as a secondary supervisor. Supervisors provide the means by which PGR students are appraised of the University's policies and procedures.

2.181 Students experiencing problems with their supervision are directed to Level 1 or 2 (that is, department or school/institute) PGR directors, and then the complaints procedure. The complaints procedure also refers to the APR as a first channel for resolving problems with supervision.

2.182 PGR monitoring procedures are described in the PGR CoP. A first annual review confirms doctoral registration or downgrades it to master's registration depending on student progress. APRs include evaluations of progress, details of training undertaken and records of meetings. Online PGR students are monitored by a student progress panel which receives progress reports for campus and online PGR students. In the case of campus students, re-registration is conditional on sign-off of the progress record by a PGR Director.

2.183 PGR training is provided through a PGR development programme and subject-specific programmes. Supervisors are responsible for identifying training needs of individual

students, and directors of postgraduate research are responsible for subject-specific training. Online PGR students undertake 90 credits of learning which supports practitioner research, with additional training being provided at the thesis stage.

2.184 The PGR student body is represented within the University committee structure through student membership of the relevant research degree-related committees. Student evaluation is sought via APR meetings, PGR staff-student liaison meetings in schools, through the PRES, and through the PGR Toolbox. Issues are identified by the PGR Student Team or the Market Intelligence and Customer Insight Team (for PRES) and communicated to faculty PGR directors.

2.185 PGR students are also involved in PGR periodic review which has been reintroduced after a three-year break, a move welcomed by the Guild. Students are involved in drafting PGR periodic review self-evaluations, in meetings during the review, and in planning actions in response to recommendations.

2.186 Procedures for assessing and awarding research degrees are set out in the PGR CoP. The criteria reference relevant benchmarks, including the FHEQ, are published to examiners and are kept under review by internal examiners. The PGR CoP sets out requirements for nominating and appointing examiners, the possible outcomes of the viva examination, and reporting procedures. Arrangements for Online PGR students are set out in the Framework for Professional Doctorates.

2.187 Research degree appeals procedures are described in the PGR CoP. Complaints are dealt with under the University's Student Complaints Procedure.

2.188 The design of policies, procedures and monitoring processes would enable the Expectation to be met. To test the Expectation, the team met PGR students and staff, including PGR supervisors, academic managers and professional staff. The team also used documentary evidence, embracing policy statements and examples of policies as implemented.

2.189 The PGR CoP sets out the standards for the doctoral award. The University does not publish criteria for progression to confirmed doctoral registration, but expectations about the activity they should complete in their first year are communicated to PGR students by supervisors, though some students revealed uncertainty as to what is required.

2.190 Students cite high levels of satisfaction with the quality of supervision in PRES and the University believes that there are clear lines of communication for supervision issues, particularly via the Annual Progress Review and the Independent Progress Assessment Panel. The team heard from some students who believed that it could be difficult to raise issues in these circumstances without risk of disadvantage.

2.191 The PGR CoP includes relevant information for students and specifies that it is the students' responsibility to engage with the relevant processes. Students that the team met revealed variable understanding of the University's procedures and policies for PGR students, including with regard to supervisors, assessment panels and academic advisers, and described inconsistent experiences of research training, supervision and support for teaching roles. Students also felt that communication from the University could be clearer.

2.192 The team noted student concerns about the University's communication with PGR students and some evidence of inconsistent practice including in relation to supervision and support. The University explained that one of the aims of the Liverpool Doctoral College (LDC) is to improve the PGR experience by strengthening monitoring of supervisor training, offering more beneficial training for PGR students and more effective student representation. The Director of the LDC is now an ex-officio member of the Student Representation and

Engagement Sub-Committee, and there will be a Student Advisory Sub-Group of the Doctoral College Board. In this context, the team was able to **affirm** the actions of the institution of the Liverpool Doctoral College to promote a more consistent level of support to postgraduate research students.

2.193 Self-evaluations and consequent reports for PGR periodic review include consideration of relevant information and result in clear recommendations.

2.194 There is student representation on RKE and the team saw evidence that a PGR representative attends meetings of a school RKE. PGR student representatives are expected to raise issues with the relevant PGR director or lead who reports them at faculty level, but there is no other formal channel within the committee structure for students to directly raise matters. The team heard that PGR student representatives are elected to PGR SLCCs but concluded that the existence and operation of SSLCs is uneven, a finding supported by two recent PGR periodic review reports. The University also acknowledged that SSLCs do not formally produce minutes or report within the University's deliberative structures. The team heard that it is an aspiration for the LDC to audit current arrangements for PGR student representation, and to create a body with student representation from the Guild and the PGR student body. Despite this aspiration, the team concluded that currently the University does not have consistent, formal structures in place that enable it to hear, respond to and report back on the PGR student voice, a finding acknowledged by the University. Accordingly, the team **recommends** that the University establish formal channels to systematically capture, consider and act on postgraduate research students' views on their academic experience, and to ensure that actions taken are reported to students.

2.195 The University has policies that set out the standards of its awards, and the quality of learning opportunities which it provides to students admitted to research degrees. It trains its supervisors, offers PGR students training to carry out research, and supports their development through a system of monitoring and progression. In the context of a need for improved communication with PGR students and a more effective approach to the provision of training and supervision, the University is setting up the Liverpool Doctoral College to promote a more consistent experience for PGR students. However, there is still progress to be made in ensuring that PGR students are effectively represented and able to influence the quality of their learning opportunities. Therefore, while the Expectation is met, the risk is moderate.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

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

2.196 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.

2.197 Of the 11 Expectations in this area, all are met. There are three recommendations, three affirmations and one feature of good practice. In two areas, there is a judgement of a moderate risk.

2.198 There is a recommendation under Expectation B7 which requires the University to strengthen monitoring and oversight of external examiner reports. There is also an affirmation of the work being undertaken to ensure that students are aware of and can readily access external examiner reports and responses. For Expectation B5 there is a recommendation to develop a systematic approach to making taught students aware of responses to their feedback on learning opportunities. However, there is also an affirmation of the work underway to include students in programme design and approval, and further engage them in annual monitoring and periodic review processes. There is a recommendation under Expectation B11 to establish formal channels to systematically capture, consider and act on postgraduate research students' views on their academic experience, and to ensure that actions taken are reported to students. The report also affirms the institution of the Liverpool Doctoral College to promote a more consistent level of support for postgraduate research students.

2.199 While there is a moderate level of risk associated with Expectations B7 and B11 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.

2.200 There is evidence that the University is aware of its responsibilities for assuring the quality of learning opportunities. The recommendations relate to minor omissions or oversights. There is activity already underway in a small number of areas that, once completed, will enable the University to meet the Expectations more fully.

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

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

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

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

##### **Findings**

3.1 The University publishes a range of information for prospective and current students, the majority of which, including an online prospectus and the information in the wider information set, is made available on its website and intranet. The website is managed by the Marketing and Communications Department, which delegates specific pages to subject areas.

3.2 A range of information is available for prospective applicants through the online prospectus and the website; the University also has links through to the KIS and the Unistats website.

3.3 The University has a clear process in place for the management of information published by its partners. Agreements with collaborative partners cover University approval of published information and this is monitored through the annual monitoring process (see Expectation B11).

3.4 The Student Charter commits the University to providing comprehensive information to students at both programme and module level, including estimates of additional costs students will have to bear. Channels through which students receive information relating to their studies include Liverpool Life, VITAL, My Liverpool, and online timetable software. Liverpool Life is the portal for current students and applicants; it provides a range of information including academic timetables, and for applicants, the ability to track their application. Programme and module information is available through VITAL and programme specifications are available on the TQSD website. There is an institutional handbook, Your University, which has bespoke versions for undergraduate, taught postgraduate and London campus students.

3.5 The TQSD website contains the University's QEF, which sets out quality assurance procedures and guidance. A Directory of Teaching Partnerships is maintained. External examiners' reports are made available to student representatives via board of studies meetings. However, work is ongoing with collaborative partners to ensure students there have the same access; following a monitoring visit in November 2014, XJTLU will be making the reports and responses available to students.

3.6 The University has clear policies and procedures in place for the management of published information, and that which is published by its various partners. The University is making progress around some potential areas for concern, including publication of external examiner reports for student access, and in relation to providing comprehensive information about additional costs for students.

3.7 The team tested the University's approach to the Expectation by scrutinising documents, including websites and online sources, and meeting academic and professional services staff and students from a variety of disciplines.



3.8 As noted, the University's website is overseen by the Marketing and Communications Department with responsibility for specific areas devolved to departments. Within departments, accuracy of information is ensured through a contributor and approver system, and all webmasters are trained by the Digital Communications team within Marketing and Communications. Programme-specific information is facilitated through TQSD via approval of programme specifications at AQSC.

3.9 Information made available for prospective applicants through the online prospectus and website is clear and accessible. The documentation details a process through which information provided to students is ratified or approved at departmental and faculty level, and staff were able to explain how this process works in practice.

3.10 The channels through which students receive information from the University are varied. Students revealed some confusion and concern about information being provided to students via several different platforms including Liverpool Life; MyLiverpool; VITAL (the VLE); departmental webpages; 'Spider' for exams; and 'ORBIT' for timetabling. Staff acknowledged that there are different information entry points for students.

3.11 The review team noted efforts to standardise the approach to how information is made available to current and prospective students. The University has undertaken an audit of its website to ensure the relevance of student-facing information. For the 2014-15 academic year, the University introduced a minimum standard of information to be provided for all module information in VITAL. The VITAL baseline specifies key information and content that students most want to see in all modules.

3.12 The University's protocols for the management of information published by its partners are clear and effective. Agreements with collaborative partners cover University approval of published information and this is effectively monitored. Partner staff, while agreeing that the University monitors information online before publication, had not received any overarching guidance on information. Staff who support collaborative arrangements explained that liaison with partners in this area ensures that any information published is a collaborative effort and not necessarily guided by a process beyond what is outlined in the collaborative agreement. Information produced by partners is managed by TQSD for partners covering multiple subject areas, and at school level for partnerships covering a single subject area.

3.13 Students met during the review visit were unaware of their external examiner, where to find this information or the existence of a report. The team heard that the University is working to ensure that students have access to information relating to external examiners and their reports. Progress has been made by making reports available on a specific VITAL overview page and by information being displayed on the student homepage. The University understands that further progress is needed in this area to support student understanding of the external examiner's role, in disseminating reports, and in engaging student representatives in the dissemination process (see recommendation for Expectation B7).

3.14 The review team learned that in certain cases, for example in a revision to academic appeal procedures, changes have been made to the CoPA during the academic year and with immediate effect. Student representatives are notified of changes to the CoPA through membership of the Assessment Feedback Working Group, which has two student members. It is expected that these students will report back to their constituent groups, and that changes will also be discussed at SSLCs. However, the review team could not establish that there was a systematic method via which this occurred and nor was the team made aware of any relevant formal guidance. Senior staff explained that in-year changes to the CoPA are not normal practice and would not occur if they were deemed to be detrimental to students. Any such changes are outlined on the TQSD website and reported to Guild. More

significant changes are reported to students, who are notified via email from TQSD and also by their school or institute. However, the review team was of the view that students could be better and more appropriately informed, and concluded that the University should ensure that any regulatory changes which will impact on students are routinely communicated in an accessible way, and students are consulted prior to such changes taking place (see also paragraph 3.16).

3.15 Programme and module information is available through VITAL with programme specifications being made available on the TQSD website. However, the programme specifications are comparatively long documents that are not useful to students and few of the students met by the review team were able to reference information above module level. Senior staff accepted that programme specifications are primarily used by staff as part of approval and monitoring processes, and also by external organisations such as PSRBs. Some information from programme specifications is reflected in programme handbooks received by students. However, programme handbooks do not have to include programme-level learning outcomes for students. Moreover, students met by the review team were unsure where to find definitive information about their programmes. The review team therefore concludes that while programme-level outcomes are recorded in programme specifications, students do not have ready access to that information.

3.16 The team therefore **recommends** that the University ensure programme learning outcomes and any changes to the Code of Practice on Assessment are communicated to students in an accessible and timely way.

3.17 The Student Charter commits the University to providing comprehensive information to students at both programme and module level, including estimates of additional costs students will have to bear. Students met by the team had been made aware of additional costs associated with their programmes via inductions and introductory lectures. Staff explained that work is underway to ensure that additional cost outlines are included within programme specifications, and also outlined the use of open days and applicant discovery days at which this information can be communicated to students. Within programme information webpages, there is a fees and finance section, where additional costs are outlined. However, there is no systematic provision of information for applicants. The team heard that further initiatives are planned in relation to quantifying indicative costs such as textbooks and printing for applicants. The review team therefore **affirms** the steps being taken to ensure that additional programme costs are clearly accessible to prospective and current students.

3.18 Overall, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met as students and staff attest to the quality and value of information they receive, and there is effective management of information at University and departmental/service level. The risk associated with this area of provision is moderate because if students do not receive comprehensive and accessible information about programme-level learning outcomes and/or regulatory changes, over time this could impact on the quality of student learning opportunities and academic standards.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Moderate**

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

3.19 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 risk, giving rise to one recommendation and one affirmation.

3.20 The risk associated with this area is moderate because if students do not receive comprehensive and accessible information about programme-level learning outcomes and/or regulatory changes, over time this could impact on the quality of student learning opportunities and academic standards. The University should, however, be able to address the recommendation relatively swiftly and effectively by harnessing and formalising some of its current practices. This will not result in major structural, operational or procedural change.

3.21 The review team therefore concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the University **meets** UK expectations.

## 4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

### Findings

4.1 The University's strategic approach to enhancement is set out in the Policy on Academic Quality and Enhancement in Learning and Teaching. This includes a statement of commitment 'to systematically identify and pursue opportunities for development and enhancement'.

4.2 The policy is supported by guidelines on Implementing the policy which include training for staff, methods of dissemination of good practice, and via the ASR and periodic review. Further, it sets out responsibilities at institutional, faculty and school/departmental levels.

4.3 Key strategic documents support enhancement, including the University's Strategic Plan, in which the student experience is one of the five strands for focus, and the Learning and Teaching Framework. Related projects include the VITAL baseline, and a Lecture Capture function.

4.4 Education Committee (EC) - previously SEC - is chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education), and oversees all aspects of the student experience. The terms of reference include the responsibility for the promotion of ongoing enhancement. Faculty Education Committees (Faculty SECs until 2014-15) are chaired by the key lead on student experience within the faculty; the chair of the Faculty Education Committee sits on the University Education Committee to provide effective governance.

4.5 QAPRG exists to keep relevant processes and procedures under review (see Expectation B8). Annual reports are also required from key professional services, reflecting on information data such as NSS outcomes and student feedback, some of which are received formally at committee.

4.6 The Centre for Lifelong Learning (CLL) is charged with a key responsibility for identifying good practice and innovation within the University and also from beyond the University, and then disseminating this information. The Educational Development Unit (Ed Dev), which sits within the CLL, is intended to play a key role in this.

4.7 The design would enable the Expectation to be met.

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

4.9 The Learning and Teaching Framework is a recent development intended to increase the focus on student learning opportunities. EC monitors the implementation and progress of the LTF.

4.10 The University has recently approved a student engagement framework which sets out the different areas of University life in which students can engage. There was understandably little awareness of this development among students at present but the evidence presented through the development to date indicated how student engagement might be strengthened and enhanced once it is fully in place.

4.11 Over 20 student-led enhancement projects were completed during 2014-15. While this was initially primarily student-driven and staff involvement and awareness appears limited in the first year of operation, examples were provided of where the University has continued to develop and extend activity at the end of the year-long student project. This ensures that there is a legacy beyond the life of the project and provides an opportunity for other areas to benefit. This initiative is continuing in 2015-16.

4.12 Another example of enhancement relates to the University's academic adviser framework which was introduced in 2010 in response to the 2009 Institutional Audit. Developmental work on this has continued, with an institutional handbook produced in 2012-13 followed by some parts of the University subsequently developing their own bespoke versions. The University has continued to keep this area under review to improve practice for students.

4.13 A number of key monitoring processes, including ASR and periodic review, are designed to identify action either where something could be improved or where there is good practice for wider dissemination. Outcomes of these processes are reported at FAQSC and to AQSC and this line of reporting was illustrated in reports and minutes provided to the review team.

4.14 The CLL, which includes the Educational Development Unit and eLearning, plays a central role in identifying and sharing good practice. Activity coordinated through the CLL includes a Digital Champions pilot with the HEA through the University's Management School; dissemination of relevant news items and a précis of key points from workshops with visiting speakers; support for networks such as e-learning; and a substantial repository of articles and guidance to support academic staff in the diverse facets of their role.

4.15 The HEA-accredited CPS in Learning and Teaching (Level 6) and PGCert in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (Level 7) offer qualifications to new teaching staff and the opportunity for CPD. Staff who had taken advantage of these opportunities provided examples to the review team of how the training and support they had received enabled them to develop good pedagogic practices and, moreover, disseminate that practice within their own academic areas.

4.16 Anecdotal evidence was provided of how the annual Learning and Teaching Conference supports staff in developing and sharing good practice to the benefit of the student experience. Presentations of Teaching Excellence Awards, which are made for any aspect of learning and teaching that can be demonstrated to have had a positive impact on the quality of the student experience and/or the standard of student performance, are also made at the annual Learning and Teaching Conference and staff noted the value of these awards.

4.17 The review team recognised the value of the diverse and wide-reaching activities of, and the resources provided by, the CLL and its constituent parts. The review team considers that the strategic and effective role played by the CLL in training and supporting staff in pedagogic practices and developments, and disseminating good practice, is **good practice**.

4.18 Key processes are kept under review and updated to enhance practices. The review team noted the work of the QAPRG in developing and improving the University's approach to quality assurance (see Expectation B8).

4.19 The review team concludes that the Expectation on Enhancement is met. The associated level of risk is low because the University has structures in place for the systematic consideration and enhancement of its practices and there is evidence that these structures are being implemented through appropriate activity.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

4.20 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.

4.21 The one Expectation in this area was judged to be met and the associated level of risk is low. There are no recommendations or affirmations in this area. There is one feature of good practice.

4.22 The team considers the strategic and effective role played by the Centre for Lifelong Learning in training and supporting staff in pedagogic practices and developments, and disseminating good practice, to be an example of good practice.

4.23 The team concludes that the University has appropriate structures in place for the systematic consideration and enhancement of its practices and there is evidence that these structures are being implemented through appropriate activity. Therefore, the team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the University **meets** UK expectations.

## 5 Commentary on the Theme: Digital Literacy

### Findings

5.1 The University takes a considered approach to supporting the development of digital literacies among its student body. This is underpinned by a range of strategies and working groups including the Developing Digital Literacies Working Group (DDLWG); the Technology Enhanced Learning Working Group (TELWG); and the Technology Enhanced Learning Strategy Implementation Group. The University aims to ensure that the student learning experience is underpinned by appropriate technologies, and this aspiration is a key part of the University's Technology Enhance Learning (TEL) Strategy, which forms a pillar of the overarching Learning and Teaching Framework.

5.2 The TELWG was set up in 2012 and is chaired by the Pro Vice Chancellor Education. The Group aims to raise the quality of technology enhanced learning, and the review team noted that this Group has been a catalyst for several staff development opportunities. Students are offered opportunities to develop digital skills through the taught curriculum and the extracurricular opportunities offered via the My Liverpool portal. Across the institution there are numerous examples of how digital literacy is embedded in undergraduate, postgraduate taught and postgraduate research provision. The University has also worked in tandem with the Guild to raise the profile of digital literacy, including through campaigns such as 'Make the Most of IT', which has now become embedded as the 'Learn IT' programme.

5.3 The DDLWG was initiated in 2011, and aims to support staff in embedding digital literacies across the University. It managed the development of the Digilearn website, which supports best practice sharing by hosting case studies from across the University. The DDLWG also hosts events and workshops and worked with the Guild to run staff-student exchange events. The University's progress in this area is well regarded with the DDLWG being cited by JISC as a good exemplar in its Online Guide, 'Enhancing the student digital experience: a strategic approach'.

5.4 Students met by the review team mentioned some confusion in relation to the various digital platforms through which information is provided to them, reflecting comment in the student submission for this review. Students also expressed lack of confidence in the technology. The CSD has acknowledged that there are some resourcing and project management issues to address.

5.5 The TEL Strategy Implementation Group aims to address staff development to support digital literacy, and TEL is now a significant theme in the CPD provided for staff. Digital literacies are included in a core module of the PGCert in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, as well as in an optional module, Design for Learning Utilising Digital Technologies. The Certificate in Professional Studies also includes the introduction of TEL as one of its workshop components. There have also been workshops to support the implementation of the baseline standard for VITAL. The eLearning network meets twice a term and the annual Learning and Teaching Conference includes presentations about developing digital literacy.

5.6 There have also been several recent institutional developments which aim to further students' digital literacy. These include the policy for the use of Lecture Capture (2014) and the VITAL baseline project which ensures a minimum level of module information is provided. A new Learning, Information and Digital Literacies Skills Strategy is also currently under development to ensure that students are able to develop the skills for lifelong learning, employability and living in a changing digital world.



5.7 In summary, the University is taking a systematic approach to supporting the development of digital literacies among its student body, and this is underpinned by a range of strategies and working groups. Staff are being supported in developing digital awareness and competency as a means of recognising and embedding digital literacies across the University. Students have some concerns in relation to the various digital platforms through which information is provided to them, but overall there is evidence of the University seeking to develop digital literacy to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities.

## Glossary

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

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

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

### Academic standards

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

### Award

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

### Blended learning

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

### Credit(s)

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

### Degree-awarding body

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

### Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

### Dual award or double award

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

### e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning

### **Enhancement**

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

### **Expectations**

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

### **Flexible and distributed learning**

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

See also **distance learning**.

### **Framework**

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

### **Framework for higher education qualifications**

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

### **Good practice**

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

### **Learning opportunities**

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

### **Learning outcomes**

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

### **Multiple awards**

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

### **Operational definition**

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

### **Programme (of study)**

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

### **Programme specifications**

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

### **Public information**

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

### **Quality Code**

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

### **Reference points**

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

### **Subject Benchmark Statement**

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

### **Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)**

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

### **Threshold academic standard**

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

### **Virtual learning environment (VLE)**

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

### **Widening participation**

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

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© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2016  
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB

Tel: 01452 557 000  
Email: [enquiries@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@qaa.ac.uk)  
Website: [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)

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