



Higher Education Review of University of Birmingham

February 2016

Contents

About this review	1
Key findings.....	2
QAA's judgements about the University of Birmingham.....	2
Good practice	2
Theme: Student Employability.....	2
About the University of Birmingham	3
Explanation of the findings about the University of Birmingham.....	6
1 Judgement: The setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards.....	7
2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities.....	17
3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities	43
4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities	46
5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability.....	49
Glossary.....	50

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 Birmingham. The review took place from 15 to 18 February 2016 and was conducted by a team of four reviewers, as follows:

- Professor John Feather
- Dr Ian Giles
- Ms Louisa Green
- Ms Sarah Ingram (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 7.

In reviewing the University of Birmingham 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,² and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

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

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

² Higher Education Review themes:
www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2859.

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

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

Key findings

QAA's judgements about the University of Birmingham

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

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

Good practice

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

- The strategically driven and systematic work undertaken with applicants for undergraduate places, which enables them to make confident and informed decisions (Expectations B2, C).
- The high value placed on teaching, and the way in which staff are enabled to develop and improve as teachers (Expectation B3).
- The systematic use of data about student learning to identify ways of enhancing learning opportunities (Expectations B3, C).
- The University's sustained engagement with employers, which enhances learning and employment opportunities for students (Expectation B4).
- The systematic implementation of BALI internally to use assessment to improve students' learning, which is shared with other UK universities through the LEAF project (Expectation B6).
- The rigour of the University's strategic and operational management of its collaborative provision, which secures effective partnerships (Expectation B10).
- The pervasive culture of evidence-based and contextualised decision making, which contributes to the enhancement of students' learning opportunities (Enhancement).
- The combination of formal governance structures and established informal discussion networks that contribute to the enhancement of student learning opportunities (Enhancement).
- The central oversight and local College ownership of professional services, which contributes to the enhancement of student learning opportunities (Enhancement).

Theme: Student Employability

The University of Birmingham provides an extensive range of coordinated activities and support services to promote, develop and sustain the employability of its students and graduates, having invested significantly: £4 million in the last five years.

Each College has an Employability Team, led by the College Careers Consultant. Central provision and support comes through the Careers Network, with oversight from the Employability Committee. Employability is also an integral element of curriculum design, including the development of placement modules and modules and skills training, which develops entrepreneurship awareness and skills, including the Birmingham Project where first-year students work in mixed-disciplinary teams on real-world challenges. A Student Engagement Team actively works with the Guild of Students, using students and recent

graduates to help their fellows to identify their own employability skills. The University's alumni links have led to the development of Alumni Mentoring and prestigious Alumni Leadership Mentoring programmes. Placements are also a valuable contribution to employability and the University supports students in finding placements, even when these are not a requirement of their programmes, and provides opportunities for extracurricular activities and public engagement. Through its recently developed Liberal Arts and Natural Sciences programme the University seeks to develop the intellectual flexibility needed by leading employers.

The University works closely with employers, from international companies to local and regional small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Some employers are actively involved in the design and delivery of programmes and modules through visiting lecturers and as placement providers. This relationship is seen as a partnership and employers appreciate the supportive and positive attitude of the University and comment favourably on Birmingham students and graduates.

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 Birmingham

The University of Birmingham (the University), founded in 1900, was England's first civic or 'redbrick' university and it seeks to continue the values of its founding principles, including inclusiveness and service to the community.

The University occupies a large campus two miles southwest of the centre of Birmingham. There are currently almost 27,500 full-time equivalent students, of which around 47 per cent are postgraduate (33 per cent postgraduate taught, 14 per cent postgraduate research). The majority of the University's students are full-time and are based at the main campus in Edgbaston. Around 680 students are registered on programmes based abroad (Transnational Education), and around 380 distance-learning students are also based abroad. More than 8,000 students are from outside the UK, representing over 150 countries around the world. In 2014-15, some 200 students were registered on 24 collaborative programmes validated by the University, with 3,940 at University College Birmingham. In total, 80.7 per cent of undergraduates are from state schools and 23.4 per cent are from lower social classes; 27 per cent are from ethnic minorities, with the largest black and minority ethnic (BME) student population outside London. Staff number approximately 6,250 full-time equivalents, including approximately 3,000 academic staff. The University's academic disciplines are organised into five Colleges, each of which comprises a number of Schools, while professional services are located both centrally and in the Colleges.

The University is committed to ensuring that members of the local community have the opportunity to benefit from higher education and it engages in a variety of outreach and access schemes to encourage under-represented groups. It also has wide-ranging research-based relationships with local businesses, with whom it has engaged in a significant number of projects.

An annual Student Voice report has been produced annually since 2009 and recommendations made on behalf of students by the Guild of Students are tracked annually. Students report a 'constructive and professional' relationship with the University and maintain that 'overall the majority of students enjoy their time at the University of Birmingham and speak highly of the education they have received'. In the National Student Survey (NSS), the University's score for overall satisfaction has risen since the Institutional Audit by QAA in 2009 and has been maintained at between 88 and 89 per cent over the previous four years. In 2013-14 the University was the *Times/Sunday Times* University of the Year.

The graduate employability rate is 86.7 per cent and the University was recently awarded *The Times/Sunday Times* University of the Year for Graduate Employment.

The University has just launched its new Strategic Framework for 2015-20, Making Important Things Happen, building on its previous Shaping our Future: Birmingham 2015. This is unified around four complementary pillars - Research, Education, Influence and Resources. The Education Pillar emphasises supporting the 'exceptional and ambitious' students who choose the University 'to learn from researchers at the leading edge of their subjects' to become 'natural leaders, enthusiastic about knowledge and learning and able to get things done'. These attributes are said to define the 'Birmingham Graduate', who is expected to go on to have a successful career and be an 'engaged global citizen'. Major campus developments include a new student hub, sports centre and library, together with a University Training School. The University benchmarks itself against other members of the Russell Group and aims to be 'the destination of choice among our peers'.

Since the Institutional Audit there have been no major structural changes to the scale of the restructuring into Colleges, but there have been changes to the composition of certain Colleges and Schools and the creation of 'institutes' as an umbrella for some taught and research programmes. A new team of College Academic Policy Partners (CAPPs) was created in 2012, absorbing the work of the former Academic Quality Unit, an example of a 'Business Partner' model employed in a number of University Professional Services. There is a Planning, Finance, HR, Marketing, Registry, Library Services and Careers Network Business Partner, where a representative of a centrally managed service works specifically with one College.

Changes to personnel since the Institutional Audit include the appointment of both the current Vice-Chancellor, Professor Sir David Eastwood, and Chancellor, Lord Bilimoria of Chelsea, CBE, DL. The two positions of Deputy Pro Vice-Chancellor (Quality Assurance and Enhancement) have been consolidated within the remit of one Deputy Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education).

The University's objectives include an increase in tariff of the UK/EU undergraduate intake, a substantial increase in international undergraduate students, maintenance of its position as a major provider of postgraduate taught programmes, and an increase in UK/EU and international postgraduate research students. It identifies one of the most significant of its challenges as being to improve further its position and market share in an increasingly competitive and diverse higher education landscape. Other challenges it identifies are the inclusion of overseas students in the net migration figures and recommendations from QAA and the Competitions and Markets Authority (CMA) requiring universities to be explicit about their offer to applicants and students. The University believes that these external challenges have largely been anticipated and incorporated into its strategic planning.

The University takes account of a range of external reference points, including national government requirements in the case of overseas provision, and Ofsted for its teacher education, for which it is rated 'outstanding' both for primary and secondary education. It also engages with some 40 different professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs).

The University responded fully to the two advisable recommendations made at the Institutional Audit. A revised University-wide system for annual review of taught modules and programmes was implemented in 2010, together with an annual review of collaborative provision and postgraduate research. Consistency on extensions to coursework deadlines was achieved through a wide-ranging revision to the University's Code of Practice on Taught Programmes and Module Assessment, which was also informed by proposals from the Guild of Students. The recommendation relating to the moderation of marks was addressed by guidelines approved in 2012.

The first desirable recommendation in the Institutional Audit related to the timing of the comprehensive programme review and School quality cycles. In addressing the recommendation of the QAA team, the University went further than integrating its review systems and developed the Vice-Chancellor's Integrated Review, bringing together education, research, management and other strategic aspects of review. The second concerned module evaluation and a working group drew on good practice in the institution to develop a standardised questionnaire for the whole institution, which was rolled out in 2012-13.

The University has gone beyond the particular and literal recommendations of the Institutional Audit in a proactive, holistic and timely fashion. The eight features of good practice have been carried forward in the wider context of enhancement and strategic planning.

Explanation of the findings about the University of Birmingham

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

1.1 The University of Birmingham states that *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) is the basis for awarding credit and determining the level and nomenclature of its qualifications. Degree nomenclature and generic requirements are incorporated in Ordinances and Regulations. Subject Benchmark Statements and PSRB requirements are adhered to, where they are available or applicable, and the University follows QAA guidelines on qualifications characteristics and awarding qualifications that mark the achievements of positively defined programme outcomes.

1.2 The review team found that the design of the processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.3 In testing the design in practice, the review team examined documentary evidence and held meetings with staff.

1.4 The review team found that the University's programme approval process ensures that programme alignments with external reference points are fully considered at all stages and that there is a record of deliberation and outcomes in the minutes of appropriate bodies, such as the University Programme Approval Review Committee (UPARC). Programme specifications include statements of the intended learning outcomes (ILOs), and the means by which the ILOs are to be achieved and demonstrated. Awards are made only when

students can be demonstrated to have achieved the specified learning objectives of the approved programme. External examiners are required to confirm that programme standards are set appropriately and that students have met the required learning outcomes of programmes. The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education) or Deputy reads all external examiner reports, of which a digest is considered at the University Quality Assurance Committee (UQAC), Senate and the University Executive Board (UEB). A comparable system is in place for postgraduate research degrees, with an annual review of external examiners' reports and feedback which goes through the Graduate School Management Board, University Quality Assurance Committee, Senate and UEB.

1.5 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.6 The responsibility for academic standards and the award of credit lies ultimately with Senate. The framework and key processes are explicitly regulated with clear assignment of responsibilities between designated committees and officers. A legislative framework is derived from authority granted in the University's Charter. There is a comprehensive guide to the academic framework and the processes and requirements derived from it in the Key Processes Primer, available on the web.

1.7 Senate exercises its responsibilities through the University Education Committee (UEC) chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education). UEC has a University Programme Approval and Review Committee (UPARC) which undertakes detailed scrutiny and analysis of programme approval and review activities carried out according to the published processes. All these bodies report to Senate, while the UEB additionally receives summary reports from UQAC.

1.8 Relevant information on the award of credit is made clearly available to students in the Student Handbook. Students are involved in the programme approval process through their membership of Senate and its committees and subcommittees.

1.9 The academic frameworks and regulations would allow the University to meet the Expectation. The review team tested the implementation of these mechanisms through analysis of documentation and discussions with staff and students.

1.10 The review team saw evidence that UPARC meets its responsibilities through careful consideration of proposals as part of its normal business. The evidence seen and heard by the review team shows that the process is effective in practice and that outcomes are properly recorded in the minutes of the meetings at which they are considered.

1.11 The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.12 The University maintains and publishes definitive records of its programmes of study and qualifications. Regulations require a programme specification for each programme and its constituent modules, including postgraduate research programmes with taught elements. When approved, programme specifications are kept securely as a record on the student record system and made available online. A standard template ensures that there is consistency across the University and with its collaborative provision partners. Programme specifications are reviewed annually at College level to ensure currency, and as part of the Vice-Chancellor's Integrated Review (VCIR). The detail regarding the process for handling changes arising from annual monitoring is described in the Guidelines for Annual Review and is considered more fully in this report in relation to Expectation B8.

1.13 The principles and processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.14 The review team tested the Expectation through consideration of a range of programme and module specifications and student handbooks, and through meetings with staff and students, including a collaborative partner.

1.15 Programme specifications were found to meet the University's regulatory requirements for both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, including details of alignment with the FHEQ and with any relevant Subject Benchmark Statements or PSRB requirements, together with assessment methods, intended learning outcomes and other essential information about the design and content of the programme.

1.16 Students told the review team that they are familiar with the concept of Intended Learning Outcomes, and know how to access them through the virtual learning environment (VLE). Similarly, postgraduate research students know how to access regulations and other documents relevant to their studies.

1.17 The review team concludes that appropriate processes are in place to provide definitive records of programmes and modules and that a secure record is maintained. Therefore the Expectation is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.18 Authority for the approval of taught programmes lies with the University Programme Approval Review Committee (UPARC) with input from the Collaborative Provision and Academic Policy and Regulations Committees when appropriate. UPARC reports to the University Education Committee, which reports to Senate.

1.19 After initial scrutiny and successful initial approval of the strategic, financial and academic perspectives conducted by the College Programme Approval Review Committee, the programme is developed with input from a range of professional service business partners, the College Academic Policy Partner and one or more external advisers. Following scrutiny by the School and College, approval rests with UPARC. The procedures involved, both prior and subsequent to approval, are described in process maps, forms and guidance documents available from the Registry programme development and approval intranet site. The processes and documentation refer to external reference points such as Subject Benchmark Statements, the FHEQ, qualification characteristics where applicable, and the requirements of any PSRBs. New modules required by the proposed programme are normally approved during the programme approval process. Further description of the processes can be found in this report under Expectation B1.

1.20 The review team examined the procedures by detailed documentary study and discussion with members of academic and professional services staff, students and relevant committees. The team found the processes and procedures to be fit for purpose and robustly and independently operated. Consequently, the review team confirms that the University's procedures for the approval of taught degrees and research programmes are fit for purpose. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.21 The University's Regulations and Code of Practice on Taught Programmes and Module Assessment articulate the requirements for the award of credit and qualifications. These establish that credit and qualifications can only be awarded upon the achievement of the University's stated learning outcomes and apply to all taught programmes.

1.22 Learning outcomes are defined at programme and module level and are agreed at the programme approval stage. The process requires that academic staff involved in designing programmes refer to the FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements and qualification characteristic statements. Programme and module specifications also establish the assessment methods through which students are able to demonstrate that they have achieved the learning outcomes. Defined marking criteria are also provided and students are assessed against them.

1.23 Boards of Examiners have responsibility for ensuring that relevant learning outcomes have been demonstrated through assessment, and decisions taken by the Boards are in accordance with the University Regulations. External examiners are full members of the Board and can provide input if they have concerns at the point when an award is made.

1.24 The University does not operate a condonement system. Any exceptions or exemptions from the regulations at School level are considered either by the Academic Policy and Regulations Committee or, at the level of individual student progress, are looked at and approved by the Progress and Awards Board, which in turn reports to Senate.

1.25 The University requires external examiners to confirm that learning outcomes are aligned with the relevant level descriptors in the FHEQ through the annual submission of a report. The reports seen by the review team, together with the annual external examiner summary reports received by UQAC, confirm that this happens in practice.

1.26 The review team read documents relating to the University's process for awarding credit and qualifications, including the Regulations and Code of Practice, examples of programme and module approvals and external examiners' reports. Meetings with staff involved in monitoring quality and standards at the University confirmed that practice was implemented securely through these processes.

1.27 The University's approval process is designed both to ensure that appropriate consideration is given to relevant external reference points and that credit and qualifications are awarded to individual students only where the appropriate learning outcomes have been achieved. The Board of Examiners acts to ensure that this standard is upheld for all awards made and external examiners act as a final check that this is applied consistently across the University.

1.28 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.29 The University states that the external examiner system is the primary mechanism used to monitor and review academic standards. Schools are required to consider their comments as part of the annual module and programme review processes and during the periodic VCIR. The detail regarding the working of both these processes is provided in this report under Expectation B8.

1.30 The review team concluded that the approaches taken would enable the Expectation to be met. They explored how the processes worked in practice by analysis of a representative sample of each of the various reports and committee papers, and had discussions with appropriate academic and professional staff.

1.31 Through their annual reports external examiners were observed to play an important role in commenting on alignment with external reference points such as the FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements and relevant PSRB requirements. The disciplinary and pedagogic expertise of the external examiners informs their feedback to the University on the attainment of academic standards, curriculum and assessment processes.

1.32 The Annual Programme Monitoring process is described in the Guidelines for Annual Review. In addition to statistical data, feedback from students and stakeholders, such as employers or PSRBs, and the comments of external examiners, are considered as a matter of routine. The external examiner report template asks the examiner to comment annually on whether the relevant learning outcomes align with relevant level descriptors in the FHEQ and any applicable Subject Benchmark Statements. If required, the programme will be modified to ensure maintenance of standards using defined risk-based procedures that require approval by School, College or University depending on the level of risk. Postgraduate research provision is also subject to annual monitoring.

1.33 The outcomes of Schools' reflection on the annual monitoring of their individual programmes are reported to the UQAC in their annual School summary.

1.34 Periodic review of programmes occurs within the VCIR when the educational portfolio is analysed in parallel with the School's research, management and other strategic dimensions. The final report is a synthesis of these different dimensions and the University believes firmly that this holistic approach is the most effective way to review education within a research-intensive institution. Appropriate externality is used during the VCIR to secure the education strand of the review process.

1.35 The review team confirms that the procedures for monitoring and reviewing programmes are appropriate in design and conscientiously implemented. The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.36 The University uses external and/or independent expertise in a number of processes relating to the setting and maintenance of its academic standards. These include programme approval; external examiners' reports; PSRB requirements; annual programme and module review; and the VCIR.

1.37 At the programme approval stage, the University makes use of both external (to the University) and internal (external to the School proposing/providing provision) independent expertise. Once approved, each programme offered is required to have at least one external examiner; they also serve as members of the Boards of Examiners. External examiners are also invited to comment on academic standards as part of the annual reporting process. The University provides an annual summary of external examiners' reports which acts as further assurance that external expertise has been used.

1.38 The University's processes for reviewing provision, namely annual programme and module review and the VCIR process, require confirmation to be given of the use of external expertise in the maintenance of the University's academic standards.

1.39 Beyond the academic portfolio, the University also uses external and/or independent expertise for its Personal Skills Award where all programmes are taken through the University's academic quality assurance processes, which include an independent external examiner.

1.40 The review team considered the range of documents provided by the University, including examples of programme approvals, VCIR reports, external examiner reports and the University's annual report on them. Meetings with those staff of the University with responsibilities for quality and standards also confirmed that appropriate use of external advice was being consistently used at key stages of setting and reviewing standards across the University's provision.

1.41 The review team found therefore that the University is appropriately and systematically making use of external and independent expertise in designing, approving, assessing and monitoring its provision. This enables the University to be assured that its provision meets UK threshold academic standards and that its academic standards are appropriately set and maintained. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

1.42 In reaching its judgement about academic standards, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.43 All seven of the Expectations in this area are met, with a low degree of risk. There are no recommendations and no affirmations in this area. The University has clear and explicit frameworks and regulations governing its awards, with titles, levels and credits aligned with the FHEQ and relevant descriptors and characteristics. Programmes are devised with reference to national Subject Benchmark Statements and professional requirements, where appropriate, with externality required at approval and review stages. Awards are granted only when the stated learning outcomes have been met and external examiners are required to confirm that student achievement is comparable with sectoral expectations. Codes of practice govern the principles and operation of the systems underpinning the setting and maintenance of academic standards and these are explicitly referenced to the Quality Code. Arrangements for programmes delivered in collaboration with others follow the same procedures as for programmes delivered on campus, though with additional checks.

1.44 The review team was assured from its sample reading of approval and review documentation, examination boards' minutes, committee minutes and external examiner reports, together with meetings with staff and students, that the University's procedures are sound, understood, carried out in accordance with its own requirements and effective in ensuring that standards are set and maintained securely. Academic governance arrangements ensure robust oversight.

1.45 Given that all Expectations have been met with low risk, the review team concludes that the setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards at the University **meet** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1 Detailed central guidance on the requirements for the development and approval of a new programme are provided by the University on the Registry programme development and approval intranet site. The process of programme development builds iteratively through four stages, from an initial proposal stage through further levels of scrutiny within the School and College until approval by the University. Authority for approval lies with the University Programme Approval Review Committee (UPARC), with appropriate input from the Collaborative Provision (CPC) and Academic Policy and Regulations (APRC) Committees when appropriate, including external input from at least one external adviser. All three committees employ peer review and include student membership.

2.2 The review team concluded that the approaches taken would enable the Expectation to be met. Following a review of a representative sample of each of the various reports and committee papers, the review team discussed the arrangements with appropriate academic and professional staff and students.

2.3 The review team learnt that programme development involves a wide-ranging series of consultations involving existing external examiners and consultants; College Business Partners; Academic Practice Advisors; e-learning consultants; PSRBs where relevant; and staff and students from cognate areas. College Careers Consultants may also inform programme design. The College Academic Policy Partner plays an essential role in guiding a programme proposer through the various processes that govern programme approval. The review team heard examples where employers have contributed to the design and content of academic programmes, and may co-deliver employability-specific provision.

2.4 The submission of a proposal for a new programme must address strategic, market and financial matters, as well as academic issues including all relevant external reference points.

2.5 The first stage is completion of a Plan to Develop a New Programme (PDNP). This is considered by the College Programme Approval Review Committee to ensure alignment with the School/College/University strategy, the potential market (including employer/sector needs) and resource implications. If the PDNP is approved, the College develops a full new programme proposal that includes input from an external adviser. A new programme proposal must be accompanied by a number of documents including a Programme Proposal form; a programme specification; the external adviser's comments; a market research report; a curriculum map; an assessment matrix and a skills audit. These documents require consideration of external reference points such as Subject Benchmark Statements, the FHEQ, qualification characteristics where applicable, and the requirements of any PSRBs. Any proposal that requires new modules will be supported by a module proposal form and module specification for each new module.

2.6 Support for taking forward curriculum developments and training is available from a number of sources. For example, in addition to local support available within the School and College, a member of the Academic Practice team within the Centre for Learning and Academic Development and Learning Spaces (CLAD-LS) is linked to each College and provides guidance on aspects of programme and module design to complement the guidance provided by Registry.

2.7 Every new programme proposal considered by UPARC is peer-reviewed by two members of academic staff external to its owning College. Key individuals (such as Directors and Heads of Education, and other nominated academic and/or administrative colleagues) are closely involved in these processes.

2.8 The outcome of the consideration of a new programme proposal by UPARC may be one of the following: that it is approved unconditionally; that it is unconditionally approved with request/s for confirmation or clarification; that it is conditionally approved; that it is not approved; or that it is rejected.

2.9 The process to modify an existing programme adopts a risk-based approach that differentiates between modifications requiring approval at University level, those that can be approved by the College and those that can be approved by the School. Details of the risk categories and process maps are provided in the Guidance on Modifications to Programme document.

2.10 The review team confirms that the University operates effective processes for programme design, development and approval. The Expectation is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.11 The University follows the processes outlined in the Code of Practice on the Admission of Students, which is reviewed annually. This Code provides a system where recruitment, selection and admission are overseen by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education) through the University Recruitment, Admissions and Targets Board.

2.12 Recruitment targets are proposed by each School and agreed with the Board, in accordance with the 'compact' process through four meetings during the year, in line with the Strategic Framework. However, targets are usually set several years in advance so that there is adequate time for resource planning. Staff are aware of the clear process and strategy for entry requirements, which are confirmed annually through the University Recruitment, Admissions and Targets Board in agreement between the School, College and University.

2.13 The University's External Relations department has oversight of University recruitment. The University is in the process of moving to a digital-first recruitment communication strategy, enabling the website to be the source of detailed information for prospective students. The University has a clear recruitment and communications strategy and applicants are provided with a range of targeted communications.

2.14 The University has a number of outreach programmes including the A2B scheme, which provides opportunities for students from a diverse range of backgrounds to engage with Birmingham University. The University provides a number of avenues of support for applicants, including mentor schemes and schemes for care leavers and disabled students. The University provides unconditional offers to applicants where possible, which has been accepted positively by applicants and with no negative effects on award achievement or retention. In addition to the programme information provided to applicants, the University provides information about its support mechanisms on the website. The University is in regular correspondence with applicants who have accepted offers, including using current students to contact them to answer any questions.

2.15 Around 40 overseas recruitment agents are used and the University provides comprehensive information, largely through the website, to the agents. Oversight of this system is maintained through applicants providing feedback using the acceptor/decliner survey.

2.16 Decisions are made on applications by central admissions staff and admissions tutors. Interviews take place where this is required by the professional nature of the programme. Unsuccessful applicants to the University are provided with the reason for their rejection, which is recorded in the University's system. Successful applicants are provided with information about any conditions of offer, accommodation and study. Any changes to the programmes are communicated to applicants in a timely way. Applicants can raise a complaint or appeal if dissatisfied with the admissions process through the Code of Practice on Admission of Students.

2.17 The design of the University's admission, selection and recruitment policies would enable the Expectation to be met. The University's Code of Practice provides a mechanism to ensure that applicants have fair and consistent access to the University. The Code of Practice and the published material on the University's website provide details of the entry criteria and selection process, culminating in a reliable and transparent process.

2.18 The team tested the Expectation by reviewing the Code of Practice and the information available to prospective students. The team considered the information provided regarding the outreach and support programmes available to applicants and the statistics around the impact that these programmes have had on the current student population.

2.19 Following the review of all relevant written documentation, the team met with students and staff to understand the recruitment, selection and admission processes from their perspective. The team considered whether staff at different levels of the University had knowledge of the relevant information and followed the Code of Practice. The team considered whether students had received a suitable amount of information prior to attending the University and whether that information had enabled them to understand what their programme entailed.

2.20 The admissions, recruitment and selection of students at the University work effectively. The Code of Practice is clear and provides a transparent and robust framework to which all staff adhere when making decisions. Applicants and students appear satisfied with the level of information provided by the University and understand why and how decisions are made. This is reflected in the minimal number of complaints received by the University in relation to admissions processes.

2.21 The University provides a wealth of support to prospective students both through outreach schemes and in informing prospective students about what is available at the University. The regular communication and level of support provided to applicants, which is targeted depending on their potential needs, is effective in creating students who feel part of the University community. The strategically driven and systematic work undertaken with applicants for undergraduate places, which enables them to make confident and informed decisions, is **good practice**.

2.22 The review team finds that there are application, recruitment and selection processes which are robust, accessible, fair and transparent. Prospective students and staff are aware of these processes and are clear that they are adhered to when making decisions and providing information. Suitable oversight is maintained to ensure that if the processes were not followed, the University would be informed and would be able to take suitable action. As a result of the evidence considered during the review, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.23 The University's strategic approach to teaching and learning is articulated in the Strategic Framework and Education Strategy which set out four core strands of activity. Each strand includes key performance indicators and action points, which together set out how the University will achieve each education-related action. The Strategy also defines the 'Birmingham Graduate' attributes, and what opportunities students will have to gain these. Each College is asked to produce its own Education Strategy set against the University's Strategy; at the time of the visit these were under development. The Student Charter is also aligned with the Education Strategy, which helps to ensure that students have a clear understanding of the University's strategic approach to teaching and learning. The University Education Committee oversees implementation of the Strategy, while delivery against it is a collective responsibility involving the University management, Colleges, Corporate Services teams and the Guild of Students.

2.24 There is a renewed focus on teaching at the University with an expectation that all staff will engage in teaching, including senior staff and the Vice-Chancellor. Recruitment and promotion processes have been developed and now provide a teaching route for promotion, as well as a University-wide commitment to increasing the number of staff with a recognised teaching qualification, to be achieved through the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PCAP) and the Beacon Professional Recognition Scheme, recently accredited by the Higher Education Academy. The number of qualified teaching staff has already increased from 43 per cent in 2013-14 to 57 per cent in 2014-15 and the University has set a target of 75 per cent of teaching staff having a recognised teaching qualification by 2020. The University also has processes in place to reward excellent teaching through the provision of teaching awards, including the Outstanding Teaching Awards offered in conjunction with the Guild.

2.25 Opportunities for support, recognition and reward are also extended to professional services staff through the Birmingham Professional and Senior Leadership programmes. The review team found evidence that these opportunities were being taken up by staff. Professional services staff achievements have been recognised by the University through the introduction of the BUAFTAs (Birmingham University Awards For Tremendous Achievement).

2.26 Good practice in teaching is identified through a range of mechanisms, including the annual review process; module evaluation questionnaires; the VCIR; personal development reviews (PDRs); and the Guild's annual Student Voice report. A Teaching and Learning Conference, themed around topics arising from teaching and learning reflections, is held annually and in 2015 was attended by 185 members of staff. This provides a further opportunity for teaching practices to be kept under review as well as for good practice to be shared. The Teaching Academy (established in 2014) plays an important role in promoting a shared understanding of the University's approach to learning and teaching and in disseminating good teaching practice across the Schools. Teaching Academy initiatives include an Education in Practice journal; awards for educational innovation and enhancement; and an Education Matters newsletter.

2.27 A peer observation scheme is well established, used and valued by members of teaching staff whom the team met. Heads of Schools are responsible for ensuring that this takes place. An annual PDR process is also in place, ensuring systematic review of individual teachers' performance and development. Workload allocation models are in place to support staff and offer those staff involved in both teaching and research a way to balance commitments.

2.28 For postgraduate research students who teach, the Code of Practice on Teaching by Registered Students sets out which students can teach, what type(s) of teaching they can provide and who can appoint them. The Code also sets out the requirements for training. Colleges and Schools are required to establish procedures for capturing and monitoring data on training, using the records kept by the Centre for Learning and Academic Development and Learning Spaces (CLAD-LS), where training is delivered. The Head of School or a senior member of academic staff is responsible for ensuring that all postgraduate teaching assistants are appropriately trained before they start to teach. However, the wording of the current Code does not explicitly require this check to be in place. The team is satisfied that the University's practice is sound but notes that the Code of Practice is not explicit on this point.

2.29 The review team considered a range of documents relating to the University's policies and processes for reviewing and enhancing teaching practices. The review team found evidence that these processes are systematic across the University and heard from staff and students that the commitment to teaching articulated in the Strategy is implemented in practice. The high value placed on teaching, and the way in which staff are enabled to develop and improve as teachers, is **good practice**.

2.30 The University has well embedded mechanisms in place for collecting and analysing data on student learning, which includes the Student Access and Progress Committee who consider the performance of different student groups and report to the UEC. A range of data are also considered as part of the Annual Review process, with the outputs considered by the University Quality Assurance Committee, and with high level academic oversight through an annual report to the UEB. Data on student learning also forms part of the VCIR which ensures that data is looked at locally and centrally. This also enables a local response and action and means that the University can identify collective areas for enhancement. As a result of these processes, an assessment literacy project was identified in 2014-15. Data is also collected for non-academic activities, for example a space utilisation analysis and an annual survey on student and staff satisfaction with the University's VLE.

2.31 The University uses student and stakeholder feedback to inform and reflect on teaching practice: module evaluation questionnaires, the National Student Survey (NSS), Birmingham Student Survey (BSS), Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES), Student-Staff Committees, external examiner feedback, peer observation of teaching and formal PDR. Student and external examiner feedback is part of the Annual Review process, which is scrutinised at local level (programme Clusters) or School level and University level.

2.32 The University adopts an inclusive approach to learning and has established an Inclusive Curriculum Working Group, exploring embedding of inclusivity in the curriculum, and a working group on BME achievement. A Code of Practice on Reasonable Adjustments ensures that individual students are appropriately supported. The University is also committed to delivery of provision through alternative modes and pays close attention to this as part of the programme approval process. A Code of Practice for alternative modes of delivery is also in place to support the approval process for programmes delivered in this way.

2.33 The review team found evidence in reading the University's policies and procedures and the articulation of its governance structure, and in meetings with staff and students, that the consideration of data through these systematic processes has enhanced students' learning opportunities. Enhancements include the Birmingham Project, Modules Outside of the Main Discipline and Languages for All. Information about these additions to the curriculum is clearly articulated to students through student handbooks and on the VLE; students whom the review team met reported awareness of these activities and those who had taken part in them understood the value these activities added. The systematic use of data about student learning to identify ways of enhancing learning opportunities is **good practice**.

2.34 The review team concludes that that the University systematically reviews and enhances its approaches to teaching practices for the enhancement of student learning. Therefore the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement

Findings

2.35 The Strategic Framework and Education Strategy set out the primary mechanisms provided by the University to enable students to develop and achieve their academic, personal and professional potential. The UEC has strategic oversight of the Education Strategy, ensuring that the Strategy is developed and implemented. The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education) has executive responsibility in this area and an Education Team meets weekly, chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education), with Deputy Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education), Deputy Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) and Director of Registry, with College Directors of Education attending regularly.

2.36 There is a collective responsibility for the implementation of the University Education Strategy and at the local level this is articulated through College Education Strategies. The University's compact process ensures that Colleges and Professional Services agree specific targets and objectives, with associated resourcing, aligned to the Education Strategy.

2.37 An Equality Scheme 2011-15 is in place to ensure equity of opportunity and support, overseen by the University's Equality Executive Group which reports to UEB. An action plan for implementation is reviewed annually.

2.38 The University has a number of senior roles to ensure a comprehensive approach to supporting students' development and achievement, including a Deputy Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience), personal tutors and welfare tutors. Roles are defined in the Codes of Practice for each area of responsibility. These roles are complemented by the range of Professional Services, including the Careers Network, Library Services and Student Services.

2.39 Students' transition into, and progression through, their programme is supported through a wide variety of mechanisms, including welcome and induction; Individual Transition Review for all first-year students in their second semester; a student mentor scheme organised by the Guild; Focus on Finals; and the personal tutor system.

2.40 Students' personal and professional development is also supported through opportunities including the PROGRESS personal development planning tool; College-based initiatives such as the Academic Skills Service; Academic Writing Advisory Service in the College of Arts and Law; volunteering and work experience mentoring schemes (the Birmingham Project); Widening Horizons modules; Languages for All; and a recruitment agency (Worklink).

2.41 The monitoring of staff involved in supporting student development and achievement is via the annual PDR process, where appropriate training and continuing professional development opportunities are identified and implemented. The effectiveness of the University's provision is evaluated through a range of mechanisms, including student feedback surveys, the annual review process, the VCIR process and the annual Student Voice reports prepared by the Guild. Localised mechanisms also operate; for example, the Careers Network Service analyses usage data, which forms a termly report to each College, and the CLAD-LS carries out a biannual survey of the quality of learning environments.

2.42 A range of learning spaces and IT facilities are provided to students along with training and support to use them. The University has recently invested in the learning environment through a new library, major upgrades to IT facilities and the introduction of a new VLE. The Learning Spaces Strategy provides a framework for further development.

2.43 The University has a clear employability strategy for its students, providing a wide range of opportunities delivered through the curriculum and extracurricular activities as well as placements and internships. Moreover, the University has a clearly established history of engagement with a number of employers. Focused within the Careers Network, the University is responsive to new and established employers and often enhances existing arrangements as a result. The team heard from employers who recruit a large number of Birmingham graduates, providing internships and work placements across a number of the University's programmes on the basis of the quality of Birmingham graduates and the effectiveness of the relationship with the University. The employers who met the team were keen to engage further with the University. The Careers Network works closely with College Careers Consultants, ensuring that it provides enhancements in this area, also drawing on data and external peers. It acts as the central focus point for employers, ensuring that relationships are strengthened. The University's approach to employer engagement ensures that effective approaches can be made both in response to an employer, and more proactively to expand and develop interaction.

2.44 The University's sustained engagement with employers, which enhances learning and employment opportunities for students, is **good practice**.

2.45 From the range of evidence considered by the team on the University's processes, it is evident that sound procedures are in place which effectively monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources to enable student development. Meetings with students attested that the University's policies are understood by them and are being implemented in practice. The review team found evidence and heard examples of how the University had responded to student feedback and enhanced arrangements to support student development. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student Engagement

Findings

2.46 The University engages students using a number of formal and informal mechanisms at programme, School, College and University level. The University has a positive relationship with the Guild of Students and the elected officers sit on a number of University and College committees and working groups. Senior staff and elected officers meet often on an informal basis and officers receive briefings prior to Senate. The University Executive Board (UEB) meets with the Guild Sabbatical Officers five times during the academic session, with a shared agenda and an alternating chair.

2.47 The University provides funding that enables the Guild of Students to maintain the student representation system. The system is overseen by a joint University and Guild committee, the Student Representation System Advisory Board (SRSAB), which reports to the University Education Committee (UEC). The system adheres to a Code of Practice on the Student Representation System. Student representatives and Staff Liaison Contacts receive a handbook and training from the Guild. In addition, some Colleges and Schools provide supplementary training and briefings for student representatives.

2.48 Student-Staff Committees are co-chaired by staff and students. They meet at least three times a year and submit an annual report to the University, which is then shared with the Guild. Student representatives also provide feedback through an annual survey, which the Guild of Students presents to SRSAB with recommendations to improve the system. Staff involved in the representation system attend an annual SRSAB forum to enable them to provide feedback on the system. A summary of the annual reports makes up the Student Voice Report, which is considered by the SRSAB and subsequently by the University Education Committee and College Directors of Education. The action plan developed in response to this report is then overseen by the SRSAB. Any action taken at University level by the UEC as a result of feedback gathered from Student-Staff Committees is reported back to the wider student body via the College Conferences (Student Rep Fora).

2.49 Within taught programmes, senior representatives, School and College representatives provide representation on the corresponding level of University committees and facilitate the communication of information. Postgraduate research students are represented at School level, College level and on the Graduate School Management Board. In addition to postgraduate research representatives, the University has Westmere Scholars: five paid postgraduate research students who facilitate cross-discipline events and provide a student perspective to University projects.

2.50 All students can provide feedback through Module Evaluation Questionnaires, including mid-term questionnaires on some programmes, and surveys. Non final-year undergraduate students complete the Birmingham Student Survey, final-year students complete the National Student Survey and postgraduate students complete the PTES and Postgraduate Research Experience Survey PRES. The University responds to this feedback by providing action plans and 'you said, we did' posters at a local level, in addition to an annual email from the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education).

2.51 Students are encouraged to speak to staff informally to provide feedback, and individual lecturers run focus groups and discuss the student experience during seminars.

Decisions made by the University adhere to the Policy on Consulting Students on Major Changes.

2.52 Students are involved in the review of programmes and are consulted when modifications are proposed. External examiner reports are discussed at the Student-Staff Committee meetings. The annual review process requires Schools to evaluate the student feedback that has been received.

2.53 The VCIR includes student representatives as part of the panel when education matters are discussed, and students are given a briefing prior to the event.

2.54 The University provides a number of student-led enhancement projects where students can contribute to improving the student experience at the University.

2.55 The design of the student engagement systems within the University would enable the Expectation to be met. The University provides opportunities for students to engage in their University experience and to make improvements to the system. Through the developed systems, the University is required to consult with students and act on feedback it receives at programme, College and University level.

2.56 The review team considered the evidence provided by the institution prior to the visit. During the visit, the team were provided with further documentation and also saw groups of students and staff who were able to triangulate the documentation that had been provided and describe their personal experience of the University.

2.57 The University values the student voice and has implemented a number of changes in the last couple of years to improve and standardise the representative process and the ways in which the University communicates with students. The University is reactive to feedback provided by the Guild of Students and individual students, and the University gives responsibility to students to raise potential improvements, for example the inclusion of an elected Postgraduate Sabbatical Officer to the Guild of Students, or changes to the consultations on major changes policy.

2.58 The University is continuing to develop opportunities for students to be partners in their student experience and is currently developing a Student Communication and Engagement Strategy. The University routinely encourages students to feed back where there is a direct correlation between a University activity and the student experience.

2.59 Some Schools within the University have developed intuitive ways to close the feedback loop and keep students informed. Some lecturers hold their own focus groups, and before students attend an NHS trust placement they are shown previous student feedback and an action plan from the NHS trust as a result of the feedback. These students are therefore able to comment on their experience by using and building on this data.

2.60 The University provides opportunities at all levels for students to provide feedback on their student experience and make changes on the basis of this feedback in a timely way. Therefore the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk in this area 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

2.61 The University Regulations on Assessment, Progression and Award, supported by the Code of Practice on Taught Programmes and Module Assessment and the Code of Practice on External Examining (Taught Provision), are the cornerstones of the framework for the assessment of students. They contain the principles and processes for ensuring equitable and rigorous assessment across programmes and modules.

2.62 The Regulations and the Code of Practice on Taught Programmes and Module Assessment state that credit and qualifications may only be awarded upon the achievement of module and programme learning outcomes. All modules are marked numerically from 0 to 100 (unless an exemption is granted to mark on a pass/fail basis).

2.63 The review team considers that these policies and procedures would enable the University to operate equitable, valid and reliable assessment processes. The team explored the operation of these through a thorough review of documentation and through discussion with academic and professional services staff, and with students.

2.64 University assessment regulations, policies and procedures are available to staff via the University's intranet site. Student Handbooks contain information on assessment, in accordance with the guidance on the content of handbooks produced by Registry.

2.65 The Code of Practice on Taught Programmes and Module Assessment contains guidance for marking and moderation practices. The guidance defines when moderation is required, the methods of moderation that can be used, the outcomes from the moderation process, and the actions designed to ensure consistency of marking and moderation across modules of the same level within a programme. This Code of Practice sets out the minimum expectations and Schools are free to strengthen this guidance when necessary. The review team heard that there are processes in place for the importation of marks obtained by students when studying abroad, overseen by the International Relations department. A working party is currently formulating further recommendations which will be considered in due course. The moderation process, overseen by the external examiners, serves to ensure that these are appropriate and comparable. The expectations surrounding assessment practice for collaborative provision are set out in each legal agreement.

2.66 Module approval requires provision of the learning outcomes and how these will be assessed (including re-assessment for module failure). Programme approval requires the production of learning outcomes and the type of assessment that will test achievement of these; a curriculum map that links skills to modules; and an assessment matrix that links the type of assessment with each module.

2.67 Programme documentation for students relating to assessment is produced by the College, School or Department in accordance with the guidance on the content of handbooks produced by Registry. This will include, for example, marking criteria appropriate to the nature of the discipline, the methods of assessment and model answers.

2.68 Students are less content with feedback from staff following assessment. This is acknowledged by both the University and the Guild of Students. The University has recently taken a decision to reduce the period of time in which work will be returned to students from 20 working days to 15. However, the Guild and students have some concerns over this, as their evidence indicates that many students are unhappy with the quality of feedback they receive, as much as or more than its timeliness, while the reduction in turnaround time could have an adverse effect on the quality of feedback received. The review team heard about projects designed to enhance feedback quality. For instance, the introduction of the new VLE will facilitate more effective feedback on students' work and it is encouraging greater use of online submission of work and online marking. The University stated that staff are using the VLE for online quizzes and assessments and to provide online feedback, usually written, but also in the form of audio and video feedback. The review team also heard that since 2014 all Colleges provide banks of anonymised, previously assessed work so that students can see examples of feedback. In addition, the team was told that students are given samples of essays to mark and provide feedback on the work reviewed; this exercise is followed by an active dialogue within the student group, led by a member of staff.

2.69 The Birmingham Assessment for Learning Initiative (BALI) used the Transforming the Experience of Students through Assessment (TESTA) methodology to undertake reviews of assessment in Schools/Departments across the University, auditing the current practice in undergraduate programmes. Final-year students were asked to complete an Assessment Evaluation Questionnaire and to take part in focus groups. This was undertaken by postgraduate researchers who wrote a report incorporating the information from these three sources. The report was used to stimulate discussions within Schools, requiring them to consider actions to improve their assessment practices. This project helped to ensure that assessment across each year of the programme is coherent, that students are not over assessed, that appropriate skills are tested and that feedback can 'feed forward' to subsequent assessments. Using their learning from BALI the University led a collaboration with the universities of Nottingham, Edinburgh and Glasgow to identify issues in assessment and feedback related to particular subjects and to share good practice - the Leading Enhancement through Assessment and Feedback project (LEAF). The strategically driven and systematic implementation of BALI internally to use assessment to improve students' learning, which is shared with other UK universities through the LEAF project, is **good practice**.

2.70 The University has a regulation and supporting policies on unacceptable academic practice. The Student Conduct Regulation 8 is supported by Codes of Practice on Plagiarism, Ethics, Research and Misconduct and Fitness to Practise Committees. All processes relating to student conduct are managed by Student Services; advice for staff is provided on the intranet and students are aware of their responsibilities.

2.71 Postgraduate Teaching Assistants (PGTAs) may be involved in assessment processes. There is a Code of Practice on Teaching and Academic Support Provided by Registered Students, which includes a requirement for PGTAs to attend training provided by the Centre for Learning and Academic Development and Learning Spaces (CLAD-LS). The Code of Practice sets out the level to which PGTAs can be involved in teaching and assessment and details the responsibility of the School to ensure that students access the relevant training provided by CLAD-LS.

2.72 Regulations governing Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL) and the associated policy and procedures are accessible via the University website. The policy document directs applicants to the Admissions Office for further guidance, if required. Admissions Tutors are able to discuss potential APL requests with individual applicants.

2.73 The review team considers that the University operates equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment, including for the recognition of prior learning. The Expectation is met and the 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

2.74 The Code of Practice on External Examining (Taught Provision) sets out the University's requirements of both external examiners and University staff. The Code maps explicitly to *Chapter B7* of the Quality Code.

2.75 Schools are required to ensure that all programmes of study leading to an award have one or more external examiners appointed in accordance with the criteria set out in the University's Code. An external examiner is also appointed for the Personal Skills Award. The University Registry sends an annual update to Schools on existing external examiner appointments, and appointments are required to be made for new programmes as part of the programme approval process. A standard nomination template is used, ensuring that nominations meet the person specification as set out in the Quality Code. Nominations are signed off at School and College level and then considered by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education) or Deputy. Schools confirm appointments annually, giving confirmation that no reciprocal arrangements exist. A report is then considered by the University Quality Assurance Committee. Appointments are for four years, exceptional extensions being considered by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education) using a standard form, and termination of appointments is clearly set out in the Code of Practice.

2.76 The University is planning (through the Teaching Academy) to set up an event for those staff aspiring to undertake external examining. The University's promotion criteria include undertaking the role of external examiner.

2.77 An appointment letter, the Code of Practice and the University Guidance for External Examiners are provided to all external examiners along with a dedicated webpage. Examiners are invited to attend an annual induction event which includes University presentations and a session from programme staff. The event is well attended. Schools provide programme-specific documentation to external examiners, including programme and module specifications and a copy of the previous examiner's final report; examiners are asked to confirm in their report whether they received this information.

2.78 Examiners are provided with draft assessments for comment and approval and are required to consider the consistency and accuracy of marking standards for a programme of study. Examiners are not permitted to change the mark of any student, although they may propose a level of moderation or re-marking to be undertaken by the internal markers as set out in the Code of Practice. Examiners are full members of Boards of Examiners and are expected to attend meetings to scrutinise and endorse outcomes.

2.79 All external examiners are required to complete an annual report that includes comments on academic standards in relation to external frameworks, the rigour of assessment processes in relation to learning outcomes for the programme and the level of student achievement. Opportunities are also provided for examiners to comment on opportunities for programme enhancement and to identify instances of good practice. The report form also allows for specific concerns to be raised by an examiner for consideration by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education).

2.80 All reports are read by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education) or Deputy and a member of Registry staff. Any developmental issues and good practice raised by the examiner are sent to the School in a summary sheet with the full report. Schools are

required to respond to the issues within six to eight weeks and responses are sent in the form of a letter from the Head of School or School Head of Education and copied to Registry staff. Responses at the level of the College or University are provided where appropriate. A summary of comments from reports is reported biannually to UQAC, which considers the main themes. A summary report is considered by the UEB, ensuring oversight. Key issues are also reported to Senate through regular reports from UQAC. In respect of reports from individual PhD examinations, an equivalent process is in place with the Graduate School Management Board receiving an annual report for onward reporting to UQAC and UEB.

2.81 External examiner names, positions and institutions are provided to students in the student handbooks or the VLE and Schools are required to ensure that Student-Staff Committees discuss external examiner reports and confirm that reports have been seen. Students can request an external examiner's report from the Registry, and the University produces guidance for students on external examiner matters, including the role of the external examiner, the process for the consideration of external examiners' reports, and the role students may have in the external examiner system. Where feasible, it is expected that external examiners will meet with a representative student group to gain additional feedback on the programme, and the report form offers the opportunity to report on this where it has taken place.

2.82 Although the process for sharing examiner reports was clear, and there was evidence that this had been implemented, students whom the team met did not appear to have made use of these reports.

2.83 From the evidence accessed by the review team, including the Code of Practice, a range of examiner reports and the University's summary reports, it was evident to the team that the University has sound procedures in place and is making scrupulous use of external examiners. In addition to the systematic and robust use of external examiners for its programmes as described, it was also evident to the review team that the University is making use of feedback from examiners to inform its teaching practice. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review

Findings

2.84 The University has in place two key processes that fulfil programme monitoring and programme review functions: an Annual Review and the periodic VCIR.

2.85 The Annual Review process, described in Guidelines on Annual Review, is run in partnership between Academic Services and Schools and Colleges, facilitated by College Academic Policy Partners and (for postgraduate research provision) the University Graduate School. The quinquennial VCIR scheme provides an innovative vehicle that provides an opportunity for the educational portfolio to be analysed within the context of a School's research and other strategic ambitions. The University believes that this approach is the most effective way to provide an analysis of educational activities in a research-intensive institution, and that it is a more appropriate and effective approach than scrutiny of educational activities in isolation.

2.86 The review team concluded that the approaches taken would enable the Expectation to be met. Following a review of a representative sample of each of the various reports and committee papers, the review team discussed the arrangements with appropriate academic and professional staff and students.

2.87 Annual review begins with a consideration of each module based on statistical data, student feedback, external examiner comments and feedback from other stakeholders, such as PSRBs. A list of actions that form part of the Annual Review process is produced. Annual programme review is conducted in a similar fashion but requires a detailed analysis across student diversity categories and provides an opportunity to identify resource, space, timetabling or staff issues. School summary forms then offer an opportunity to reflect on these issues at School level, and to identify any further actions.

2.88 Once a cycle of Annual Review of taught programmes has been completed, University Quality Assurance Committee (UQAC) considers any University-level themes (for example, resources, timetabling, learning spaces) and takes action as appropriate.

2.89 The Collaborative Provision Office oversees the University's Collaborative Provision Review process. This is normally undertaken prior to the expiry of any legal agreement governing the arrangement, and considers how the arrangement has operated, including the maintenance and enhancement of academic quality and standards. Although the primary aim is to determine whether the arrangement should be renewed for a further period, the process also ensures that the collaborative provision undergoes a measure of programme review.

2.90 Postgraduate research (PGR) provision is subject to Annual Review. This process provides Schools with an opportunity to reflect on, and evaluate the effectiveness of, their PGR programmes and support for PGR students. It covers all research programmes (MRes, MPhil, PhD and Professional Doctorates) including those with taught elements, and considers data on PGR admissions, submission and completion rates, examination results, and feedback from students and external examiners.

2.91 VCIR is a strategic and integrated peer review, providing an evidence-based, holistic view of the performance of a whole School and its contribution to the attainment of the University's strategy. It includes reviews of teaching quality; research quality; market demand; external and internal future challenges; structure and processes; people and resources; and strategic integration. A key element is the Initial Appraisal Meeting, which allows detailed scrutiny of education issues through a range of performance data and information relating to education. This includes consideration of the portfolio of programmes offered by a School and how these sit together, based upon a data pack. The educational aspect of the VCIR functions as the University's 'periodic review' of learning and teaching. The working of the process is provided in the document VCIR Guidance for Schools.

2.92 Outcomes of individual VCIRs are reported to the University Executive Board (UEB). The education-related extracts of VCIR reports are considered by UQAC and the University Education Committee (UEC). UQAC also considers subsequent progress reports on relevant actions arising, confirming to UEB that consideration of action plans has taken place and highlighting areas of particular concern or merit. VCIR is continually monitored and revised where necessary by the Planning Office, and proposals for procedural change are submitted to UEB.

2.93 The University Quality Assurance Committee (UQAC), Collaborative Provision Committee (CPC) and Graduate School Management Board (GSMB) have strategic oversight of any amendments to the processes they oversee, including the Annual Review of taught, collaborative and research programmes. GSMB and CPC report to UQAC, and UQAC reports to Senate. In addition, the UEB considers annual summary reports on the outcomes of the Annual Review process at undergraduate, postgraduate taught and PGR level, maintaining academic oversight at the highest level of the institution.

2.94 The review team analysed a sample of recent documentation and discussed the detailed implementation of the VCIR process described above in meetings with staff and students. The team concluded that appropriate weight is given to the educational provision of the School being reviewed, alongside the other elements considered in the VCIR.

2.95 The review team confirms that the University operates appropriate monitoring and review procedures. The Expectation is met and 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

2.96 The University manages complaints and appeals processes through the Code of Practice on Student Concerns and Complaints and the Code of Practice on Academic Appeals Procedures. The codes of practice clearly lay out each stage of the process and provide timeframes to students confirming when they are likely to receive outcomes. Students are provided with information about the complaints and appeals policy during induction, within Student Handbooks and on the University website.

2.97 Students can seek advice regarding the procedures through Student Experience Officers, lecturers, Welfare Tutors, Personal Tutors or the Advice and Representation System within the Guild of Students.

2.98 All appeals and formal complaints have oversight from the central University team that ensures consistency. Staff attempt to resolve appeals and complaints at School level to provide students with a timely outcome. Training and updates are provided to all decision makers within these processes.

2.99 If issues cannot be resolved at School level, students are able to pursue matters through central University panels. Where students are invited to attend hearings, they are able to bring a student officer from the Guild of Students, a fellow student or a member of staff to help support them.

2.100 An annual analysis of the numbers and trends of complaints and appeals is considered by the University Quality Assurance Committee, Senate and University Executive Board (and reported to Council).

2.101 The processes that the University follows would enable the Expectation to be met. There are clear codes of practice, which students and staff are able to access. The codes of practice are fair and accessible and allow students to challenge decisions or aspects of their experience. The processes ensure that any complaint or appeal is considered in a timely way and due consideration is given by trained staff.

2.102 The review team considered the paperwork that the University provided: the codes of practice, the analysis that resulted from complaints and appeals that students had made, and how the codes of practice were advertised. The team then tested this information with different groups of staff and students to check understanding.

2.103 In practice, the University adheres to its codes of practice in terms of the processes and timeliness. The University receives a small number of complaints and appeals in comparison to its size and this leads to a proportionately small number of complaints being raised to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.

2.104 The majority of academic appeals submitted to the University are accepted, usually on the grounds of extenuating circumstances that could not be raised at the time of the assessment.

2.105 Students are aware of the formal processes but appear to be reluctant to use them, due to the trust that they have with staff to take all possible action during the informal

resolution stage. This is in spite of the clear communications that students receive during induction and from staff themselves.

2.106 The codes of practice are clear, timely and well advertised to students. The University applies its processes consistently and fairly which results in a low number of complaints being received by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator. Consequently, the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.107 The University's definition and classification of collaborative provision are derived from, and consistent with, the FHEQ. Programmes provided in collaboration with other institutions are developed by the University where it considers there is a strategic case for such partnerships. The University has developed a formal policy for Collaborative Provision which is embodied in its Collaborative Provision Policy. This comprehensive document sets out the University's principles for engaging in specific collaborative arrangements and a full explanation of its processes for approval and monitoring. The University emphasises that there must be a justification in terms of its wider strategy for each proposed collaborative programme or arrangement. It actively seeks partners of high quality, while also responding to approaches from potential partners. There is a Collaborative Provision Office (CPO) in the Registry, which handles the administrative dimension, and ensures that other central services are appropriately involved. The CPO holds a register of collaborations, which records programmes and partners together with programme-specific notes where necessary.

2.108 Continuing academic oversight of collaborative programmes is the responsibility of the Collaborative Provision Committee (CPC). Minutes show that CPC meets the requirements of its Terms of Reference, including monitoring of national and international developments in its sphere of activity. Proposals for new and revised programmes are required to go through approval processes identical to those for programmes to be delivered at the University. There are, however, some additional requirements, including a formal risk assessment and the exercise of due diligence about proposed partner organisations, which lead to legal agreements where these are required. These processes are overseen by CPC before the proposal goes to UPARC and into University's normal programme approval mechanism. Collaborative provision is subject to monitoring and review processes, which are slightly augmented from the internal processes but otherwise replicate them. External examiners are appointed by the University, and are required to follow its usual Code of Practice.

2.109 These processes would enable the University to meet the Expectation. The review team tested the processes in practice through reading a range of documentation, meetings with academic and professional staff from the University, and video-conference discussions with staff and students from one its major and longstanding partners.

2.110 The review team saw evidence that the strategic fit of a proposed partner is presented and considered at a meeting of the CPC, where the initial proposal from a college is required to include a detailed analysis of the rationale for the arrangement, dealing with both programme and partner. The business case for the partnership is dealt with separately from the academic case, the two being brought together only when the business case has been endorsed and approved. This is done using a comprehensive pro forma which is sent to the CP Office and CPC. Staff from the Singapore Institute of Management confirmed the strategic approach of the University and explained how the relationship had developed and was continuing to develop.

2.111 The review team was also able to confirm the full involvement of external examiners in collaborative programmes. For example, external examiner reports from University

College Birmingham are considered by the Accreditation Visitor. The office of the Director of External Relations regularly audits information produced by partners, and is required to sign it off before release. The University emphasises that it retains full responsibility for all awards made in its name; the team can confirm that, on the basis of evidence seen and heard, this is the case.

2.112 Students and staff confirmed that there is adequate provision of learning resources and timely and appropriate feedback on work; any issues raised are dealt with in a timely and appropriate manner; and the information that students had received about the course was accurate. Officers of the Guild seemed uncertain whether students from institutions in collaborative arrangements were represented by them, and noted that students spending a year abroad had sometimes presented a problem, although these issues are now being addressed.

2.113 The regulatory framework and Codes of Practice are comprehensive and clear. The University has clear strategic objectives in engaging in collaborative provision, and systematic and secure mechanisms for the approval, delivery and monitoring of programmes that are identical to the University's policies and practices for its on-campus provision. The team saw and heard evidence that the policies are widely understood and implemented, that students are fully informed about their rights and obligations, and that they have a high regard for their experience.

2.114 The review team notes the robustness of the University's policies, processes and practices for identifying and working with its collaborative partners and the rigour of managing programme design, delivery and review in a manner that not only replicates the processes for programmes delivered in Birmingham, including the careful and distinct consideration of the academic and business cases for the proposed arrangements, but also adds additional elements to take account of the distinctive characteristics and requirements of assuring quality in collaborative provision. The rigour of the University's strategic and operational management of its collaborative provision, which secures effective partnerships, is **good practice**.

2.115 Arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with others are implemented securely and managed effectively. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Findings

2.116 The University has a Postgraduate Research Strategy 2015-20 that governs the strategic direction for research degree provision. The Director of Graduate Studies reports to the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Knowledge Transfer) and Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education), with principal responsibility for research degree matters falling to the former.

2.117 The Graduate School Management Board has institutional oversight at the operational level and reports to the University Research Committee. GSMB also reports to the UQAC, of which the Director of Graduate Studies is a member.

2.118 The University Graduate School (UGS) supports the postgraduate research lifecycle from induction to graduation, augmenting School and College provision and acting as a conduit for the identification and sharing of good practice in relation to research degrees. The UGS manages the Postgraduate Research Annual Review and provides a development programme and other support resources for research students, in collaboration with Corporate Services and college partners. UGS's activities are monitored by the GSMB.

2.119 The University has an established and historical track record for research excellence, into which research students are admitted. This is supported by extensive funding across all seven Research Councils providing 200 research students with scholarships. There is evidence of a pervasive culture for research across the University.

2.120 The University has recently established a new Postgraduate Research Student Centre, the Westmere building, which opened in October 2015 and which provides research students with dedicated study spaces and support services. This supplements existing University and College-level resources.

2.121 The University's Regulations and Codes of Practice govern research degrees. These are clearly signposted to staff and students on the website, in handbooks and by email. The regulatory framework is kept under regular review and changes are considered by the GSMB and the Academic Policy and Regulations Committee. Students whom the review team met confirmed that they were aware of, and understood, the regulations, and knew where to seek advice if necessary.

2.122 An Annual Review process is in place to monitor and evaluate research degree provision against University-wide agreed indicators and targets. This process includes appropriate consideration of submission and completion rates, research student feedback and demographic and destinations data. Each School produces a report that is considered by the College Graduate Committee and College Director of Quality. A College report is then considered by the GSMB, which reviews the reports and formulates appropriate actions. These reports are then considered by UQAC.

2.123 The Code of Practice on Supervision and Monitoring Progress of Postgraduate Researchers sets out the processes for research student feedback, which enables students to provide feedback on their experience via a number of mechanisms including the annual

progress review process, the School Postgraduate Research Student Lead and the Head of School. Student-Staff Committees also operate at the postgraduate research level, where PRES data is also discussed before onward transmission through University committees. Research students are also represented on the appropriate committees, including GSMB. The team noted the University's and the Guild's recent plans to enhance research student representation, which included the introduction of a Postgraduate Sabbatical Officer post in the Guild with a focus on representing research students, as described in this report in relation to Expectation B5.

2.124 Entry criteria for all research programmes at the University are clearly set out in prospectuses and guidance for admissions staff is contained in the Code of Practice on the Admission of Students. All applications are reviewed by a team of admissions selectors and shortlisted candidates are invited to interview.

2.125 The entitlements and responsibilities of research students are set out in the Code of Practice on Supervision and Monitoring Progress of Postgraduate Researchers and supported by a plain English guide co-authored by the UGS and the Guild. Signposting is provided in School/College handbooks, the website and the VLE.

2.126 Induction events are provided at University and School levels in October and January and an online induction package, Doctoral Researcher Essentials, is available on the VLE.

2.127 The Code also establishes requirements for supervision that ensure that research students have an appropriately qualified lead supervisor, who is an academic expert in the appropriate field, and is supported by a supervisory team. The Head of School, using the Workload Allocation model, ensures that supervisors are not overloaded by taking into account supervision, teaching, research and other responsibilities. Supervisor training is provided by CLAD-LS in collaboration with the UGS. New supervisors are mandated to take the training. From 2015-16 refresher supervisor training will also be provided. Recognition of good supervision includes the UGS-administered University Award for Excellence in Supervision. Students whom the review team met confirmed that supervision arrangements are in accordance with requirements set out by the University's Code, that supervisors are accessible and that supervisory meetings take place on a regular basis. Equally, staff currently involved in supervision confirmed that they had attended supervisor training and intended to go to the refresher training.

2.128 Student progress is monitored regularly throughout the year at monthly supervisory meetings, as set out in the Code. Lead supervisors also complete an Annual Progress Review form. Completed forms are monitored by the College Progress Panel, which endorses or revises progress recommendations. Feedback is given to students by the College and support put in place where progress is unsatisfactory. Students are informed in writing of the review procedure and through the induction session. Supervisors also act as a point of reference for advice and guidance on the process. The Research Sub-Panel of the University Progress and Awards Board provides University-level scrutiny of research student progress recommendations and takes decisions concerning the progress and status of individual students. Students whom the team met reported that they are clear on what is required of them by way of progress review.

2.129 The University has an annual Development Needs Analysis process which identifies the skills development training for specific research students. The University provides a diverse programme of research and transferable skills development training at University, College and School level, mapped onto the Vitae Framework. The Talent Pool course offers enterprise and consultancy skills training, providing a bridge from the academy into employment routes outside of academia. There is also a Postgraduate Summer School for

PhD researchers. A Leading Academics programme provides the research student community with the opportunity to meet academic leaders and helps to develop their confidence and identity as leaders. A year-long programme is also provided by the UGS, which includes community and skills building through a range of activities, including a research poster conference and a writing summer school. Training provided on-campus is supplemented by a range of online skills development courses for those research students studying remotely. Research students are also offered the opportunity to take the Postgraduate Certificate of Advanced Research Methods and Skills. Students whom the review team met reported that they are also supported in taking advantage of external skills training offered through the University; students are content with the level and range of training opportunities and feel well supported and prepared for their PhD.

2.130 The criteria for assessment for all types of research degrees are set out in the University Regulations, which map to the FHEQ. Codes of Practice for Assessment of Research Degrees Theses and on Higher Doctorates provide full details on assessment and the examination processes. These are clearly outlined on the web guidance for research students. One internal and one external examiner are appointed for all examinations and vivas are chaired by an experienced academic member of staff not involved in the student's supervision. Online resources are provided to support students through the examination process. External examiner reports are considered by the University, first through consideration at School level, then to the GSMB and finally to the UQAC.

2.131 Appeals and complaints for research students are via the University Code of Practice on Student Concerns and Complaints and the Code of Practice on Academic Appeals Procedures, which apply to all students at the University. Regular reports on appeals are provided by Registry to UQAC and UEB. It was less clear that students whom the team met know about the appeal process, but they affirmed that they would know where to find information (and seek advice) should they need to make use of it.

2.132 The review team saw a range of evidence provided by the University on its policies and procedures relating to research degrees, as well as evidence that these processes are securely implemented in practice. Meetings with students and those staff with responsibilities for research degree provision at the University provided further evidence that such systems are kept under appropriate review, and the student experience is enhanced as a result. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.133 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.

2.134 Of the 11 Expectations in this area, all are met, with low risk. There are no recommendations and no affirmations, reflecting the findings of the review team that the University not only provides an effective learning environment but continually reviews its processes to gain evidence for quality assurance and improvement, and is proactive and ambitious for itself and its students.

2.135 The review team identified six features of good practice. These relate to the University's work with applicants; its valuing and promotion of good teaching; its attention to student learning, including through assessment; the quality of its engagement with employers in promoting employability; the systematic implementation of BALI, shared with other UK universities through the LEAF project; and the strategic and management aspects of its collaborative provision.

2.136 Together with the evidence of student engagement in these areas and the clear focus and commitment of the University to understanding and providing for the needs of students, these findings lead the review team to conclude that the quality of student learning opportunities at the University is **commended**.

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 website is the gateway to information for members of the public, prospective students, alumni and employers. Students and staff are directed to the virtual learning environment, which contains key information relating to programmes of study and facilities that can be accessed. The website content is managed through agreed processes within web governance documentation, which require all content to be accessible.

3.2 Within the University, the University Quality Assurance Committee (UQAC) has oversight of the provision of information for students and applicants which includes responsibility for the completeness, accuracy, reliability and fitness of purpose of information. Different teams provide reports giving assurance of the information they have provided. UQAC has the authority to approve changes and improvements to the provision of University information.

3.3 Prospective students receive information from a variety of sources, through the contact strategy, delivered by the contact team, printed and online publicity, and face-to-face communication through open days, visit days and, where appropriate, interviews. Prospective students can access information regarding student support using the University website, as well as programme information. Successful applicants receive personalised videos from the University and telephone calls from current students to answer any questions that may arise during the summer. To ensure that the information provided to prospective students is suitable, focus groups are conducted annually. These activities contribute to the feature of good practice identified by the review team in relation to Expectation B2.

3.4 The University requires students and staff to adhere to a suite of codes of practice in relation to key roles, such as personal tutoring and academic feedback. Mutual expectations are laid out within a Student Charter. All codes of practice are reviewed annually by a specified owner and if required, a larger review is undertaken by a Committee or working group. All amendments to regulations are formally approved by Academic Policy and Regulations Committee (APRC). Information about the University's regulations is provided during enrolment, when students agree to abide by the rules, and within the student handbooks. External audiences can access information regarding quality assurance using the University website. Staff access to this information is primarily through the intranet, which contains the University's Academic Policy and Quality Framework.

3.5 Information regarding collaborative provision arrangements is maintained by the Collaborative Provision Team and the International Relations Team and is available on the intranet; the register is reviewed annually by the Collaborative Provision Committee. The Programme Director within collaborative provision arrangements retains responsibility for the accuracy and accessibility of the information provided by the collaborative partners. The Collaborative Provision Team writes at least biannually to organisations and PSRBs to update them on changes to policies and procedures.

3.6 Students are introduced to the University experience through induction and re-induction programmes that are held at a local level using central resources. Students primarily access information while studying through the virtual learning environment, maintained by CLAD-LS, which houses key documents and programme information. This is in line with the University's 'digital first' communication policy. Students can access academic results and final award results through the virtual learning environment. Following completion of their studies, students receive an official academic transcript and a certificate where an award has been obtained. Alumni are able to continue to access the University's career services two years following graduation.

3.7 In principle the University has designed a system where key individuals have responsibility for ensuring that information at all levels is accurate and fit for purpose. The University requires annual review of this material and to ensure consistency, overall responsibility for information rests with UQAC. This system provides expertise in information design depending on the intended audience and purpose, while ensuring that all information is reviewed.

3.8 The team tested the Expectation by reviewing the information provided to different audiences before meeting with different groups, including students, staff and employers, to ascertain whether the information was fit for purpose from their perspective. The team also tested with staff the creation and review processes that the University has in place to ensure the accuracy of information.

3.9 The information processes that are in place are effective in ensuring that information is fit for purpose and remains current. Staff are aware of the processes for updating and reviewing information and feel able to use these processes effectively. All audiences are clear that information is accessible and useful. It was noted by the team that the University was awarded the MetrixLab Website of the Year 2014 in the Career and Education category. However, at the local level, information for students on joint honours programmes, for instance on timetabling and module availability, has been found by students to be confusing, although the University has put measures in place to improve support for joint honours students, including access to more comprehensive information.

3.10 Suitable processes are in place to assure the quality and accuracy of information about the University. These processes are adhered to and reviewed regularly. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and that there is a low level of risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

3.11 In reaching its judgement on the quality of information about learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

3.12 The Expectation in this area is met, with low risk. There are no recommendations and no affirmations in this area. The good practice identified in relation to Expectations B2 and B3 also relates to the quality of information, which contributes to practice in those areas.

3.13 The review team found that publicly available information is transparent and accurate. Information provided for prospective students is extensive, engaging and highly tailored to their needs, enabling them to make informed choices. Information is also made available for collaborative partners, and the accuracy of information provided by partners is scrupulously checked.

3.14 From its reading of documentation and discussions with students, the review team finds that information for current students about their programmes and relevant procedures is generally clear, accurate, useful and timely, although there are some areas where there might be room for improvement, and the University is working, for instance, on joint honours programmes. The achievements of graduates are suitably recorded and work is in progress on an Enhanced Transcript.

3.15 Data is generated for academics and managers to reflect on the outcomes of student learning and to improve quality.

3.16 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 describes its linkage of quality enhancement to quality assurance in the Academic Policy and Quality Framework. This is supported by the activities of the Centre for Learning and Academic Development and Learning Spaces (CLAD-LS) and the newly established University Teaching Academy that coordinates educational enhancement and supports the identification, sharing and dissemination of good practice.

4.2 The review team established through documentary analysis and meetings with academic and professional services staff that the strategic approach to education and educational enhancement is managed through the formal committee structure, regular informal network meetings at a number of levels within the University, and a hub-and-spoke model for many of the student-facing professional services.

4.3 The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education) chairs the University Education Committee (UEC). Institutional enhancement priorities are agreed and initiated at an appropriate level of governance. The University adopts a strategy rooted in evidence-based practice; successful enhancement occurs through the identification of effective practices using a wide range of evidence sources and then sharing good practice with staff, at a number of levels, through networks that enable them to develop ideas and their own work. A key element is the Teaching Academy which is directed by the Deputy Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education). Evidence-based approaches to teaching are a key focus of the Teaching Academy and the internal educational journal, *Education in Practice*. For example, as a follow-up to the BALI project, the Teaching Academy chose 'assessment and feedback' as one of its enhancement themes, to further identify and disseminate good practice.

4.4 Outside the formal committee structures, the review team heard of a number of regular informal network meetings. For example, the Vice-Chancellor has a weekly Monday Morning Meeting (M3) that involves about 80 senior staff, where a two-way dialogue takes place on issues of current interest. In addition, there is a weekly Education Team meeting involving the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education), Deputy Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education), Deputy Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) and Director of Registry and Policy Advisor (Education). Directors of Education and Academic Services Directors also attend regularly. The combination of formal governance structures and established informal discussion networks contributes to the enhancement of student learning opportunities and is **good practice**.

4.5 The University provided numerous examples of recent institutionally led enhancement projects, including the Birmingham Assessment for Learning Initiative; the University-wide provision of a new VLE and a lecture recording system; a revised Code of Practice for Personal Tutoring and Academic Feedback, supported by the establishment of the role of Deputy Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience); and the individual Transition Review for all first-year students.

4.6 Further initiatives cited were the Academic Skills Centre; the Birmingham Project, where first-year students can work together in teams to tackle a real-world challenge; Widening Horizons modules; Modules Outside the Main Discipline; and Languages for All, offering all students the opportunity to study a foreign language as a credit-bearing part of their programme or as study in addition to their programme. Further initiatives identified by

the University include the University of Birmingham School, which has created multiple opportunities to enhance the experience of students in the School of Education as well as those from Schools across the University; student ambassadors, who have worked with teachers and academics to introduce Year 6 pupils to the University and to secondary school life; and the Postgraduate Certificate in Advanced Research Methods (PGCARMS), which is available for PGR students and which consists of a blend of advanced research methods and transferable skills modules for the specific development needs and goals of each individual, supported by the University Graduate School and College and Academic Services colleagues.

4.7 The systematic use of contextualised information underpinned each of these developments, and is found in the holistic approach to periodic programme review within the VCIR. The pervasive culture of evidence-based and contextualised decision making contributes to the enhancement of students' learning opportunities and is **good practice**.

4.8 The University has an institutional Education Enhancement Fund that supports a variety of initiatives, including institution-wide activities, and staff and student-led educational enhancement projects. The University and Guild of Students have worked together to enhance the support and recognition available for student volunteering, allowing students increased opportunities to undertake activities within the local community. In the future, these activities will be recorded as part of an Enhanced Transcript.

4.9 The University has introduced Teaching Academy Awards for Educational Enhancement and Innovation for academic or professional services staff from across the University. Nominations can be made by staff, students or by self-nomination in one of four categories: educational innovation; research-informed teaching; leadership in teaching; and support of student learning. There are also plans to introduce Teaching Academy Awards for postgraduates who teach, with one award per College.

4.10 The review team learnt that many of the student-facing professional services operate a hub-and-spoke model, allowing local embedding of centrally managed staff within Colleges and/or Schools. The central oversight of professional services, together with the local ownership of processes through their embedded 'partners' within Colleges, contributes to the enhancement of student learning opportunities and is **good practice**.

4.11 In conclusion, the review team confirms that the University takes deliberate steps to improve the quality of student learning opportunities. The Expectation is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.12 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 handbook.

4.13 The Expectation is met, with low risk. There are no recommendations or affirmations in this area and three features of good practice were identified.

4.14 The review team was presented with many examples of deliberate steps taken at institutional level to improve students' learning opportunities, ranging from the Teaching Academy to the Education Enhancement Fund for student and staff-led projects and the creation of new learning spaces, including the new library. Furthermore, outside these specific projects, the team found a real strategic commitment to enhancement in the University, together with governance, management and deliberate structures and cultures that facilitate continuous improvement for the benefit of students.

4.15 For these reasons the review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the University is **commended**.

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1 The University places a strong emphasis on preparing its students for employment. It has developed and implemented an extensive range of activities and support services to promote and sustain the employability of its students and graduates, having invested significantly in this field since 2009. Central provision and support comes through the Careers Network (CN) with oversight from the Employability Committee. In addition, each College has an Employability Team which, in partnership with the College Director of Education, provides direct and proactive support to students.

5.2 The University has invested some £4 million in student employability since the 2011-12 academic year to promote these and other strategic developments to support and guide student employability. It is claimed that this investment and the consequential actions have underpinned the University's success in becoming the *Times/Sunday Times* University of the Year for Graduate Employment in 2015-16 and in obtaining other awards, including one from the National Centre for Work Experience.

5.3 The CN is a manifestation of the University's hub-and-spoke model of the relationship between the central services and the Colleges and Schools, described in the section on Enhancement. It has brought together services and individuals from academic Schools and administrative departments, with College Employability Teams providing front-line services to students across the University. The University claims that this was unique in the sector and has now been adopted by other higher education institutions. Academic staff explained how employability was an integral element of curriculum design, including the development of placement modules, and modules and skills training that developed entrepreneurship awareness and skills. CN and academic staff in the Colleges work closely together.

5.4 There is a Student Engagement Team, developed by the Careers Network, using students to help students and recent graduates to identify their own employability. The Guild of Students actively engages with the CN in promoting employability and the development of appropriate skills. Students confirmed that they felt the University's provisions were helpful to them both in finding placements during their programmes and in seeking employment after graduation. They were particularly enthusiastic about the value of placements and the support they received in finding appropriate positions, even when it was not a requirement of their programmes. PGR students also noted how helpful the University had been in giving them opportunities and support for extracurricular activities and public engagement.

5.5 The University works closely with employers, from international companies to local and regional SMEs, to develop student employability and provide careers advice. Employers and placement providers comment favourably on Birmingham students and graduates. Some employers are actively involved in the design and delivery of programmes and modules through visiting lecturers. The University takes the view that good relationships with employers are of benefit to all parties, including students. The University strongly emphasises this partnership dimension, as described with regard to the good practice identified in relation to Expectation B4. The review team heard from several employers of their very supportive and positive attitude towards the University, and their appreciation of the range of contacts and activities in which they could engage as partners. Some employers were involved in curriculum design and/or programme delivery.

5.6 Overall, the team found an exceptionally wide range of activities which are well designed, coherent and coordinated and which are significantly beneficial to students, graduates, employers and the University.

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

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

Academic standards

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

Award

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

Blended learning

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

Credit(s)

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

Degree-awarding body

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

Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

Dual award or double award

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

e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

Enhancement

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

Expectations

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

Flexible and distributed learning

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

See also **distance learning**.

Framework

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

Framework for higher education qualifications

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

Good practice

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

Learning opportunities

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

Learning outcomes

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

Multiple awards

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

Operational definition

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

Programme (of study)

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

Programme specifications

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

Public information

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

Quality Code

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

Reference points

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

Subject Benchmark Statement

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

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)

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

Threshold academic standard

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

Virtual learning environment (VLE)

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

Widening participation

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

QAA1590 - R4634 - May 16

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2016
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel: 01452 557 050
Website: www.qaa.ac.uk