Higher Education Review of ifs University College

November 2014

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at ifs University College. The review took place from 17 to 20 November 2014 and was conducted by a team of five reviewers, as follows:

- Alison Blackburn
- Professor Mark Davies
- Penny Renwick
- Professor Jon Scott
- Matthew Kitching (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

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

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

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

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

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[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=106.
[3] QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us.
[4] Higher Education Review web pages: www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about ifs University College

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at ifs University College.

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

Good practice

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

- The facilitation of student awareness of, and engagement with, the financial services sector, for example through the professional networking events and the in-house publication Financial World (Expectation B4).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to ifs University College.

By the end of August 2015:

- specify learning outcomes for all interim awards where these awards are available as exit routes (Expectation A1)
- implement a clear and consistent policy to ensure that staff are appropriately prepared to teach at all levels and modes of delivery (Expectation B3)
- develop effective formal opportunities for students (in particular class representatives) to be actively engaged in the annual monitoring and review of their programmes (Expectation B5)
- develop and implement a clear and consistent approach to ensure that students receive feedback on their assessments that is timely and developmental (Expectation B6).

Affirmation of action being taken

No affirmations have been identified.

Theme: Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

ifs University College recognises the challenge of providing opportunities for student involvement given that the majority of its students are either studying part-time while in full-time employment, or studying online and therefore at a distance (including many based overseas). To meet this challenge the University College provides a range of opportunities for both individual and collective feedback; examples include the class representative system. Students who met the review team reported that they feel listened to and have good opportunities for communicating with staff.

Student representatives are also appointed on behalf of the student body to sit on the University College's deliberative committees up to and including Board of Governors level. There is no Students' Union, although initial discussions have taken place about the desirability of creating a students' association. Current students have associate membership of the University of London Union.

A specific aspect of the University College's approach is the Student Representation and Advocacy module which carries notional credit; this innovative module has been successfully completed by two cohorts of student representatives.

The University College is continuing to address recommendations made during its internal audit of student engagement, providing evidence of its continued focus on and commitment to student engagement.

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

About ifs University College

ifs University College evolved from the professional body, the Chartered Institute of Bankers (CIB), created in 1879. In 1987 the organisation was conferred with both a Royal Charter and charity status. The Institute of Financial Services was created in 1997 as a dual brand with the CIB to facilitate its widening financial education remit. It is now a separate entity offering educational services and continuing professional development to alumni of ifs University College. In 2006, as part of its strategic plan to apply for taught degree awarding powers (TDAP), it formally changed its name to ifs School of Finance. In January 2010 it became the first professional body to achieve TDAP, and then university college status in 2013. Both its not-for-profit and Chartered status transferred to the newly named organisation.

ifs University College's legal and Chartered remit restricts its provision to education in and about financial services. It provides a range of qualifications from financial capability (at GCSE/A-Level equivalent) to specialised professional awards, and both undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. This includes a specialist financially-oriented Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education that is offered to both its own staff and externally.

The University College does not receive direct funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England but it has formal designated status for all its higher education qualifications, thus giving full-time students access to loans from the Student Loans Company.

From 1996 the University College developed and delivered higher education qualifications in a collaborative arrangement, first with University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology and then, after the merger, with the University of Manchester, which awarded the degrees. The students were those of ifs University College. Collaborative qualifications were also developed for students to receive awards of the Universities of Surrey and Kent. The arrangements with Manchester and Surrey came to an end after the award of TDAP.

Currently there are 91 students studying towards University of Kent degrees; it is expected that this arrangement will be completed by 2017. The University College has approved arrangements for the future delivery of some of its programmes at further education colleges in England, but at the time of the review no students had as yet been recruited through these arrangements.

The self-evaluation document identifies five types of student cohort: distance learners; flexible learners (those who study in their own time and attend three workshops per study session); full-time students who attend lectures and follow a structured programme; students at dispersed campuses (in the UK or overseas); and students that have undertaken in-house accredited programmes. Delivery is organised through three faculties: Banking, Finance and Regulation; Enterprise, Accountancy and Economics; and Financial Capability. One programme, the BSc Finance and Accounting for Financial Services, is professionally accredited by the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants. The University College employs a small core of academic staff as well as drawing from a wider pool of academics and practitioners. They are employed either by other higher education institutions or the financial services sector, or are self employed.

A key feature of the University College's approach to providing education is its established arrangements with high profile corporate institutions, with whom it works to enable recognition of their in-house education programmes. These opportunities enable employees to develop further their careers on programmes that have been scrutinised and overseen by the University College and which enable credit recognition (but not the award of higher

education credits), and have facilitated the entry of a number of students onto ifs University College qualifications.

The University College's operations as a higher education degree-awarding body are overseen by a Board of Governors, membership of which includes a student representative. Responsibility for the academic standards and quality assurance of the qualifications rests with the Academic Board, which is assisted in its role by two sub committees: the Academic Standards and Quality Committee, and the Learning and Teaching Committee. The Academic Audit Committee is a standing committee of the Board of Governors and is responsible for assessing the effectiveness of all aspects of the University College's systems and procedures for managing standards and quality. The Collaborative Provision Committee oversees collaborative arrangements and reports to the Academic Standards and Quality Committee.

The University College is committed to providing students with an effective combination of academic and professional learning that allows them to develop a career in the sector with the skills sought by employers, and the conceptual underpinning that an academic qualification enables. The University College also provides full GCSE and A-level equivalent qualifications in financial capability that are delivered in schools and colleges across the country. These provide core financial literacy skills, and the A-level equivalent qualifications enable progression onto ifs University College degrees. About half of the current full-time student cohort has achieved one or more of the ifs University College's schools' qualifications.

Although the majority of academic staff are dispersed, the University College is committed to developing a shared sense of academic community, supported by effective engagement in research and scholarly activity. No distinction is made between core and associate staff in terms of the University College's expectations of, and support for, engagement in continuing professional development.

The previous QAA review of the institution was in 2007-08 as part of its application for taught degree awarding powers. The team was provided with information about the recommendations which the University College had received in this report. The team judged that the University College had considered and acted upon these recommendations in a careful and thorough way.

The review team was provided with a student submission, which had been compiled by student representatives who sat on the University College's deliberative committees, and led by the student representative on the Board of Governors. The team was able to meet with students who had contributed to the submission and who were able to endorse its content. The review team also met with a range of students both face-to-face and through a number of telephone conferences with students based outside of London, including those based overseas.

Explanation of the findings about ifs University College

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.

Explanation of the findings about ifs University College

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 In its self-evaluation document, the University College states that its General and Academic Regulations for Students are consistent with *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). These regulations include a credit framework, which aligns directly to that of the *Higher Education Credit Framework for England*. Additionally, the University College is in a period of transition from the time before it had been granted taught degree awarding powers. Some students are still working within the University of Kent regulations and will receive University of Kent awards. These regulatory frameworks for academic standards enable the University College to meet Expectation A1 of the Quality Code.

1.2 The review team tested this through reviewing documentation relating to the University College's credit framework and Code of Practice for Quality Assurance (Higher Education) (Code of Practice), and meeting with a range of staff.

1.3 Academic standards are governed by the General and Academic Regulations for Students. These specify the external reference points that form the basis of programme approval decisions. The Code of Practice sets out in its overarching principles that all programmes must have learning outcomes specified at programme and module level, and take into account the QAA reference points, including the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements. The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy is informed by the Quality

Code, and the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Strategy states it is designed to make full use of internal and external reference points including the Quality Code.

1.4   The evidence demonstrates that the University College operates a well documented process. The University College works to the Code of Practice, which sets out key requirements for programme specifications in terms of external reference points, programme learning outcomes and assessment. In the Guidelines for Validation and Review Panel Members, staff are specifically asked to ensure programmes take account of the FHEQ and have clearly articulated learning outcomes. Programme teams, in reviewing their programmes, produce critical appraisal documents that explicitly comment on external reference points including the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements. Programme approval panel discussions demonstrate that careful consideration is given to modules to ensure they are appropriately located within the FHEQ.

1.5   The Academic Board submits an annual report to the Board of Governors, the most recent of which was structured around the Quality Code; the report maintains that University College awards meet external frameworks and UK expectations. An overview of documentation provides clear evidence that the University College uses the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements within its approval, review and assessment processes; awards are referenced to the Subject Benchmark Statements for Finance, General Business and Management, Accounting and Economics for honours degrees; and Business and Management for Master's degrees; and these are mapped within each programme specification. The process of programme approval and review ensures programme outcomes are appropriately located on the FHEQ. Programme specifications identify programme level learning outcomes and modules, and their assessment is mapped against these.

1.6   Students are permitted to take interim exit awards but stage-learning outcomes are not specified. As this means that interim exit awards could be made which do not explicitly mark the achievement of positively defined programme learning outcomes as required by Expectation A1, the review team **recommends** that the University College specify learning outcomes for all interim awards where these are available as exit routes.

1.7   The review team considers the regulatory infrastructure robust, noting that module specifications clearly set out where they are located on the FHEQ, and learning outcomes are identified. Module learning outcomes are mapped against programme learning outcomes, and module specifications set out in detail the volume of assessment in each module and the learning outcomes being assessed; but assessment tasks are not explicitly linked to learning outcomes. However, external examiners report on the appropriateness of methods of assessment in the context of intended learning outcomes and affirm these are secure. A taxonomy of grade descriptors for levels 4-7 is provided. Moderation processes are rigorous and ensure that subject-learning outcomes are addressed in each assessment.

1.8   From the documentary evidence supplied, and meetings with University College staff, the review team confirms the assertions made within the self-evaluation document and, consequently, that Expectation A1 is met. Given the recommendation relating to learning outcomes for exit awards, the risk is judged to moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

1.9   In its self-evaluation document the University College describes the deliberative committee structures it has in place to manage its education provision and for reports to be made to the Board of Governors. The Academic Board, as the supreme academic authority of the University College, is the custodian of the academic standards and quality of the organisation's higher education awards. It formally delegates powers to two sub committees: the Academic Standards and Quality Committee and the Learning and Teaching Committee.

1.10   The review team scrutinised documentation setting out the governance arrangements and regulatory frameworks at the University College and tested their effectiveness through the review of policies, terms of reference of deliberative committees and minutes of meetings. The team also met with members of those committees, including student representatives.

1.11   There is a clear governance structure in place in that the Academic Board has oversight of the qualifications provided by the University College and reports directly to the Board of Governors. The Academic Board Terms of Reference make clear its responsibilities for academic standards and regulatory infrastructure. In supporting the Academic Board, the Joint Faculties Management Committee agrees the strategic direction for new programme development and the Learning and Teaching Committee provides initial approval to enable a programme to be developed.

1.12   The Academic Board delegates responsibility for the approval, monitoring and review of programmes in terms of academic standards to the Academic Standards and Quality Committee. The Academic Board provides an Academic Quality and Standards Annual Report to the Board of Governors.

1.13   Academic standards are governed by the University College's General and Academic Regulations for Students. The Academic Board reviews these regulations periodically, most recently in 2012. Students following University of Kent Awards are subject to that University's regulations and both sets of regulations are published on the University College website. A detailed Code of Practice aligns closely to the Quality Code. Chapters of this Code of Practice are formally approved via the deliberative committees.

1.14   Governance arrangements are kept under review; there was a governance effectiveness review of the Academic Board in 2011 and of its subcommittees in 2010. These identified a number of recommendations, in particular concerning the overlap between the operation of the two subcommittees. There is a clear and helpful Deliberative Committees Handbook. Working to the Quality Audit Policy, an Academic Audit Committee reports annually to the Board of Governors on the effectiveness of quality assurance procedures. Using a structured audit approach, clear recommendations and areas of good practice are identified.

1.15   Considering the documentary evidence provided, the review team concludes that the University College meets Expectation A2.1 and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.16　　In its self-evaluation document the University College states that all awards have a programme specification that provides a definitive record of the approved programme. This sets out the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected achievements for the programme of study. Similarly, module specifications set out the detail of each module.

1.17　　The review team scrutinised programme and module documentation provided online and reviewed specimen certificates and transcripts provided to students.

1.18　　The University College's Code of Practice, Chapter 13: Programme Design, Approval, Monitoring and Review, stipulates that programme specifications serve as definitive course documents, with a mapping between the modules and the programme learning outcomes, and specify any regulations that may differ to those set out in the General and Academic Regulations for Students. Module specifications must include module learning outcomes, indicative syllabus and details of the assessment arrangements. This was evidenced through accessing publicly available programme and module specifications on the website.

1.19　　Programme specifications set out the FHEQ level, programme learning outcomes, mode of study and credit structures for the programme. Detailed module specifications set out where the module is located on the FHEQ, module learning outcomes and assessment tasks. The University College website provides full text documentation on programmes and modules and is easy to navigate. Clearly laid out student handbooks contain pertinent information. There is a clearly laid out validation and review schedule.

1.20　　Considering the documentary evidence provided, the review team concludes that the University College meets Expectation A2.2 and that 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

1.21   In its self-evaluation document the University College notes the importance of programme approval in establishing the level of the academic standards of each award, and indicated that the use of external panel members, the relationship between assessments and learning outcomes, and a consideration of external reference points are key factors in that process. It further noted that the relevant principles and procedures are contained within Chapter 13 of its Code of Practice.

1.22   The review team tested the operation of approval processes by examining relevant policy documents and committee minutes, sampling approval reports, and through dialogue with University College staff.

1.23   The ultimate responsibility for the setting of standards lies with the Academic Board, though its terms of reference note that the Academic Standards and Quality Committee and Learning and Teaching Committee have delegated powers in respect of approval, monitoring and review of standards. In practice this means that these committees discuss matters related to standards in approval, but that approval decisions are taken by Academic Board.

1.24   Validation panels work to a fixed agenda that facilitates the setting of academic standards, including through comparison with the Quality Code, principally the FHEQ, and, where applicable, Subject Benchmark Statements. Panel members are guided through that agenda by a member of the Quality, Policy and Regulation team who gives administrative support to each panel. Proposed learning outcomes (see Expectation A2.2) are particularly scrutinised. Panel chairs and members, including mandatory external members, are trained in both the University College's procedures and how standards are set. Groups that develop programmes must also take these external reference points into account.

1.25   The review team found a consistent and effective adherence to the University College's processes, and that those processes are fit-for-purpose in securing academic standards. In particular the team noted that the University College's Code of Practice set out appropriate overarching principles for ifs University College programmes that must be met during development and which form the basis of standard-setting. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.26   The University College's Learning Teaching and Assessment Strategy sets out its approach to assessment, including design, approval, monitoring and review. The Code of Practice, Chapter 7: Assessment, sets out the principles and procedures for managing assessment. An overriding condition is that all assessment is centrally controlled by the University College and conducted in English.

1.27   The course approval and review process requires that all programmes must have a clearly defined structure, with learning outcomes articulated at programme and module level supported by relevant curriculum and appropriate assessment arrangements. The review team explored a range of documentation, including programme and module specifications, which evidenced that the requirements were being met.

1.28   Module specifications, which include module learning outcomes and details of the assessment arrangements, follow a University College template. Module information on the University College's website shows clearly the level and credits, and how the module will be assessed.

1.29   The General and Academic Regulations for Students include sections on the achievement of academic credits, the conduct of assessment, the determination of marks, progression and the conferment of awards. There are additional procedures for the consideration of student progression, awards and institutional protocols for borderline cases to ensure consistency.

1.30   Internal and external moderation take place, both to set the assessment and when marking is completed, with external examiners confirming at Assessment Board meetings and via an annual report that all procedures have been carried out appropriately and standards have been maintained.

1.31   The document Principles and Procedures for Assessment Boards sets out key principles determining the operation of University College Assessment Boards. Assessment boards act under delegated authority from the Academic Board. There is a two tier system of module boards and programme boards. Assessment Board minutes viewed by the team were detailed and showed consideration of all candidates.

1.32   The processes for checking assessment components prior to them being undertaken by students, and for moderating marks thereafter, appeared to the team to be clear and thorough, and meetings were found to be well understood by staff.

1.33   In meetings, both undergraduate and postgraduate students attested to the overall appropriateness and clarity of assessment.

1.34   The review team concludes that Expectation A3.2 is met and that the 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

1.35   Annual monitoring is largely at the level of the award. Reports for non-collaborative provision are produced for undergraduate programmes, postgraduate programmes and the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education (PGCHE), with data disaggregated by individual programme within those reports (see Expectation B8). The University College recognises, as part of its annual monitoring processes, its duty to ensure that award standards meet the requirements of the FHEQ; the reporting process includes a specific conclusion concerning the operation and maintenance of standards. Standards are addressed at annual monitoring through the reports of external examiners, feedback from students and staff, and data on the performance of students.

1.36   In its self-evaluation document the University College indicates that the review process is essentially the same as validation, but uses retrospective information. Its Code of Practice states that the 'review panel is required to ensure that the programme is of the appropriate standard for the level of the award' and must take into account external reference points. The review team was able to confirm that the process of review mirrored that of approval and that checks on standards were identical in both processes.

1.37   Through a study of exemplar review documentation and discussions with staff, the review team concludes that the University College follows its own processes in regard to monitoring and review and that those processes effectively secure the standards of the awards. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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

1.38   In its self-evaluation document the University College states that 'ifs involves independent external participation at key stages within the life cycles of its programmes. Externality is incorporated throughout design, approval and review of programmes, and external examiners are fundamental to ensuring the effective management of threshold academic standards'.

1.39   The review team tested the involvement of external panel members by scrutinising a series of reports for approvals and periodic reviews, and was able to confirm, from the documents which it saw, that there is appropriate external input to course validation and review events, with both practitioner and academic representation.

1.40   External examiners are appointed at a programme level for level 4 and are involved at both module and programme levels for levels 5-7. External examiners moderate assessment tasks before they are used, see sample assessment scripts, write an annual report and attend Assessment Board meetings. They are required to confirm attainment of threshold standards and the intended learning outcomes. The review team saw evidence of careful consideration of external examiners' comments by University College staff.

1.41   External examiners submit an annual report which is responded to by the University College. An annual overview report is considered by the Academic Board, to confirm satisfactory management of the external examining process.

1.42   Considering the evidence of involvement of independent and external participation in confirming threshold standards at course approval and periodic review, and the evidence of the management of the external examiner process, the review team concludes that the University College meets Expectation A3.4 and the risk is therefore low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

1.43　　The report demonstrates that the University College meets each of the seven Expectations in relation to the setting and maintenance of the academic standards of its awards. Clear and detailed regulations and a Code of Practice are in place and available publicly, and these are applied effectively and consistently by staff through the module and programme approval, monitoring and review stages. Effective alignment is achieved with external reference points, especially Part A of the Quality Code, with one specific exception where the review team has made a recommendation that the University College needs to define programme learning outcomes applicable to interim exit awards so that when such awards are made the University College will be able to demonstrate that the awards explicitly mark the achievement of positive intended learning outcomes.

1.44　　The University College pays particular attention to involving externals both in respect of programme approval and review and in key aspects of assessment through the use of external examiners.

1.45　　The review team concludes that the setting and maintenance of the academic standards of the awards of the University College **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1 The University College's approach to the design and approval of programmes is set out in Chapter 13 of its Code of Practice. This Chapter underwent review in 2014, in part to ensure alignment with the Quality Code. The review team was presented with a draft of the review report and noted appropriate developments showing careful discussion of the proposed changes.

2.2 Following the grant of taught degree awarding powers a report was commissioned on the course development and validation activity that took place in 2009-10. The report was endorsed by the Academic Standards and Quality Committee and Academic Board. The review team viewed this approach to new programmes as cautious, sensible, and an appropriate check on the exercise of new powers.

2.3 Proposals for new programmes are first discussed at the Joint Faculties' Management Committee for strategic fit. The Learning and Teaching Committee undertakes the academic consideration of proposals while the Executive Committee considers the commercial fit. Approval by the Learning and Teaching Committee triggers programme development.

2.4 During the development process, programme teams use templates to guide them on what is to be addressed, for example in the production of programme specifications. Comments are received from student ambassadors and industry representatives on the proposals and these are incorporated into a thorough self-evaluation document. In one case an industry-based review group was formed to 'oversee and provide directional guidance on the programme as it develops and becomes operational'.

2.5 The constitution of validation panels includes a student member and typically two external members: a practitioner and an academic. Panel chairs are approved by the Academic Standards and Quality Committee and are drawn from the wider University College community, including those who hold substantive posts and have experience of chairing such panels at other higher education providers. Both the chair and members are trained and provided with written guidance, which the review team noted was of a good standard. In discharging its business, the panel is required to report on a range of indicators of both standards and the quality of learning opportunities.

2.6 Panel reports and action plans are considered by the Academic Standards and Quality Committee, and Academic Board, and are commented on by the Learning and Teaching Committee. Depending on their nature, the Learning and Teaching Committee also looks at the responses to some conditions and recommendations set by the panel.

2.7 Exemplar validation reports and action plans seen by the review team were thorough and conformed to the University College's requirements.

2.8   Although the team was informed that the sign-off of conditions and approval to run a new programme are decisions of the Academic Board, and the team saw evidence of this, the team noted confusion around approval in the minutes of other deliberative bodies. The terms 'approval in principle', 'endorsed' and 'approval' were used interchangeably at committees where initial proposals were discussed, and where validation reports and action plans were discussed. While this has not compromised standards or quality, the team formed the view that more consistent and clear nomenclature could be adopted. Members of the University College's senior staff acknowledged this. Nonetheless, where consideration at a committee was warranted, the team noted typically full discussion.

2.9   Following an examination of relevant documents and discussions with staff, the review team concludes that the University College's processes for the design, development and approval of programmes are effective, and therefore the Expectation is met with a low risk.

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

2.10   The University College sets out what it considers to be a clear and fair set of admissions policies and procedures within Chapter 2 of its Code of Practice. It also dedicates Chapter 3 of its Code of Practice to Accreditation of Prior Learning. Entry criteria are considered at validation and periodic review, and laid out in programme specifications which are ultimately approved by the Academic Board.

2.11   Admissions are viewed in three strands by the institution: part-time, full-time and postgraduate. Although these strands are managed by different teams, a programme of training for staff ensures they are managed consistently. Undergraduate provision is overseen by the Vice Principal, Operations, with the full-time programme team administering corresponding applications and the Marketing and Corporate Relationship teams recruiting part-time students. Postgraduate admissions are the responsibility of the faculty team. All full-time students apply via UCAS, whereas part-time students are required to complete a programme application form.

2.12   The University College's arrangements for the recruitment, selection and admission of students, if followed, are sufficient to enable this Expectation to be met. The review team tested this Expectation by meeting with students and staff. The review team also studied the relevant chapters of the University College's Code of Practice, programme specifications, the institution's website, prospectuses and information pertaining to induction.

2.13   Students were very complimentary about the information they received throughout the application process which they viewed as accurate and comprehensive. Students also reported that staff are quick to answer queries about studying at the University College. The students' views about the nature of the information provided were supported by reading the University College website and prospectuses, which were clearly structured and detailed.

2.14   At undergraduate level, the University College admits full-time students in October and part-time students in May and November. This enables students to switch more effectively from one mode to another if their circumstances alter. A significant number of students are admitted using the institution's process for the accreditation of prior learning. This includes a sizeable number of applicants from the University College's in-house corporate education programmes (addressed further under Expectation B10 of this report). The review team found that these admissions arrangements were robust and overseen through a detailed annual report to Learning and Teaching Committee.

2.15   Postgraduate students are required to complete an application form, following which they undertake a standard exercise, which the University College employs to ensure consistency during admissions by using it as the foundation for the interview process. This process is well understood by staff and students alike and appears to be operating effectively.

2.16   The review team concludes that as a result of the clearly understood division of responsibilities, robust process for postgraduate admissions, explicit entry criteria and

comprehensive information provided to prospective students, this Expectation is met and the level of associated 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

2.17   The University College's key principles for the support and delivery of learning and teaching for all students are set out in its Code of Practice, Chapter 4: Learning and Teaching. The Academic Quality and Standards Annual Report to the Board of Governors provides an overview of monitoring against the University College's Code of Practice. The Learning and Teaching Committee has oversight of the annual monitoring process, and identifies and reports on action points through the Higher Education Faculties Operation Group.

2.18   The Learning and Teaching Strategy (2014) sets out a series of milestones for development, progress against which is monitored by the Higher Education Faculties Operations Group and the Learning and Teaching Committee. These bodies consider both a review of the Strategy, ahead of consideration by the Academic Board, and the draft milestones for future action. Student input to the development and monitoring of the Strategy is through their membership of these deliberative committees.

2.19   The procedures underpinning the appointment of teaching staff are set out in the Recruitment to the Academic Community Policy, with all faculty appointments being approved by a Vice-Principal and the relevant Head of Faculty, and reported to the Learning and Teaching Committee. Since 2012, the Academic Board has required that all those teaching face-to-face, though not those teaching on distance learning programmes, must hold a teaching qualification which is recognised by the University College or what the University College defines as 'membership' of the Higher Education Academy, though the grade of fellowship of the Higher Education Academy is not specified.

2.20   Appointees who do not have experience of teaching in higher education are normally required to undertake the University College's PGCHE, though exemptions may be granted by the relevant Vice-Principal on the basis of previous experience. The team noted that the programme specification for the PGCHE does not include formal evaluation of teaching competence in higher education, as teaching observations are not summatively assessed and some of the teaching events are not undertaken in a higher education context.

2.21   Almost all the staff supporting distance learning provision also hold teaching qualifications or are working towards them, though not all of those held are in higher education. Examiners are normally required to hold a qualification above the level at which they are examining, though exceptions are permitted based on other attributes, in particular professional expertise, and if they do not hold teaching qualifications or recognition by the Higher Education Academy they are encouraged to acquire the latter or undertake the PGCHE.

2.22   The review team noted that there was inconsistency in the way in which the policies governing the requirement for teaching qualifications were applied and a lack of clarity about the way in which staff were prepared for teaching at higher education level, whether this involved undertaking the PGCHE or through Higher Education Academy recognition. The review team therefore **recommends** that the University College implements

a clear and consistent policy that ensures staff are appropriately prepared to teach at all levels and modes of delivery.

2.23   During the review the team met with a wide variety of staff involved in the management, delivery and assessment of modules. The team also noted that there is a large number of different job roles and titles employed by the University College, often with apparent overlap, enabling the creation of some confusion - including for staff and students. This was also evident in the differing role descriptors reported to the team in meetings with staff.

2.24   Members of staff are well supported in fulfilling their duties. There are schemes for induction and mentoring of new staff which were considered very effective by recently appointed staff. The team was further informed that staff changing roles within the University College also receive mentoring and guidance in their new roles, including training in the appraisal process where this forms part of their new duties, for example as lead tutors or module coordinators.

2.25   The Academic Development Team and Learning Resources and Libraries Team facilitate a series of developmental workshops. The main event is the annual higher education conference, which is preceded by a workshop. These events attract significant levels of attendance from academic staff who are contractually required to attend at least one of these events each year. The staff met by the team reported that they considered the events to be very beneficial. Staff are also encouraged to attend external conferences. Attendance at University College events is monitored and staff are required to make an annual return on their continuing professional development which contributes to the appraisal process. The appraisal process is also informed by the outcomes of the teaching observations, operation of which is set out in the Teaching Observation and Peer Review of Teaching Policy, and which the staff perceived as conferring a significant developmental benefit.

2.26   The University College is developing its capacity for both applied research and scholarly activity, which is being supported by the Academic Board and the Learning and Teaching Committee, fostering sharing of pedagogical project outcomes and engagement with the wider academic community. The University College continues to develop and evolve its institutional research strategy.

2.27   The University College maintains a virtual learning environment (my ifslearning) that is easy to navigate and which contains all the information required by the students, both regarding the programme regulations and expectations of the students, and detailed information regarding the programmes of study and the individual modules constituting those programmes. Students met by the team from all modes of delivery spoke positively regarding the quality of information provided through the virtual learning environment, and in particular the resources made available through the KnowledgeBank. They were also well aware of whom to contact for advice.

2.28   Based on the evaluation of the documentation, the electronic resources and meetings with the staff and students, the team concludes that the Expectation of the Quality Code, *Chapter B3* is met. The level of risk is moderate, given the recommendation regarding ensuring that staff are appropriately prepared to teach at all levels and modes of delivery.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

Findings

2.29   The University College's Learning and Teaching Strategy (2014); Code of Practice, Chapter 4: Learning and Teaching; and the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Strategy (2009-16) set out the policies and practices underpinning student development and achievement (see also Expectation B3). Their operation is monitored by the Learning and Teaching Committee and the Quality, Policy and Regulation Team, which reports to the Academic Standards and Quality Committee. The Quality, Policy and Regulation Team sets out an annual programme to support the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Strategy. The Academic Quality and Standards Annual Report to the Board of Governors provides an overview of monitoring against the University College's Code of Practice. The Quality, Policy and Regulation Team 'fosters a culture of enhancement through the Quality and Enhancement Strategy, the identification of good practice and guidance and advice to teams across ifs University College'.

2.30   Programme managers and student support officers have a key role in supporting student development and achievement, providing advice and guidance on mode and level of study as well as on module choice. There are mechanisms of oversight of student engagement and progress: in the case of campus-based students this includes attendance monitoring. In the case of distance learning students, engagement with the online forums and submission of work are monitored by the lead tutors and also the Student Support and Admissions Team.

2.31   To help inform student admission, ifs University College offers a range of visit days and has recently initiated a 'summer university', which is a three-day taster course for Year 12 students considering a career in financial services. There is an extensive study skills area on the virtual learning environment which is focused on supporting student transitions, irrespective of mode of delivery, onto the programmes. This includes guidance on study techniques, information literacy, assessment and time management. There is also a specific module, Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, which includes a section on student support principles, setting out the rationale for systems of support. The students met by the team from all modes of delivery spoke positively regarding the quality of information and level of support provided, and were well aware of whom to contact for advice.

2.32   Ifs University College has detailed documentation setting out its policies on Equality and Diversity, Reasonable Adjustments and its Widening Participation Statement, which are underpinned by the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy. In the student written submission, 77 per cent of students agreed, and none disagreed, with the statement that the University College supports equality of opportunity. The Student Services and Admissions Team is aware of those incoming students who have declared a disability through UCAS, or whose requirements change during the course, and is able to provide a single point of contact for disabled students or those with other needs, enabling provision of support, for example, through coordination of access to specialist study materials and specific provision for assessments. All the online materials are fully accessible.

2.33   The Learning Resources and Library Team has oversight of the provision of learning resources, which includes supporting students in the use of those resources. Resources are designed for specific programmes and modes of delivery, including provision of core texts, study guides and multimedia; each module also has a website. The students

met by the team commented very positively regarding the quality of the resources, the timeliness of their availability and the guidance regarding their usage. The Learning Resources Team is involved in programme validation, enabling evaluation of resource requirements at an early stage of programme development. Faculty members are consulted regarding resource provision and students also provide feedback.

2.34   A learning resource provided for all students is the in-house, monthly publication Financial World, which includes focused articles that help students contextualise their studies and gives indications of career directions within the financial sector. All students are also given membership of the professional body, the Institute of Financial Services. The University College runs an annual series of careers seminars and professional networking events to support career planning, and also provides guidance on curriculum vitae preparation and supporting access to internships. Student progression to careers in the financial sector is also supported through the Future Self student mentor scheme, through which current students can receive careers advice from alumni. However, the review team noted that currently there is little advice available for students who may wish to seek careers outside the finance sector.

2.35   Based on evaluation of the documentation, the electronic resources and meetings with the staff and students, the review team concludes that the Expectation of the Quality Code, *Chapter B4* is met and that the level of risk is low. The team also identified as **good practice** the way in which the University College facilitates student awareness of, and engagement with, the financial services sector, for example though the professional networking events, and the in-house publication Financial World.

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

2.36 The University College has its own definition of student engagement, which it views as 'the participation of students in its quality processes and systems, resulting in the improvement of the educational experience for all current and future students'.

2.37 Chapter 11 of the University College's Code of Practice details principles and processes relating to student engagement. This covers student mentors, representatives and ambassadors, all of whom fulfil different roles within the institution. Student representatives attend the University College's deliberative committees and a role description is in place. Student feedback is collected through surveys and module questionnaires, and informally through programme teams and class representatives. There are, however, no formal opportunities for individual programme teams and their students to routinely discuss issues relating to quality assurance. Student feedback is considered as part of the University College's annual monitoring process and a Student Engagement Audit takes place which informs an action plan.

2.38 The team found that these arrangements, while limiting the ability for students to be truly involved in a dialogue over quality assurance at programme level, are sufficient in enabling the Expectation to be met. Multiple systems are in place to capture feedback and this is discussed in a number of forums, especially at University College level.

2.39 This Expectation was tested by meeting with staff, students and student representatives. The review team also met student ambassadors and mentors. In addition, the review team considered a wide range of information including committee minutes, role descriptions and the Code of Practice, and studied relevant sections of the University College website.

2.40 The University College does not have a Students' Union, however, students are able to access services through the University of London Union. The review team found that while students were aware of this, in practice the take-up was not widespread. The institution is currently giving consideration as to whether a formal student association would further improve the overall student experience, though the creation of this association was not imminent at the time of the review.

2.41 The University College has identified that challenges exist in involving its students in quality assurance and enhancement. The most significant challenge being the high number of part-time and distance learners. It was clear to the team that the institution is actively working to improve student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement, and this was viewed as a strategic focus by staff.

2.42 The overriding conviction of students was that they were able to give feedback and that they felt listened to. Students did acknowledge, however, that these arrangements sometimes lacked formality and they believed that certain aspects, such as training, could be strengthened. Training itself consists of a face-to-face induction session and optional ongoing sessions, supplemented by a handbook. International and EU students are also given an initial telephone briefing if they are not in the UK.

2.43   Student representatives wishing to take part in the University College's deliberative committees are subject to an application process, which is overseen by the institution's Student Engagement Manager. Students assuming these responsibilities are profiled on notice boards around campus, and students were largely aware of whom their representatives were.

2.44   An annual programme review event exists for some programmes, which acts as an opportunity for course teams to examine their provision; however students are not currently involved in these review days. A student experience group exists which discusses the experience of students at programme level, but operates as a cross-programme committee and consequently detailed scrutiny is difficult to achieve. Students have recently been appointed as members of this committee. The review team found that although students were aware of external examiner reports, they had not discussed the contents of these with staff.

2.45   The review team was unable to find evidence that students are actively involved in a discussion about the contents of programme annual monitoring. The review team therefore **recommends** that the University College develops effective formal opportunities for students (in particular class representatives) to be actively engaged in the annual monitoring and review of their programmes.

2.46   The review team concludes that, while formal opportunities at programme level would enable greater student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement, this Expectation is met and the level of associated risk is moderate. These findings were centred on the following observations: that the University College has defined student engagement in their context and views it as a strategic priority; clear roles and responsibilities have been developed in relation to student engagement; and a range of feedback mechanisms are employed, the results from which are discussed at senior institutional committees.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

Findings

2.47   The Learning, Teaching and Assessment strategy sets out the University College's approach to assessment, regarding design, approval, monitoring and review, and its integration with learning and teaching. The Code of Practice, Chapter 7: Assessment, sets out the principles and procedures for managing assessment, and the General Regulations set out the rules and regulations concerning assessment. The General Regulations also state that assessment 'contributes to students' learning because students reflect on their learning and, through feedback, are helped to recognise and enhance their achievements'.

2.48   All awards are located within the FHEQ and all proposed assessment tools are subject to external examiner and validation approval. At undergraduate level there is a panel process for this approval, in order to ensure consistency, standards and appropriateness. At postgraduate level this is done by the course team and an independent internal moderator.

2.49   At undergraduate level each new examiner who is involved in assessing is subject to an induction programme, and transition is facilitated between the incoming and outgoing examiner. There is a contractual requirement to take part in the developmental programme thereafter. All full-time staff are encouraged to attend the annual examiner day, along with at least one representative per team from the part-time staff. Development processes for examiners on the MSc programme are less formal, due to the smaller course team. The review team heard that the MSc team draws instead on peer to peer support, which is provided through discussion and sharing of good practice and feedback across the programme, including pre-term briefing meetings and module review meetings.

2.50   The Learning and Teaching strategy also commits to ensuring that students know the manner in which they will be assessed and the grading criteria. Module descriptors on the University College website clearly specify the form of assessment and its weighting. There are grade classification descriptors for levels 4, 5, 6 and 7 and these are published in student handbooks.

2.51   Students whom the review team met were familiar with the assessment and grading criteria applicable to their assessed work. They found it particularly helpful to have a link from the module descriptor to specimen coursework, examination and assignment questions, to assist them in fully appreciating the standard of work required.

2.52   The University College Code of Practice, Chapter 7: Assessment, sets out the principles for assessment, which include reference to prompt and clear feedback related to the learning outcomes that the student was attempting to achieve. Promptness was not quantified in any documentation viewed by the review team but senior staff advised that the timescales were seven weeks maximum for part-time courses and two weeks for full-time courses.

2.53   The review team learned from the student submission and from meetings with students that students had varying experiences of both the quality and timeliness of feedback on assessed work. For some the feedback consisted of detailed comments while

for others it had been more generic. In terms of timeliness, some students had been given very clear schedules for the receipt of feedback, which were adhered to, while others had not been provided with such information and reported that feedback arrived after the subsequent examination had been sat and thus was too late to inform the next piece of assessed work. The review team concluded that this did not meet the University College's stated principle that 'feedback should be provided whilst the student is able to remember the assessment exercise and thus act upon any advice contained within feedback'. An Internal Quality Audit report on Assessment (Higher Education) was undertaken in May 2014 and reported almost identical findings to those of the review team.

2.54   In the light of the evidence received and viewed by the review team, the team **recommends** that the University College develops and implements a clear and consistent approach to ensure that students receive feedback on their assessments that is timely and developmental.

2.55   The review team scrutinised Assessment Board minutes and found that they evidenced the operation of boards in line with the University College Principles and Procedures for Assessment Boards. The Vice Principals and Faculty Heads act as chairs of Assessment Boards for higher education programmes.

2.56   Academic malpractice, including plagiarism, is considered by the Malpractice Committee, which takes into account an investigation undertaken by the Vice Principal. All students whom the team met were very well informed about the need for clear and accurate referencing. They were familiar with submission of work through a text-matching software and had been made fully aware of the penalties for plagiarism.

2.57   The University College's approach to the accreditation of prior learning is set out in its Code of Practice, Chapter 3: Accreditation of Prior Learning. At levels 4 and 5, at least 50 per cent of the credit at the level of the award must be accumulated as a result of learning assessed by the University College, unless specified otherwise in the programme specification. Accreditation of prior learning may not be awarded at level 6. At postgraduate level, 50 per cent of the credit for an award must be accumulated as a result of learning assessed in respect of the taught modules. Modules for which credits have been awarded on the basis of accreditation of prior learning are recognised simply as qualifying modules for the award and do not contribute to the grade or classification of the award.

2.58   All accreditation of prior learning claims are received by, recorded and processed through the Academic Services, Student Support Unit, using a template. An annual report on approved prior learning leading to advanced standing is considered by the Learning and Teaching Committee and shows careful analysis of the success and achievement of such entrants.

2.59   The review team scrutinised an example of the assessment of prior certificated learning for advanced standing, and found that decisions were based on robust evidence. There have been no cases of credit being awarded for prior experiential learning but appropriate processes are in place should they be required. Advanced standing can also be sought through successful completion of an accredited in-house corporate training programme, as described under Expectation B10.

2.60   The review team concludes that the Expectation is met, but that the risk is moderate given the disadvantage faced by students who do not receive feedback in a sufficiently timely way to support their learning, and the need for this to be addressed by the University College.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External Examining*

Findings

2.61　　External examiners' roles and responsibilities are set out in the University College Code of Practice, Chapter 8: External Examining. This includes the criteria for appointment, period of appointment, induction, termination arrangements and reporting obligations, all of which are aligned with the Quality Code and meet Expectation B7.

2.62　　Nominations for external examiner appointments are made to the Academic Standards and Quality Committee for consideration and approval, via the Director, Quality Policy and Regulation. A central register of appointments is kept so as to ensure effective management of appointments and to avoid conflicts of interest. The review team was provided with an example in which a potential conflict of interest had arisen and viewed evidence of it having been dealt with appropriately by the University College.

2.63　　In March 2012 the University College conducted an Internal Quality Audit on external examining. The Audit report notes that the University College reviewed the external examiner appointments made by the University of Manchester and the University of Kent, as awarding bodies for courses delivered by the University College prior to it gaining its own taught degree awarding powers. This was to ensure that these also met the University College criteria, as joint appointments during the handover period, and that there were no conflicts of interest. The report concluded with a number of recommendations for further strengthening the appointment and reporting processes, which were followed up through a detailed action plan. The team considered that the Internal Quality Audit provided evidence of a conscientious approach overall by the University College to ensuring the effectiveness of the external examiner system.

2.64　　In the case of the validation with the University of Manchester, the disengagement included the co-appointment of external examiners in order to award joint credits during the transition period. While the review team appreciated the intention of the co-appointments, they learned of one instance where this had led to a 10 year period of office: the external examiner had served as a University of Manchester external examiner for five years and then been appointed by the University College to the same degree programme to serve for a further five years. The view of the review team was that this was not a desirable situation as it did not bring in the 'fresh perspective' indicated in the Quality Code, *Chapter B7*.

2.65　　An Internal Quality Audit on Externality in May 2011 recognised some difficulty in ensuring that reciprocity is avoided when appointing external examiners, as no record was held on the external examiner roles of University College staff. This led to a recommendation that University College academic community members' records be extended to include external activities and this is now included in the annual updating of staff members' records.

2.66　　In its Code of Practice on External Examining the University College states that 'where a programme is delivered both by ifs and also through a partner it is often desirable to appoint a single external examiner to cover all versions of the programme, as an aid to ensuring consistency of practice and equity of treatment of students'. In a meeting with the review team, however, it was confirmed that a single external examiner for all delivery would be the norm, and that the wording was a legacy from previous validation arrangements prior to gaining taught degree awarding powers.

2.67   The induction of external examiners is the responsibility of the relevant Course Director or Postgraduate Programme manager, who is also responsible for ensuring that the external examiner is kept up to date with regard to any changes in the programme or module which may impact on their role. The review team viewed the external examiner information pack on the University College's website, and found it to be clear and comprehensive.

2.68   External examiners are required to complete annual reports to a template. These are submitted to the Director, Quality Policy and Regulation, who distributes them to either the Course Director, Postgraduate Programmes, or the Vice Principal, Head of Faculty, as appropriate. The Course Director, Postgraduate Programmes, or the Vice Principal, Head of Faculty, will respond in writing to the external examiner's annual report within 12 weeks of its receipt. Issues raised in reports and the responses to them are monitored by the Quality, Policy and Regulation team. Responses are also incorporated into the course annual monitoring report, with an annual overarching report also being submitted to the Academic Standards and Quality Committee and then to the Academic Board annually. The review team observed that external examiner reports indicate general satisfaction with the programmes and with the administration, and that external examiners were satisfied with the responses received to their reports.

2.69   Staff confirmed that the statement in the Code of Practice that 'where relevant, no ifs University College higher education qualification shall be awarded without participation in the assessment process by at least one external examiner' did not reflect the intended meaning. The intended meaning was that an external examiner would always be expected to attend the Assessment Board but that there may be exceptional circumstances such as illness where that was not possible and endorsement of assessment outcomes would be achieved through other means.

2.70   Students are informed of the names and home institution of their external examiner via the students' representation area of the virtual learning environment (my ifslearning), where each external examiner annual report is also published in full. Student representatives are emailed to tell them when external examiner reports are uploaded to the website. The majority of students whom the review team met confirmed that they were aware of the availability of the reports. While the team did not see evidence of students actively engaging in discussion of external examiner reports at a programme level, the annual overarching report is discussed at committees where student representatives are present.

2.71   The review team considered that the University College has a comprehensive set of regulations and procedures governing its use of external examiners and saw evidence that these procedures were working effectively. Notwithstanding the one instance relating to an extended appointment period noted above, the team concludes that the University College is making scrupulous use of external examiners and is meeting Expectation B7. The team considers the area to be low risk.

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

2.72   The University College's approach to monitoring and review of programmes is set out in Chapter 13 of its Code of Practice.

2.73   Four annual monitoring reports are produced: for undergraduate programmes, for postgraduate programmes, for the PGCHE, and for collaborative provision. Before 2012 separate reports were produced for each level of the undergraduate programmes. The reports draw on a number of sources of information, including feedback from students, staff and external examiners, and assessment results of students. These assessment results are often in the form of Assessment Session Reports, which are produced by programme or by level, describe and discuss the assessment of students over typically an annual period, and are presented to Module Assessment Boards. One presented to the review team additionally considered student feedback. The undergraduate programmes report also considers how the programmes interface with the in-house corporate education programmes. While there is not a separate report for each programme, individual programmes are considered. For example, the report for undergraduate programmes considers programmes first together and then as discrete entities.

2.74   With the exception of collaborative provision, annual monitoring reports are presented to the Learning and Teaching Committee, which provides a summary report to Academic Standards and Quality Committee, though the Academic Board approves individual reports. Action plans produced from the reports are considered by the Learning and Teaching Committee.

2.75   The review team formed the opinion that the annual monitoring reports and their associated action plans, in their consideration of programmes, were fit for purpose, thorough and allowed University College level oversight of activities.

2.76   The review team asked the University College about annual monitoring at module level and was told that Module Review Meetings are held that may produce reports; the University College offered to provide examples of those reports. However, the reports supplied consisted of an Assessment Session Report and an overview of marks presented for approval to a Module Assessment Board, neither of which captured the full activity of a module. Module Review Meetings (alternatively termed Module Team Days or Module Team Meetings) take place following each occurrence of a module and a formal record is kept for some, but not all. Where minutes exist, a useful discussion of relevant topics is apparent. Modules that form the PGCHE are formally reviewed through discussion at the PGCHE Annual Review Meeting. Any changes to modules are reported to, and approved by, the Learning and Teaching Committee. However, the review team saw no evidence of student input into these processes. Further, the process by which information feeds from these meetings and discussions to the annual monitoring reports was not clear to the review team, and while variability in practice in reporting on modules did not result in inadequate reporting, it was difficult for the review team to fully understand each variation in process. Although some elements of module level activities feed into the annual monitoring reports, particularly the reporting of student performance, no standardised monitoring at module level occurs.

2.77   Module Review Meetings may trigger a 'major syllabus review' (also termed 'syllabus review', 'full syllabus review' and 'full-scale module review'), for example where taught material is thought to be outdated; otherwise these reviews occur on a four-yearly cycle. The review team saw examples of these reviews, embedded in annual monitoring reports, and viewed them as comprehensive and a useful tool in maintaining currency at module level.

2.78   Periodic reviews take place at a maximum of five-year intervals. The schedule of reviews is managed by the Joint Faculties' Management Committee and decisions about when reviews occur are made by the Academic Board.

2.79   Periodic review involves the production of a 'critical appraisal' rather than a 'self-evaluation document' but otherwise the procedure, including composition, role and activity of the panel, is identical to that of programme approval.

2.80   Since taught degree awarding powers were granted in 2010, only two programmes, BSc (Hons) Banking Practice and Management and MSc Banking Practice and Management, have been through the review process; the review team was given access to all the relevant documentation. The review of the MSc was brought forward in the reviews schedule because of the number and scope of proposed enhancements identified through annual monitoring. Review reports and action plans were presented to the Academic Standards and Quality Committee and the Learning and Teaching Committee, and then to the Academic Board where the reports were formally signed off. Again, the review team noted considered debate at each committee and, again, inconsistency in the nomenclature concerning 'approval'.

2.81   Nonetheless, from a scrutiny of documentation, including the review reports, and dialogue with staff and students, the review team concludes that the University College has an effective process for reviewing its programmes.

2.82   Given the similarity of processes of approval and review, the University College decided to use a single panel and panel report for both the review of the MSc Banking Practice and Management (part-time) and the validation of the PGCert and PGDip in Banking Practice and Management, and of the MSc (full-time). While the review team found no suggestion of a lack of due process, the combining of these procedures added unnecessary complexity and the University College indicated that future combinations of this type would be unlikely.

2.83   A clear process exists for making minor modifications to programmes, and the Quality, Policy and Regulation team offers advice to programme teams on whether a modification is minor or not. The review team saw evidence of discussion at the Learning and Teaching Committee before approval for minor modifications was granted.
The University has developed a Programme Withdrawal Policy.

2.84   In scrutinising the University College's monitoring and review procedures, the review team confirms that they reflect its aspirations as set out in its Code of Practice and are widely understood by relevant staff. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the risk 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

2.85   Management of complaints and appeals is set out in the University College's Code of Practice, Chapter 10: Student Complaints and Academic Appeals, and in the General Regulations for Students. The Code of Practice is stated to have been developed in the light of the Quality Code and Office of the Independent Adjudicator guidelines; the University College is a voluntary member of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator scheme.

2.86   There is a three stage process for dealing with complaints: initially there is always an attempt to resolve the complaint informally, followed by a formal complaint in writing to the Complaints Officer which is responded to within 10 days. If that is unsuccessful, stage two comprises a hearing by the Complaints Review Group, the final stage being a review panel appointed by the Academic Board and which includes an external member. Academic appeals have a similar three stage process. Advice for students regarding both complaints and appeals is provided by the Faculties Support Office and student advisers, who can advise on the processes to be followed, though there is no independent source of guidance, for example, on how to structure the complaint or appeal.

2.87   The Complaints Review Group presents quarterly reports on the handling of cases for review by the Joint Faculties' Management Committee, with an overarching report going to the Academic Standards and Quality Committee and the Academic Board. The evidence from those reports indicates that the numbers of formal complaints are low and that early resolution is generally successful, with no complaints or appeals initiated during 2012-13 or the first quarter of 2014 being escalated beyond stage two. Along with the other chapters of the University College's Code of Practice, operation of the chapter on complaints and appeals is reviewed periodically, with reports to the Learning and Teaching Committee being drafted by the Complaints Officer.

2.88   Details of the complaints and appeals processes are available on the external website and also published in the student handbooks. The student submission indicated 46 per cent of students were not aware of the processes, however the different student cohorts met by the team all asserted that they knew they could ask their tutors or the Student Advisers for advice.

2.89   Based on evaluation of the documentation, the electronic resources and meetings with the staff and students, the review team concludes that the Expectation of the Quality Code, *Chapter B9* is met and that 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

2.90   The Collaborative Provision Strategy sets out the University College's approach to collaborative provision. In its self-evaluation document the University College claims it takes a cautious approach to collaborative provision and is risk averse in the types of arrangement that will be entered into in order to ensure these are implemented securely and managed effectively. This includes protecting against short-term opportunity negatively impacting longer-term objectives and reputation. The Code of Practice on Collaborative Provision has been reviewed in line with the Quality Code, *Chapter B10*.

2.91   The review team tested the operation of the policies and procedures governing the University College's management of provision with others by reading procedures and related guidance, minutes from the Collaborative Provision Committee and the Academic Standards and Quality Committee, and documentation and reports relating to the approval and review of partnerships in both the UK and overseas, and talking to staff.

2.92   The University College has engaged in collaborative activity for many years, having partnerships with numerous institutions, supporting members undertaking the Banking Diploma and Associate 'top-up' programmes, and recognising in-house corporate education programmes provided by a number of banking corporations.

2.93   The Collaborative Provision Committee, a sub committee of the Academic Quality and Standards Committee, oversees collaborative provision. The Collaborative Provision Strategy frames the journey that the University College has undertaken in recent years and sets out how it has streamlined its collaborative activity. The strategy has informed the Collaborative Provision Code of Practice which details sound operational requirements and processes and is closely aligned to the Quality Code, *Chapter B10*. The University College maintains a collaborative provision register that documents validating partners, arrangements for dispersed campuses in the UK and overseas, and accreditation arrangements for in-house corporate education programmes. In 2012-13 a single Collaborative Provision Annual Report was introduced and this is discussed at the Academic Quality and Standards Committee. An internal quality audit of collaborative provision was conducted in May 2014 and recommendations made. An action plan has been put in place and recommendations addressed through the Collaborative Provision Committee.

2.94   In recent years the University College has disengaged from a number of external relationships and is adopting a cautious approach, using a dispersed campus arrangement at three further education colleges in the UK and at a college in Malta, with whom there is a longstanding relationship. However, at the time of the review no students were studying for ifs University College awards at any of these institutions. The University College also has a number of students completing programmes leading to University of Kent degrees. This arises from the period before the University College had taught degree awarding powers and the arrangement will expire once those students have completed their programmes.

2.95   The University College provides credit recognition for a number of in-house corporate education programmes provided by several banking corporations. Currently these are offered at level 4 and 5. This provision is approved via the Collaborative Provision Committee, taking into account the syllabus, the staff providing the education, the teaching approach and any assessment. Secure arrangements are in place for the oversight of in-house corporate modules that are formally assessed and which attract formal credit recognition for University College programmes. Students successfully completing these modules are admitted onto University College programmes with advanced standing. Where modules are not formally assessed and carry only notional credit, students can complete applications via Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning. These in-house corporate education programmes provide routes onto University College programmes that are welcomed by part-time professional students.

2.96   The Code of Practice for Work-based and Placement learning sets out the responsibilities of all concerned and the procedures to be followed. There is a student handbook for the advanced work-based learning module that provides clear information for students. Internships are underpinned by a formal tripartite learning agreement that is supported by a detailed student handbook that sets out the rights and responsibilities of students, staff and employers. Clear documentation is provided for employers who take students onto internships. However, the competition for internships is fierce and many full-time students complete options other than the work-based learning module.

2.97   In considering the documentary evidence, together with discussions with staff and students, the review team concludes that the University College meets Expectation B10 and that the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Findings

2.98   The University College does not offer research degrees and therefore this Expectation is not applicable.

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.99 The University College has in place clear and comprehensive regulations and procedures set out in its General Regulations and Code of Practice, which are implemented by staff who are clear about their responsibilities, and which are subject to effective oversight through the deliberative committee structure. The review team found one feature of good practice relating to the opportunities provided to students to maintain an up to date engagement with issues in the financial services sector relevant to their programmes of study.

2.100 The review team identified three areas where improvements in procedure and/or practice would enable the learning opportunities to be strengthened: in relation to preparing staff to teach at all higher education levels and modes of delivery; in providing formal opportunities for students to engage with staff in the annual monitoring and review of their programmes; in operating a clear and consistent approach so that students are receiving timely and developmental feedback on their assessed work.

2.101 Overall, the review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the University College **meets** UK expectations.

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

3.1 The University College is committed to ensuring the information it provides about the higher education it offers is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. It has a public information statement on its website, a chapter within its Code of Practice is dedicated to public information, and information is subject to scrutiny through the institution's internal quality audit.

3.2 There are four teams involved in the management of information within the University College. The Quality, Policy and Regulation Team are responsible for overseeing quality assurance information for staff, institutional policies and strategies, and the Academic Framework. The Communications and Alumni Services Team manage information for prospective students while faculty teams manage programme information. The Academic Services Team manage data, the Key Information Set and information for the Unistats website.

3.3 The review team found that the University College's written arrangements for the production, management and monitoring of information were sufficient to enable the Expectation to be met.

3.4 The review team considered this Expectation by meeting with students and staff; scrutinising the University College website; and viewing the Code of Practice, internal quality audit reports, programme specifications, student handbooks and other policies relating to information.

3.5 Information relating to the University College's mission, values and strategic plan is available on the website. The website also provides clear programme information relating to entry criteria, academic content, fees and progression routes. The Key Information Set is clear and accessible on programme pages, which are in general well structured and easy to navigate. Students reported to the team that they were satisfied with the content of the website and the fact it was up to date and accurate.

3.6 The review team found that student satisfaction with the broader range of information available such as prospectuses, student handbooks, newsletters and the virtual learning environment was high, with students reporting that they felt well equipped to succeed. External examiner reports are available online, a student charter is also in place, and information relating to complaints and appeals is contained within handbooks. Awareness of these categories of information was not universal amongst the student body, although it was known by many students; there may be benefit in more extensive communication with the student body.

3.7 Student ambassadors assist in providing information to prospective students at open days and other events. The University College also has its own online video channel which hosts interviews with current students for prospective students to view. The team considered this to be a positive initiative which enabled prospective students to gain an insight into the student experience at the institution.

3.8   Clear and detailed information is available for staff in relation to quality assurance. The Code of Practice details arrangements for validation, student engagement and admissions amongst others. A Deliberative Committee Handbook is available which contains terms of reference and membership for committees. Guidelines are also made available to external participants in validation and review. This information is also accessible online on the University College's secure portal.

3.9   The University College monitors information it produces in a variety of ways. The website has in-built hierarchies which enable the institution to ensure that approval is taking place at the required level. Information is also subject to an internal quality audit, most recently in February 2013. The Head of Policy and Planning is responsible for overseeing actions emanating from the audit and reports to Academic Audit Committee. The review team found that the audit process was detailed, comprehensive in scope, and effective.

3.10   On completion of their studies, students receive specific documentation depending on their level of study. Students are provided with an academic summary of modules achieved on completion of each stage, and an academic transcript and degree certificate on completion of an award. The review team saw an example of the certificates and transcripts which are provided to students on completion. There is a clearly laid out procedure for the issuing of replacement certificates or a transcript of results.

3.11   The review team concludes that as a result of the clear division of responsibilities in relation to information management, high levels of student satisfaction and robust monitoring arrangements, this Expectation is met and the level of associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

3.12   The University College has in place clear and comprehensive arrangements and responsibilities which enable it to ensure that the information it provides about its higher education provision is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. Evidence seen by the review team on the website, internal portal and other documentation demonstrated that these arrangements are effective, and the value of the information was endorsed by students who met the review team. For these reasons the review team concludes that the quality of the information produced by the University College about its higher education provision **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 College defines quality enhancement as 'a systematic approach to the student learning experience by improving the quality of provision and personal and professional development opportunities'. From reading the documentation and in the meetings that took place during the review, the review team was informed of a variety of examples of activities that the University College identified as representing enhancement. In the self-evaluation document it is asserted that this is a deeply embedded philosophy, a view that was also expressed in meetings with staff. The approach is detailed in the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Strategy 2009-16, which is reviewed annually, most recently in June 2013. As such, the University College sees enhancement as being underpinned by the quality assurance procedures and external activities of the staff.

4.2 Following recommendations in the 2013 Academic Quality and Standards Annual Report, and the paper to the Academic Board, *Approach to Enhancement*, enhancement has been placed as a standing item on the agenda for the Learning and Teaching Committee; the Academic Board receives notification of examples of enhancement activities through this route, and also through reports of validations and audit reports. Through the *Approach to Enhancement* paper, sources for enhancement were identified as: annual monitoring; validation and review; the reviews undertaken by the Academic Audit Committee; student representation and feedback;and the external activities of staff, such as external examining, external panel membership and attendance at conferences.

4.3 Through these quality assurance systems, the University College identified as examples of enhancement activities: the introduction of the Student Experience Group at undergraduate level; the introduction of face-to-face examination revision workshops at postgraduate level, as outcomes of annual monitoring and student feedback; improvements to the management of option modules at postgraduate level, based on outcomes from validation and review; the restructuring of the annual monitoring report templates to enable easier identification of areas where improvements can be made from Academic Audit deliberations; and, from staff input, the introduction of student focus groups at undergraduate level. While these activities can be seen to be enhancing learning opportunities, particularly at local levels, these represent the normal operation of quality assurance feedback loops rather than strategic, deliberate steps.

4.4 The self-evaluation document also identifies a set of enhancement case studies. These include activities that might be considered standard for the sector, such as student representation on all core committees and ensuring that public information is correct and up to date. In the final meeting with the senior staff, the team was informed that there were three strands of strategic enhancement: sustainability, faculty (academic staff) development, and assessment and feedback, the last of which was not identified as one of the exemplars in the self-evaluation document, nor had it been referred to in other meetings with staff as an example of enhancement. The development of faculty was represented in terms of the provision of staff development workshops, the annual conference and linkages through to the annual appraisal processes.

4.5 The contribution of the University College to the development of a sustainable future for the financial services sector is defined as a strategic enterprise with the aim that

the University College 'endeavours to identify and address the key sustainability issues within the curriculum at all levels, ensuring that students are able to practise sustainability throughout their future careers.' This aim is set out in the Sustainability Policy that arose out of strategic direction from the Board of Governors and is implemented through the Sustainability Committee, chaired by the Principal. This policy has been enacted through a major curriculum review, initiated in 2011, to identify, develop and embed sustainability themes within the curriculum. In 2013 student representation was added to the Sustainability Committee and two appointments made to the role of Sustainability Champion.
The Sustainability Committee reports on progress to the Learning and Teaching Committee and the Higher Education Faculty Operations Group. A formal report on progress was presented to the Board of Governors in December 2013 and to all full-time students.
In addition to the curriculum review, progress has included creation of a sustainability area on the virtual learning environment with links to educational resources, active engagement with the London Universities Environmental Group and a one-day conference, hosted by the University College in November 2012, on Developing Sustainable Business Practice Through Education.

4.6   The team concluded that there were robust quality assurance systems in place for identifying opportunities for enhancement, supported by an institutional ethos to continually improve the student learning experience. While much of the University College's stated enhancement activity took the form of actions impacting on specific student cohorts and resulted from the implementation of standard quality assurance loops rather than resulting from deliberate, strategic direction, the team recognised that projects such as the development and implementation of the Sustainability Policy did exemplify such strategic and systemic activities. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation of the Quality Code is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.7   The University College's approach to enhancement is reflected in the combination of establishing an ethos across all staff and in specific initiatives which derive from a number of different sources, including quality assurance mechanisms and the three strategic strands, of which sustainability is evidently the most developed. Based on these arrangements, the review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

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

Findings

5.1   The University College's approach to, and range of opportunities for, student engagement are addressed under Expectation B5 of this report.

5.2   The University College has taken an innovative approach to student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement through the establishment of a dedicated module for student representatives. The Student Representation and Advocacy module carries notional credit and is designed to support students in undertaking their role effectively. The University College views this as an important tenet of their student engagement work. At the time of the review, three students had completed the module in the first cohort and a further seven on the second cohort.

5.3   The University College conducted a detailed audit of student engagement arrangements in May 2013. The review team found that this process was highly focused in terms of scope, and that recommendations were well considered and mirrored by the findings of the review team regarding the value of increasing the opportunities for staff and students to enter into a dialogue at the individual programme level. This audit and the associated action plan therefore effectively underpin the University College's strategic focus in this area.

5.4   Students are actively involved in the deliberative committee structure and feel listened to by the institution. The University College has taken the approach of appointing students, following an open application process, to key committees, an approach that is not all that common at other higher education institutions, where they are often elected. This arrangement is working very well in context, however, as it helps to ensure representation from part-time and distance learners in formal committees.

Glossary

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

e-learning
See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

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

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

Flexible and distributed learning
A programme or module that does not require the student to attend classes or events at particular times and locations.
See also **distance learning**.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Programme specifications
Published statements about the intended **learning outcomes** of programmes of study, containing information about teaching and learning methods, support and assessment methods, and how individual modules 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.