University of Chichester

Institutional Review
by the Quality Assurance Agency
for Higher Education

March 2012

Contents

About this review

This is a report of an Institutional Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at the University of Chichester. The review took place on 5-9 March 2012 and was conducted by a team of five reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Elizabeth Barnes
- Dr Stephen Ryrie
- Dr Marie Stowell
- Mr Matthew Barrow (student reviewer)
- Mr Hugo Burchell (review secretary).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by the University of Chichester and to make judgements as to whether or not its academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. In this report the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
  - threshold academic standards[1]
  - the quality of learning opportunities
  - the enhancement of learning opportunities
- provides commentaries on public information and the theme topic
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the institution is taking or plans to take.

A summary of the key 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 5.

In reviewing the University of Chichester the review team has also considered the theme: First Year Student Experience.

The QAA website gives more information about QAA and its mission.[2] For background information about the University of Chichester see page 4. A dedicated page of the website explains the method for Institutional Review of higher education institutions in England and Northern Ireland[3] and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents.

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[1] For an explanation of terms see the glossary at the end of this report.
[2] www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/pages/default.aspx
[3] www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/pages/ireni.aspx

Key findings

This section summarises the QAA review team's key findings about the University of Chichester.

QAA's judgements about the University of Chichester

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

- Academic standards at the University **meet UK expectations** for threshold standards.
- The quality of student learning opportunities at the University **meets UK expectations**.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities at the University **meets UK expectations**.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following **features of good practice** at the University of Chichester:

- the design and implementation of the Support and Information Zone (paragraph 2.7)
- the implementation of electronic module assessment feedback (paragraph 2.11)
- the work of the Disability and Academic Skills Service and the Disability Equality Group in enhancing the experience of disabled students (paragraph 2.39)
- the learning opportunities and personal support provided through the MPhil probationer scheme (paragraph 2.43)
- the support for individual postgraduate research students within the context of an effective research environment and culture for postgraduate research (paragraph 2.44)
- the learning and teaching resource page on Moodle as an effective means of disseminating good practice (paragraph 4.4)
- the University's commitment to the quality of the student experience, through the alignment of institutional strategy, values and culture (paragraph 4.6).

Recommendations

The QAA review team **recommends** the University of Chichester to:

- ensure that annual reports from external examiners are systematically made available to students' representatives from November 2012 (paragraph 1.4)
- ensure oversight and consistency for all taught postgraduate programmes in relation to the revised postgraduate regulatory framework by the start of the academic year 2013-14 (paragraph 1.9)
- systematically assure itself that all elements of action plans arising from its quality assurance processes have been addressed from the start of the academic year 2012-13 (paragraph 1.11)
- complete the review of the definition and coherence of joint and combined honours programmes by the start of the academic year 2013-14 (paragraph 1.12)
- require staff and postgraduate research students new to teaching to participate in a learning programme to support their development upon commencement of teaching duties from the start of the academic year 2012-13 (paragraph 2.3)

- clarify institutional oversight for the delivery, monitoring and individual student completion of the Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education from the start of the academic year 2012-13 (paragraph 2.4)
- devise a plan by the start of the academic year 2012-13 to strengthen student employability and career development (paragraph 2.31)
- review the Quality Handbook for collaborative provision to ensure that each stage of the due diligence and approval processes are clearly articulated and consistent, including how the memorandum of agreement relates to partner and programme approval. This should be completed before any further institutional approvals are undertaken (paragraph 2.48)
- ensure that certificates and transcripts for collaborative programmes fully meet the expectations of the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education (Code of practice)* with respect to information provided about the language of instruction and the location of the partner before the next graduation (paragraph 2.49)
- improve the communication and dissemination of the student commitment charter from the start of the academic year 2012-13 (paragraph 2.54).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The review of the postgraduate regulatory framework (paragraph 1.9)
- The action being taken to ensure alignment of provision with the *Code of practice, Section 3: Disabled students* and *Section 8: Career education, information, advice and guidance* (paragraph 1.14).
- The introduction of revised arrangements for the training of staff who become postgraduate research supervisors (paragraph 2.45).
- The review of the recommendations of the external consultant's report on transnational collaboration (paragraph 2.47).

Public information

The information the University of Chichester provides about its higher education is clear, accessible, accurate, and up to date.

The first year student experience

The University of Chichester has effective arrangements in place for managing the experience of first-year students.

Further explanation of the key findings can be found in the operational description and handbook available on the QAA webpage explaining [Institutional Review for England and Northern Ireland](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/pages/ireni.aspx).[4]

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[4] www.qaa.ac.uk/institutionreports/types-of-review/pages/ireni.aspx

About the University of Chichester

The University of Chichester was granted university title in 2005 after gaining degree awarding powers in 1999 as the University College Chichester. The University is located on two sites, the Bishop Otter Campus in Chichester, and the Bognor Regis Campus. The University has 563 members of staff. The University describes itself as one of the smallest modern universities in the country. Its mission is:

> To be a socially responsible university that is recognised internationally, significant nationally, important regionally and vital locally - not only in teaching and student experience, but also in research and in its diverse communities and the public, private and voluntary sectors.

In 2010-11 there were 5,710 students (4,016 full-time and 1,694 part-time). There were 1,260 postgraduate taught students and 53 postgraduate research students. Research degrees are awarded through an accreditation agreement with the University of Southampton. The University has 380 students studying for the University's awards with seven collaborative partners.

Since the QAA Institutional audit in 2007 the University has twice undergone restructuring of its management arrangements. In January 2011 the University appointed its current Vice Chancellor. The University considers the introduction of the new student funding arrangements and potential changes to Teacher Education to be among its current major challenges.

Explanation of the findings about the University of Chichester

This section explains the key findings of the review in more detail.[5]

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](#)[6] 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.[7]

1 Academic standards

Outcome

The academic standards at the University of Chichester **meet UK expectations** for threshold standards. The review team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

Meeting external qualifications benchmarks

1.1   The University's qualifications, including those awarded under collaborative arrangements, are allocated to the appropriate level in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). This is achieved through institutional requirements that must be demonstrated through the process of planning and designing new programmes of study. Evidence from programme approval events generally shows that careful consideration is given to the level of the programme. External examiners' reports and annual monitoring reports are also required to confirm programmes' continuing alignment with the FHEQ.

Use of external examiners

1.2   The University's use of external examiners ensures that academic standards are adequately maintained. External examiner roles are defined clearly and the University's processes for nominating, appointing and inducting examiners to the role operate effectively. There is a suitable template for preparing a response to external examiner reports and there are clear lines of responsibility for those involved in preparing and approving the written response.

1.3   At programme, department and institutional levels the review team saw evidence of generally effective consideration and use of external examiners' reports. This showed that the University uses external examiners' reports to confirm and identify actions to secure academic standards, including programmes delivered through collaborative arrangements. However, the University did not provide evidence that it systematically monitors the completion of action plans based on external examiners' reports (see also paragraph 1.11 below), or that it ensures that such reports are made available to students' representatives.

1.4   The review team **recommends** that the University ensures that annual reports from external examiners are systematically made available to students' representatives from November 2012.

Assessment and standards

1.5   The University's design, approval, monitoring and review of assessment is effective in ensuring that students have the opportunity to demonstrate the learning outcomes of their awards. There is a comprehensive set of assessment regulations, and evidence of careful consideration and approval of institutional changes to those regulations.

1.6   Teaching staff make effective use of the University's generic marking criteria and there are clear policies for internally moderating marks. Students have raised concerns about the timing and quality of assessment feedback. The University's Learning and Teaching Strategy has clear aims to improve feedback. Students who met the review team praised the online module assessment feedback system (see paragraph 2.11 below), introduced in 2011-12, as a means of receiving more timely feedback on their work.

1.7   The review team saw evidence of effective consideration of assessment strategies in the conduct of approval, monitoring and periodic review, including the use made of the views of external advisers in these processes. This also applies to programmes delivered through collaborative arrangements.

1.8   The Postgraduate Awards Scheme was undergoing a review at the time of the Institutional Review visit. The University initiated this review because more variation from assessment regulations, for example the use of different types of grading schemes, had been identified between its postgraduate taught programmes than was expected. The Scheme regulates taught postgraduate students' assessment and is used by those involved in developing and approving postgraduate programmes. Variation from the Scheme may be approved for new programmes through programme approval, or for existing programmes through the minor change process.

1.9   The review team **affirms** the University's review of the postgraduate regulatory framework. The team **recommends** that the University ensures oversight and consistency for all taught postgraduate programmes in relation to the revised postgraduate regulatory framework by the start of the academic year 2013-14.

Setting and maintaining programme standards

1.10   The review team saw convincing evidence that the University's processes for approval, monitoring and review of programmes ensure that academic standards are set and maintained and allow students to demonstrate the learning outcomes of their awards.

1.11   However, the review team noted a lack of evidence that would allow the University to systematically assure itself that action plans had been completed, including those from annual monitoring and external examiner reports (see paragraph 1.3 above). The review team **recommends** that the University systematically assures itself that all elements of action plans arising from its quality assurance processes have been addressed from the start of the academic year 2012-13.

1.12   The previous audit by QAA in 2007 recommended that the University review the definition and coherence of joint and combined honours programmes. In response the University has reduced the number of these programmes from 285 to 88, and the production of new handbooks for joint honours programmes is ongoing. The current review team found that a consistent statement of learning outcomes for all joint and combined honours programmes was therefore still lacking. The review team **recommends** that the University completes the review of the definition and coherence of joint and combined honours programmes by the start of the academic year 2013-14.

Subject benchmarks

1.13   Subject benchmark and qualification statements are used effectively in the University's processes for programme design, approval, delivery and review to inform standards of awards. There is also clear evidence that the University takes care to ensure that programme standards are set and maintained to meet professional, statutory and regulatory body requirements.

1.14   The review team **affirms** the action being taken to ensure alignment of provision with the *Code of practice, Section 3: Disabled students* and *Section 8: Career education, information, advice and guidance.*

2   Quality of learning opportunities

Outcome

The quality of learning opportunities at the University of Chichester **meets UK expectations**. The review team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

Professional standards for teaching and learning

2.1   The University supports professional standards for teaching and support of learning. Students describe staff as passionate and enthusiastic about their subjects, and are positive about the learning experience and support provided by their tutors. The new research strategy recognises the broader nature of research and professional practice that informs the curriculum and learning and teaching experience.

2.2   New staff receive a structured induction and work with a mentor and a buddy. Support is available to new teachers through the Postgraduate Certificate in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (PG Cert L&T in HE) and staff taking this award value the experience and the contribution it makes to their teaching practice.

2.3   Staff with no previous teaching experience are expected to take the PG Cert L&T in HE within three years of appointment, but this is not a requirement. The review team also noted that some postgraduate research students were teaching but had not completed this award and, due to timing of start dates for the course, some research students were unable to begin it until after they had started teaching. The review team **recommends** that the University requires staff and postgraduate research students new to teaching to participate in a learning programme to support their development upon commencement of teaching duties from the start of the academic year 2012-13.

2.4   From its scrutiny of documentation and its meetings with staff, the review team found that responsibilities for managing, overseeing and monitoring the PG Cert L&T in HE were unclear. The review team **recommends** that the University clarifies institutional oversight for the delivery, monitoring and individual student completion of the PG Cert L&T in HE from the start of the academic year 2012-13.

2.5   In 2012 the University launched a new system for teaching observation. Teaching staff who met the review team were positive about the benefits of the initiative.

Learning resources

2.6   The University's learning resources are appropriate and allow students to achieve the learning outcomes of their programmes. The Learning and Teaching Strategy sets out three key objectives aimed at making a positive impact on students' experience and their learning environment.

2.7   Significant investment has been made in the development of the University's physical resources. This includes a total refurbishment of the Dome, a grade 1 listed building and a new Learning Resources Centre, both on the Bognor Regis campus. The Learning Resource Centre project included the design and implementation of a new Support and Information Zone, informed by a project group that included students as well as academic and professional services staff. This initiative demonstrates a student-centred approach, and has enhanced access to resources and student support including a 'one-stop shop' incorporating the library, IT support, student services, and a variety of study settings. The design and implementation of the Support and Information Zone is a **feature of good practice**.

2.8   The University oversees and manages its teaching accommodation effectively, including regular assessment of its continuing fitness for purpose. Resources are also monitored at programme level with effective input from subject librarians.

2.9   The virtual learning environment, Moodle, supports learning in all modules. The University has participated in a national programme to support the management of cultural changes associated with utilising and embedding new technologies for pedagogic purposes. Considerable progress has been made to meet the University's minimum requirements for information to be provided on Moodle. Students reported improving engagement by staff with Moodle and an increasing use of interactive learning.

2.10   Annual performance reviews for staff allow progress against individual objectives to be reviewed, and provide an opportunity to plan professional development aligned to the University strategy. A comprehensive staff development portfolio is in place and an 80 per cent target has been set for staff participation in development activities.

2.11   Electronic module assessment feedback has been implemented across the University. Staff have been well supported in its implementation, with a series of workshops offered both centrally and at departmental level. Students reported a positive impact on the return of assessed work. The implementation of electronic module assessment feedback is a **feature of good practice**.

Student voice

2.12   Students are enabled to make an effective contribution to the University's quality assurance processes. Students have a very positive relationship with the University's senior management and provide feedback both through formal and informal methods. Students are represented on all of the University's major committees, including the Board of Governors. Students feel able to make an effective contribution at these meetings.

2.13   A Student Forum, chaired by the Vice Chancellor, meets three times a year. This provides a mechanism for senior staff to meet selected student representatives and for the President and Vice President of the Students' Union to discuss matters that impact on students. Students said that when issues raised could not be addressed within the forum they were fed into appropriate committees.

2.14   The revised process for annual monitoring includes students as panel members. Students see this as a positive development and welcomed the opportunity to be more fully engaged in quality assurance activities. Students are met as part of the periodic review process. The University also wishes to include students as panel members and anticipates that this may become possible when the periodic review process is revised.

2.15   Student programme representatives and committee representatives are offered training through the Students' Union, but take-up of the training is inconsistent. However, students feel able to fulfil their roles and are positive about the opportunities at all levels to provide feedback and input. They are also positive about the systems in place for feeding back on action taken.

2.16   Outcomes from the National Student Survey (NSS) are shared with the Students' Union. Programme teams share outcomes and action plans with students through programme committees. An internal university-wide student survey is in place for level 5 students not participating in the NSS. The review team saw responses to the NSS results from most professional service areas.

2.17   An annual student survey based on national surveys has been implemented to seek feedback from postgraduate research students. The outcomes have been shared with students through committees and a seminar, and actions for enhancement have been identified. The review team considered this approach to have contributed to the ongoing development of the positive research culture and student experience (see also paragraph 2.44 below).

2.18   Students complete module evaluations but report that the forms are not particularly user-friendly. Many module handbooks provide feedback on responses to the previous year's module evaluations. Focus groups and other informal methods are used to collate feedback. Reports are scrutinised by an evaluations group that involves students and tutors.

Management information is used to improve quality and standards

2.19   There is effective use of management information by the University to safeguard quality and standards and to promote enhancement of student learning opportunities.

2.20   Academic performance and demographic data for all categories of students is made available to subject teams for the purpose of annual monitoring. The review team found this data to be well presented, accessible and comprehensive. Annual monitoring reports show that data from surveys is used to inform departmental action plans.

2.21   The review team saw evidence that management information is used to provide an appropriate institutional overview of academic quality and standards. A comprehensive annual report, consisting of key performance and benchmarking data, is presented to a joint meeting of the University's Academic Board and Board of Governors. The review team found that this informative document provides a rich source of information about academic quality and standards.

Admission to the University

2.22   The University has an adequate policy that sets out the policies and procedures for the admission of students. The process for making a complaint about an admissions decision is also included within this policy. The Student Written Submission stated that the admissions policy is too technical and inaccessible for students. The University recognised

this and intends, with the recent appointment of a new Head of Quality, to review the admissions policy, procedures and guidance and their accessibility to students.

2.23   An admissions forum is in place for admissions tutors to share updates on changes and developments and to share good practice.

2.24   Students are provided with useful information before their arrival. A start of year group is in place to oversee registration and programme induction, and a student arrivals group focuses on residents' arrival days.

2.25   Induction usually takes place over two to five days, with sessions provided by library staff. Students from collaborative partner colleges have a local induction and interaction with University staff through periodic visits. Postgraduate taught students have a brief induction period, including a library induction and introductions to staff.

2.26   Postgraduate research students have an induction with a supervisor and then a general induction for generic information. Although the student survey had suggested some improvements that could be made to induction, postgraduate research students who met the review team spoke positively about their induction.

Complaints and appeals

2.27   The University has effective complaints and appeals procedures. There are separate procedures for complaints and appeals. These are included in the academic regulations available to students through their own area of the University's website, but it is not immediately obvious where the complaints procedure is located.

2.28   Guidance on the avoidance of plagiarism and academic malpractice is included in student module handbooks, and some handbooks include links to the regulations incorporating the complaints and appeals procedures. Mitigating circumstances procedures are well known and understood by students. Students commented that personal tutors and academic advisers can be approached for details of particular policies and procedures, including the complaints or appeals processes and the plagiarism policy. The Students' Union provides support to students making a complaint or an appeal, or in cases of suspected academic misconduct.

2.29   The Academic Standards Committee considers a summary of complaints addressed and the outcomes of those complaints that have progressed to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator. Academic malpractice data is also included in the annual report to the joint meeting of the Academic Board and the Board of Governors (see paragraph 2.21 above).

Career advice and guidance

2.30   The University's approach to career education, information, advice and guidance is quality assured through periodic external verification ('Matrix accreditation'), and through internal monitoring. The 2006 Matrix accreditation report recommended the introduction of service level agreements between the Careers Service and academic departments in order to foster greater collaboration. The review team noted that no formal arrangements had been established. Instead, the Careers Service works with academic programmes mainly through the delivery of one-off sessions.

2.31   Employability skills tend to be embedded into academic programmes primarily through work placements, though staff also referred to the inclusion of transferable skills in the curriculum. Professional development planning is not widely taken up by students.

The review team considered that the University's current approach towards enhancing students' employability and career development could be strengthened. The review team therefore **recommends** that the University devises a plan by the start of the academic year 2012-13 to strengthen student employability and career development.

2.32   The Careers Service has set up careers drop-in days, where students can seek advice on particular topics such as preparing CVs and developing interview skills. Information is also provided on the students' private area of the website, including details of careers talks. For careers advice, students self-refer to the Careers Service and are advised of services primarily through emails.

2.33   Steps have been taken to offer students the opportunity to enhance their employability through extra-curricular activities, such as the newly introduced Chichester Award and the GraduateOn scheme. The University has also joined a regional partnership called 'Graduate Jobs South' to provide a well designed website for employers and graduates with a single source of worthwhile jobs and internship opportunities.

Supporting disabled students

2.34   The University proactively manages and enhances the quality of learning opportunities to enable the entitlements of disabled students to be met. This is achieved through the monitoring and promotion of developments, including staff training take-up, equality assessment outcomes, accessibility matters, and the review of management information that includes data on disability, student achievement and progression.

2.35   The Disability and Academic Skills Service within Student Services provides effective professional support for disabled students and gives advice to academic and professional services departments. Students who met the review team spoke positively about the support provided by the service. As noted in paragraph 1.14 above, the University is taking action to ensure alignment of its provision with the revised *Code of practice, Section 3: Disabled students*.

2.36   There is comprehensive and good quality guidance available to applicants and students on the University webpages, including in relation to work placements. Documents are available in alternative formats on request and this is clearly flagged. There are clear processes for managing the admission of disabled students, including processes for encouraging disclosure and identifying support needs and reasonable adjustments - both through the admissions process and throughout the course. A pre-induction event for disabled students was successfully introduced in 2010, as well as an initiative for group screening for dyslexia.

2.37   Although students reported some variation in their experience of staff being informed and responsive to their additional needs, the review team heard from academic staff of the processes in place via the Student Online Academic Record to ensure they were aware of the additional needs of disabled students at the start of a programme or module, and that staff considered the processes were generally effective.

2.38   The Disability and Academic Skills Service provides a range of information for staff, for example in relation to identifying dyslexia, making reasonable adjustments for learning and teaching, and marking dyslexic students' work. The Staff Development programme also includes sessions relating to disability and equality/diversity more generally, although the University acknowledged that take-up could be improved.

2.39   The work of the Disability and Academic Skills Service and the Disability Equality Group in enhancing the experience of disabled students is a **feature of good practice**.

Supporting international students

2.40   The University offers an appropriate quality of learning opportunities to international students. Prospective and current international students are provided with useful and accessible information. The review team saw evidence of comprehensive support for international students through Student Support Services and the Applied Language Studies team. Applied Language Studies is monitored on an annual basis using the same process that is applied to academic programmes, and includes student feedback and a student member on the panel. Reports from the process have a strong focus on enhancement.

2.41   Language and academic skills development support for international students is designed to meet a range of international student needs, and includes pre-sessional and orientation programmes. There are also weekly sessions and drop-in sessions as well as social activities. Support is tailored for individual students following an initial tutorial and is proactive. The review team saw evidence of positive engagement from international students with this support.

Supporting postgraduate research students

2.42   Appropriate support and guidance is provided to enable postgraduate research students to complete their programmes of study and to enable staff involved in research programmes to fulfil their responsibilities.

2.43   The review team found that the support and guidance provided to postgraduate research students and to staff involved in their supervision was effective and took account of the expectations of the *Code of practice*. Of particular note is the probationer MPhil scheme, which provides students with six tutorials and access to facilities in order to prepare a research proposal. The learning opportunities and personal support provided through the MPhil probationer scheme is a **feature of good practice**.

2.44   The arrangements for annual monitoring and reporting, and for student feedback, also make a significant contribution to the enhancement of the student learning experience and development of an effective research environment for postgraduate research students. The support for individual postgraduate research students within the context of an effective research environment and culture for postgraduate research is a **feature of good practice**.

2.45   The review team **affirms** the introduction of revised arrangements for the training of staff who become postgraduate research supervisors.

Learning delivered through collaborative arrangements

2.46   The quality of learning opportunities delivered as part of collaborative arrangements is managed to enable students to achieve their awards. Liaison tutors and the University's Collaborative Programmes Forum perform an important role in managing individual programmes and in maintaining an overview of collaborative provision as a whole.

2.47   The review team saw evidence of detailed due diligence and scrutiny for two recently approved international collaborative partnerships. They noted the University's commitment to learn from this experience, to review processes and practice, and to work towards strengthening the management of partnerships at all stages of development. The review team **affirms** the review of the recommendations of the external consultant's report on transnational collaboration.

2.48 However, the review team found a lack of clarity and some inconsistencies in the processes and procedures for the approval of collaborative partnerships. The team therefore **recommends** that the University reviews the Quality Handbook for collaborative provision to ensure that each stage of the due diligence and approval processes are clearly articulated and consistent, including how the memorandum of agreement relates to partner and programme approval. This should be completed before any further institutional approvals are undertaken.

2.49 The review team **recommends** that the University ensures that certificates and transcripts for collaborative programmes fully meet the expectations of the *Code of practice, Section 2: Collaborative provision and flexible and distributed learning (including e-learning)* with respect to information provided about the language of instruction and the location of the partner before the next graduation.

Flexible, distributed and e-learning

2.50 The programme approval process takes account of the specific challenges of programmes delivered primarily through flexible, distributed and e-learning. The University provides effective support, training and advice for staff in making use of learning technologies for e-learning. The review team heard from staff and saw evidence demonstrating that the introduction of the University's new virtual learning environment had been well managed (see also paragraph 2.9 above).

Work-based and placement learning

2.51 The University manages the quality of learning opportunities delivered through work-based and placement learning effectively. The University assures and enhances the quality of learning opportunities delivered through work-based and placement learning through its course approval, its monitoring and review processes, and the establishment of good practice guidance.

2.52 The review team saw examples of course handbooks, student evaluations and annual monitoring that showed placements are well managed. Students who had undertaken a placement confirmed to the review team that they were well prepared, had been asked to evaluate their experience, and were debriefed.

Student charter

2.53 The University has a student commitment charter in place setting out the commitments of the University and the expected commitments of students. This was reviewed with the Students' Union in 2008-09.

2.54 Students who met the review team were clear about what was expected of them but were not aware of the charter. The review team **recommends** that the University improves the communication and dissemination of the student commitment charter from the start of the academic year 2012-13.

3 Public information

Outcome

The information the University of Chichester provides about its higher education is clear, accessible, accurate, and up to date. The review team's reasons for this conclusion are given below.

3.1   The University makes information about academic standards and quality publicly available via its website. The information is clear, accessible, accurate, and up to date. Students find the information useful in helping them make an informed choice when applying to the University and generally helpful for preparing for what they might expect when they join.

3.2   The University has effective systems for managing public information. The Director of Marketing Communications and Access has overall responsibility for the oversight of public information. Most information is made public and accessible using the University's website. At the time of the review visit a new version of the website was about to be launched.

3.3   Student satisfaction is high in relation to prospectuses and access to information about their academic programmes. Students have voiced concerns about a lack of information about hidden costs, for example those associated with field trips and sports equipment. The review team was informed that the University intends to provide more detailed information, upfront to applicants, about such costs.

4   Enhancement of learning opportunities

Outcome

The enhancement of learning opportunities at the University of Chichester **meets UK expectations**. The review team's reasons for this judgement are given below.

Findings

4.1   Enhancement of the student experience is one of five strategic priorities in the University's Strategic Plan. The Chief Executive Team regularly reviews progress against the priorities. The Learning and Teaching Strategy aligns with the Strategic Plan, and as noted in paragraph 2.6 it has objectives aimed at making a positive impact on students' experience. Academic and professional services departments are required to develop departmental strategies which align to the institutional priorities. The review team found that this alignment has led to strong support from staff for the University's enhancement agenda.

4.2   Enhancement initiatives are integrated in a systematic and planned manner. This was evident from, for example, the design and implementation of the new Support and Information Zone (see paragraph 2.7 above) and the implementation of online module assessment feedback (see paragraph 2.11 above); both of which demonstrate a student-centred approach.

4.3   As noted in paragraph 2.13 above, the Student Forum, which meets three times a year, provides a useful mechanism for senior staff to meet with students' representatives to discuss matters that impact on students. The review team noted the close working relationship between students and academic and professional services staff. The institution puts students genuinely at the heart of its values and activities, and is generally responsive to making changes based on student feedback. The review team noted that this culture has a strong impact on enhancing the student experience both at undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

4.4   The annual Learning and Teaching Conference is valued by staff as an effective way to share good practice and innovation. The Learning and Teaching Resource site on Moodle includes a repository of resources that staff can use to enhance their teaching as

well as a forum to showcase good practice. The Learning and Teaching Resource site on Moodle, as an effective means of disseminating good practice, is a **feature of good practice**.

4.5　　The University's quality assurance processes are used to enhance the quality of students' learning opportunities. Students' participation on the annual monitoring panels contributes to enhancement. The University anticipates including students as panel members in periodic review when the process is revised.

4.6　　The University's commitment to the quality of the student experience through the alignment of institutional strategy, values and culture is a **feature of good practice**.

5　　Theme: First Year Student Experience

Each academic year a specific theme relating to higher education provision in England and Northern Ireland is chosen for particular attention by QAA's Institutional Review teams. In 2011-12 the theme is the **First Year Student Experience**. The review team explored the first-year student experience at the University of Chichester.

Supporting students' transition

5.1　　The University has effective arrangements in place for managing the quality of experience provided for first-year students. The University proactively supports students' transition to higher education and is responsive to individual needs. There are thorough induction processes both at University and at programme levels. Targeted transition work is undertaken to support students with particular needs, such as international students, students from care, and students with disabilities. Much of this work is undertaken before the start of the year.

5.2　　Welcome Representatives, employed and trained by the Students' Union, meet incoming residential students and provide support for the first nine weeks of their studies, guiding them through the transition between home and university life.

5.3　　The recently revised annual monitoring process now includes a 'thematic' section which, for reports on 2010-11, asks for commentary on the first-year student experience.

Information for first-year students

5.4　　Before starting their studies, students are given sufficient and appropriate information. Handbooks are provided and students are well briefed on what is expected from them in their assignments. An admissions portal on the University's website gives applicants access to information about the status of their application. This includes dates of interviews and open days, financial advice and guidance, accommodation details, course information (including reading lists), and induction information.

5.5　　Undergraduate students met by the review team were all aware of the existence of their programme specification. Programme and module handbooks, available on Moodle, provide students with course-specific information. Students studying at partner institutions reported that they were made aware of information about honours degree top-up possibilities when they began their studies. Programme Handbooks contain statements on the rights and responsibilities of staff and students.

Assessment and feedback

5.6   Programme and module assessment details are included in student handbooks. Undergraduate students met by the review team mainly felt that they had been well briefed on what was involved in their assessments. Students were aware of and understood the University's generic marking criteria, and felt that staff used the criteria appropriately. As noted in paragraph 2.11 above, the University has implemented online module assessment feedback to provide students with more timely feedback on their work.

Monitoring retention and progression

5.7   The University makes effective use of a range of statistical information to monitor the progression, retention and completion rates of first-year students. The University views its retention rates as good and suggests that the support put in place for first-year students is a contributory factor. Statistical information is provided to academic departments on programme entry qualifications, progression, retention and completion rates, and equality and diversity (including disability, ethnicity and domicile) and is benchmarked against university norms and sector comparators where possible. Departments are required to analyse these quality indicators as part of the annual monitoring process.

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to key terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Most terms also have formal 'operational' definitions. For example, pages 18-19 of the handbook for this review method give formal definitions of: threshold academic standards; learning opportunities; enhancement; and public information.

The handbook can be found on the QAA website at: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/informationandguidance/pages/ireni-handbook.aspx.

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

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

Academic Infrastructure Guidance developed and agreed by the higher education community and published by QAA, which is used by institutions to ensure that their courses meet national expectations for academic standards and that students have access to a suitable environment for learning (academic quality). It consists of four groups of reference points: the **frameworks for higher education qualifications**, the **subject benchmark statements**, the **programme specifications** and the *Code of practice*. Work is underway (2011-12) to revise the Academic Infrastructure as the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

academic standards The standards set and maintained by institutions for their courses and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

Code of practice The *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* published by QAA: a set of interrelated documents giving guidance for higher education institutions.

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.

enhancement Taking deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the quality of **learning opportunities**. It is used as a technical term in QAA's audit and review processes.

feature of good practice A positive aspect of the way a higher education institution manages quality and standards, which may be seen as exemplary to others.

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*.

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

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

operational definition A formal definition of a term, which establishes exactly what QAA means when using it in reports.

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

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

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

Quality Code Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is being developed from 2011 to replace the **Academic Infrastructure** and will incorporate all its key elements, along with additional topics and overarching themes.

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.

threshold academic standard The minimum standard that a student should reach in order to gain a particular qualification or award, as set out in the **subject benchmark statements** and national qualifications frameworks. Threshold standards are distinct from the standards of performance that students need to achieve in order to gain any particular class of award, for example a first-class bachelor's degree. See also **academic standard**.

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