

# Higher Education Review (Plus) of The Royal School of Needlework

June 2014

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## About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Plus) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at The Royal School of Needlework. The review took place from 16 to 17 June 2014 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Ms Erika Beumer
- Professor Denis Wright.

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

In Higher Education Review (Plus) the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
  - threshold academic standards
  - the quality of learning opportunities
  - the information provided about learning opportunities
  - the enhancement of 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.

In Higher Education Review (Plus) there is also a check on the provider's financial sustainability, management and governance (FSMG). This check has the aim of giving students reasonable confidence that they should not be at risk of being unable to complete their course as a result of financial failure of their education provider.

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 5.

In reviewing The Royal School of Needlework 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 2013-14 are Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement and Student Employability,<sup>2</sup> and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.<sup>3</sup> A dedicated section explains the method for [Higher Education Review \(Plus\)](#).<sup>4</sup> For an explanation of terms see the [glossary](#) at the end of this report.

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<sup>1</sup> The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode/](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode/)

<sup>2</sup> Higher Education Review themes: [www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106).

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

<sup>4</sup> Higher Education Review (Plus): [www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Educational-Oversight.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Educational-Oversight.aspx)

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about The Royal School of Needlework

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at The Royal School of Needlework.

- The maintenance of threshold academic standards at the Royal School of Needlework **meets** UK expectations for threshold standards.
- The quality of student learning opportunities at the Royal School of Needlework is **commended**.
- Information about learning opportunities produced by the Royal School of Needlework **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities at the Royal School of Needlework **meets** UK expectations.

### Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at The Royal School of Needlework.

- The extensive involvement of employers and students in programme design and development (Expectation B1)
- The comprehensive, effective and rigorous admissions processes (Expectation B2)
- The use of bursaries to encourage and support student learning (Expectation B4)
- The effective systems in place to engage and respond to the student voice (Expectation B5).

### Recommendations

The QAA review team makes no recommendations to The Royal School of Needlework.

### Affirmation of action being taken

No affirmations have been identified.

### Theme: Student Employability

The Royal School of Needlework (RSN) develops students' employability through a number of mechanisms, including opportunities to participate in work placement, commissions and live client projects undertaken by RSN's commercial studio. The flexibility in the course structure allows students to independently secure a placement, undertake a professional development project and/or research work, and be involved in internal and external commissions. Within the curriculum the Professional Development unit in years 2 and 3 supports the development of employability skills. In addition the degree team organises an annual Professional Development Symposium which contributes to the Professional Development and the Professional Portfolio units and to which all students are invited.

### Financial sustainability, management and governance

There were no material issues identified at The Royal School of Needlework during the financial sustainability, management and governance check.

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

## About The Royal School of Needlework

The Royal School of Needlework (RSN) provides higher education courses in hand embroidery as well as short leisure courses, and certificates and diplomas in technical hand embroidery that are awarded by RSN. It has offered a foundation degree since 2009 and a top-up to BA honours since 2011. These replaced apprenticeships and are both validated by the University for the Creative Arts (the University). RSN's mission is to teach, practise and promote the art and techniques of hand embroidery. Its vision is to be known and recognised as the international centre for hand embroidery, offering a common approach to embroidery, open to all levels from beginners to advanced students of all ages; to be both the custodians of the history of hand embroidery techniques and active advocates of new developments in hand embroidery.

RSN was founded in 1872 by Lady Victoria Welby with two principles: to keep the art and techniques of hand embroidery alive and have embroidery recognised alongside fine art; and to provide paid occupation to educated women who would otherwise have been destitute. It is a charity and a company limited by shares. As a charity, RSN receives donations given specifically for support of students, including an endowment from a former RSN Life Friend. These funds are distributed in the form of bursaries, usually of £1,000. In 2013-14, 68 per cent of students received a bursary and since the start of the degree courses in 2009 a total of 72 bursary awards have been made, totalling almost £90,000.

RSN is governed by a Council of Trustees that has two subcommittees, one for finance and investment and one for education. The degree courses feature as an item on all Council agendas and the Degree Course Leader regularly attends to report on relevant matters. There is no direct link between the University's committee structures and those of RSN; however, all matters relating to the University are reported on and discussed at the Council.

The Foundation Degree in Hand Embroidery was validated by the University in 2009 and the BA (Hons) Top-up in Hand Embroidery was validated in 2011. RSN appointed additional academic staff to support the implementation and delivery of the new top-up degree course. In 2012 the University developed a Common Credit Framework against which all courses validated by them must map. As a result, the foundation degree was revalidated in 2012 and changes were made to the honours degree top-up to ensure it met the requirements of the framework. Staff and students at RSN consider the foundation degree and final year top-up to be three-year courses and refer to these generically as years 1, 2 and 3 of the degree course.

More recently, and following the appointment of a new Degree Course Leader in January 2013, RSN has developed a three-year honours degree course to replace the foundation degree and top-up. This was discussed and agreed by School Council and a validation event with the University took place in April 2014. All conditions set by the validation panel have been met and the new BA in Hand Embroidery for Fashion, Interiors, Textile Art will recruit its first cohort of students in September 2014. The existing foundation degree will be taught out, completing in 2015.

Key challenges faced by RSN include: the extensive quality assurance and validation activities that have taken place since the introduction of the degree courses; recruitment (overall student numbers have dropped from the largest cohort of 46 in 2011-12 to 25 in 2013-14); and the impending implementation of the new three-year honours degree that will run alongside the existing courses for one year.

## Higher Education Review (Plus) of The Royal School of Needlework

There have been no previous QAA reviews of RSN. The University underwent a collaborative provision audit in 2012 but provision at the Royal School of Needlework was not considered as part of that review.

## Explanation of the findings about The Royal School of Needlework

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 handbook for the [review method](#), also on the QAA website.

# 1 Judgement: Maintenance of threshold academic standards

**Expectation (A1): Each qualification (including those awarded through arrangements with other delivery organisations or support providers) is allocated to the appropriate level in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)*.**

## **Quality Code, Chapter A1: The national level**

### **Findings**

1.1 RSN's awarding body, the University for the Creative Arts (the University), is responsible for the validation, approval and review of courses. University policies and processes are designed to ensure validated programmes are located at the appropriate level within the FHEQ. RSN develops and designs the curriculum and gains approval for the courses using the University procedures. This therefore enables it to meet Expectation A1.

1.2 The review team tested the effectiveness of the arrangements by reviewing validation and revalidation documentation, external examiner reports, and minutes of meetings, and through discussions with staff. In particular the team considered documentation related to the successful revalidation of the existing BA (Hons) Hand Embroidery (top-up) in 2012 and the recent validation of the new BA (Hons) Hand Embroidery for Fashion, Interiors, Textile Art.

1.3 RSN is governed by a Board of Trustees, the RSN Council (the Council), which meets six times a year and has an advisory role. The degree courses are managed by the Degree Course Leader, supported by a senior lecturer, a contextual studies lecturer and a technical stitch tutor, and two part-time degree administrators. The Chief Executive and Degree Course Leader report to the Council and form the link with the University committees.

1.4 The Chief Executive and Degree Course Leader are members of the Senior Management Team and attend the University's Annual Collaborative Partner meeting. The Degree Course Leader also attends the Boards of Study, Boards of Examiners and Resit Boards held by the University's School of Crafts and Design, in which RSN's courses are located.

1.5 Course Boards are held at RSN and are attended by the academic staff, a degree administrator, the Marketing Manager and student representatives from all three years.

1.6 The FdA Hand Embroidery was revalidated in 2012 for a period of five years. The BA (Hons) Hand Embroidery (top-up) was also revalidated in 2012 for a period of five years. The new three-year BA (Hons) Hand Embroidery for Fashion, Interiors, Textile Art has recently been validated and will recruit from September 2014.

1.7 RSN follows the academic regulations and requirements of the University when developing courses and the Degree Course Leader matches the proposed elements of the course with the subject benchmark requirements.

1.8 The University's Quality Assurance Handbook and Common Credit Framework provide guidance to RSN during the development of courses. The University ensures the courses are allocated to the appropriate level through its validation processes that take into account subject benchmark statements and positioning in relation to the FHEQ.

1.9 Validation and revalidation documentation confirms that RSN responded to all conditions specified by University and completed the required recommendations.

1.10 Overall the review team concludes that effective processes and guidance are in place and that RSN meets its delegated responsibilities for matching programme outcomes and volumes of study to appropriate levels in the FHEQ. Expectation A1 is met and the level of risk is low.

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



**Expectation (A2): All higher education programmes of study take account of relevant subject and qualification benchmark statements.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A2: The subject and qualification level**

**Findings**

1.11 The University has ultimate responsibility for setting the academic standards of the degree courses. The external examiner reviews courses annually and checking adherence to subject and qualification benchmarks is part of this process. RSN follows University policies and procedures during course design that enable this Expectation to be met.

1.12 The team tested this through review of validation and revalidation documentation, and external examiner reports. The team also met staff from RSN and the University.

1.13 Staff use the *Subject benchmark statement: Art and design* during course development and design to ensure the appropriate subject and qualification level. The benchmark statement is also used to develop levels of difficulty throughout the course and to ensure students are prepared for further study at level 7 if required.

1.14 RSN provides a national standard for technical stitch which is supported by the fact that all technical stitch tutors have been taught through RSN's Apprenticeship scheme. Students whom the team met confirmed the quality and highly acclaimed standard of stitch tuition. The external examiner comments on the high level of technical skill that existing graduates attain and the important role RSN plays in maintaining the traditional craft of hand embroidery.

1.15 The 2012 revalidation of both the foundation degree and the BA top-up confirmed that the courses are appropriately aligned to the Quality Code, the *Subject benchmark statement: Art and design* and the University's Common Credit Framework.

1.16 The review team concludes that RSN has effective mechanisms to ensure that higher education courses it offers take account of relevant subject and qualification benchmark statements and that this Expectation is met. The level of risk is low.

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

**Expectation (A3): Higher education providers make available definitive information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements for a programme of study.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A3: The programme level**

**Findings**

1.17 RSN develops and runs courses under the academic regulations and requirements of the University's Quality Assurance Handbook and Common Credit Framework. The University reviews the programme specifications as part of the revalidation and validation process. These processes enable RSN to meet Expectation A3.

1.18 The team tested this through scrutiny of validation documentation and link tutor reports and in meetings with students and staff of RSN and the University.

1.19 The University's Common Credit Framework acts as a way of ensuring parity across subjects in terms of amount of work per unit/credit and parity of levels of assessment. Staff have attended training at the University on the use of this framework and receive additional support from the link tutor.

1.20 Information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements is disseminated through the course handbook. Detail is available on the University's website and this information is made available through links from RSN's website.

1.21 The validation documentation for the new BA (Hons) Hand Embroidery for Fashion, Interiors, Textile Art confirms that RSN fulfilled the condition to review the aims and learning outcomes of each unit to better reflect the incremental build, intent and level of language expected.

1.22 Students comment that the course gets more challenging as it progresses, and that academic staff are able to clarify the learning outcomes and assessment criteria to them if needed.

1.23 The review team concludes that RSN fulfils its delegated responsibilities to make available definitive information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements for its courses and that this Expectation is therefore met. The level of risk is low.

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

**Expectation (A4): Higher education providers have in place effective processes to approve and periodically review the validity and relevance of programmes.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A4: Approval and review**

**Findings**

1.24 RSN makes use of the University processes for approval and periodic review and has its own internal mechanisms for review of courses. These include regular review by RSN Council, which receives reports from the Degree Course Leader. In addition RSN operates the University's annual academic monitoring and curriculum development processes and makes use of external examiner's reports. These mechanisms enable RSN to meet this Expectation.

1.25 To test this review team considered a range of documents including minutes of meetings and annual monitoring reports, and met staff and students.

1.26 Internally RSN conducts regular team meetings to review the curriculum. Any suggested changes will then follow the minor/major change matrix as prescribed by University to update the curriculum.

1.27 Review of the courses takes place at a local level through course boards which meet three times a year and are held at RSN. Students, through their Course Board representatives, may ask for items to be put on the agenda. Students and tutors are able to discuss course issues and formulate action plans which are fed back to the student cohort and the minutes published and disseminated. Feedback from the employers is considered at Course Board meetings.

1.28 RSN prepares annual academic monitoring reports and associated quality assurance action plans. The Degree Course Leader attends RSN Board of Studies at the University and presents RSN's annual academic monitoring reports as well as the quality assurance action plans. Actions based on the monitoring and the external examiner's reports are recorded in RSN's Board of Studies meeting minutes and monitored for progress and impact.

1.29 RSN undertakes a regular review of the degree courses, which is considered by the RSN Council at each meeting (six times a year). The Degree Course Leader presents a report detailing the current status of the courses and the ongoing communication and review processes with the University. The Degree Course Leader may attend the meeting at their own request or at the behest of the Council to participate in strategic discussions. The Council also regularly reviews the annual academic monitoring reports and the external examiners reports.

1.30 Overall, RSN has robust internal processes for the review of courses and a close working relationship with the University, which enables effective use of their approval and periodic review processes. The team therefore concludes that RSN meets Expectation A4 and the level of risk is low.

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

**Expectation (A5): Higher education providers ensure independent and external participation in the management of threshold academic standards.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A5: Externality**

**Findings**

1.31 RSN uses external feedback in the design and review of their courses. University processes require the involvement of externals at validation and revalidation who are nominated by RSN. The external examiner provides important independent advice and guidance as well as scrutiny of standards. In addition RSN has extensive contact with the fashion and hand embroidery commercial sector and opportunities for students to participate in work placements and commercial activities. These mechanisms enable Expectation A5 to be met.

1.32 The team met staff of RSN and the University, and students to understand how externality is used in practice to support the management of threshold academic standards. In addition the team considered external examiner reports, testimonials from employers and industry contacts of RSN and commercial assignments undertaken by students.

1.33 Initially an external examiner for the degree courses was selected based on the need for external scrutiny of the technical field of stitch while the courses were developed, implemented and embedded. The first external examiner was appointed for a period of four years in 2009.

1.34 Subsequently RSN recognised the need for an external examiner from a wider subject area to enhance the external review of the curriculum and, when the initial external examiner's term of office was at an end, recommended a candidate with a broader skill set. This decision coincided with the development of the new BA (Hons) course. The aim was to have an external examiner who can give comments based on the wider academic context and support the future development of the courses. The new external examiner was recommended by RSN, recruited by the University using their vetting and selection criteria, and took up the post in January 2014. Staff whom the team met confirmed the relevance of the broader skill set of the new external examiner, who also has a strong background in research and is able to provide useful support for the more academic subjects. This will be particularly helpful when the new degree course commences in September 2014.

1.35 In reviewing work placement opportunities and other commercial assignments, the team found evidence of companies expressing their approval of the currency and quality of the course, as well as repeat requests for students to return to the organisation to gain further experience.

1.36 Overall, the review team concludes that independent and external participation in the management of threshold academic standards at RSN is effective and that Expectation A5 is therefore met and the risk is low.

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

**Expectation (A6): Higher education providers ensure the assessment of students is robust, valid and reliable and that the award of qualifications and credit are based on the achievement of the intended learning outcomes.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A6: Assessment of achievement of learning outcomes**

### **Findings**

1.37 RSN's assessment procedures are set in line with the expectation of the University assessment policy and the University's Link Tutor advises RSN in the process. All components of assessment are agreed at validation, including components of units that meet the intended learning outcomes. These procedures enable Expectation A6 to be met.

1.38 The team reviewed the validation and revalidation documents, link tutor reports and the external examiner reports, and met staff and students to explore how these procedures work in practice.

1.39 All summative assessment is double marked by members of the academic team and marks are recorded using the summative assessment matrix. A moderation meeting takes place and an agreed grade is recorded. Following the University's assessment policy, and given the small cohort numbers, all student work is internally verified and all work is viewed by both the Link Tutor and external examiner.

1.40 All components of a unit descriptor are checked at validation. The assignment briefs must meet the intended learning outcomes and assessment components of the unit. The subject content of the assignment is determined through academic planning within the course team at RSN. The course team reviews and revises assignment briefs to maintain the currency of the subject during its Course Board meetings.

1.41 The University Link Tutor acts as the main point of contact between the University and RSN. The Link Tutor verifies assessments to ensure adherence to the University's assessment policy during the internal verification process and reports any issues in the Link Tutor's report. During the internal verification process, which takes place three times a year, the Link Tutor looks at a sample of the student work to confirm it is at the appropriate level and that the assessment standard is equivalent to that of other courses at the University.

1.42 The team concludes that RSN has effective processes that adhere to the expectations of the University and ensure assessment is robust, valid and reliable and that qualifications and credit are awarded on the basis of achievement of intended learning outcomes. Expectation A6 is therefore met and the risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

## Maintenance of threshold academic standards: Summary of findings

1.43 In reaching its positive judgement the review team matched its findings against the criteria in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All expectations in this area are met and all risks are deemed low. There are no features of good practice and no recommendations or affirmations.

1.44 RSN fulfils effectively its delegated responsibilities for the maintenance of threshold academic standards. It has a close working relationship with the University and has undertaken significant validation and revalidation processes since the inception of the foundation degree course in 2009. The currently validated courses were mapped against the University's Common Credit Framework when it was introduced in 2012 and a new three-year honours degree course has been validated for delivery from September 2014. These validations and revalidations have afforded RSN many opportunities to engage with University policies and processes and to ensure effective use of external reference points. This has also enabled RSN to develop a sound understanding of the Quality Code and to use it where appropriate, as it has been implemented.

1.45 The team concludes that the maintenance of threshold academic standards of awards offered on behalf of the University of the Creative Arts at RSN **meets** UK expectations.

## 2 Judgement: Quality of learning opportunities

**Expectation (B1): Higher education providers have effective processes for the design and approval of programmes.**

**Quality Code, Chapter B1: Programme design and approval**

### Findings

2.1 Guidance regarding the implementation of quality assurance is provided in the University's Quality Assurance Handbook, which covers all sections of *Part B: Assuring and enhancing academic quality* of the Quality Code relevant to RSN, including validation. The Degree Course Leader discusses ideas for a new programme with the Chief Executive, and RSN Council then considers the financial implications, recognition and reputational impact. If approved, the outline proposal is submitted to the University's Academic Planning Committee. RSN's academic team then produce a detailed proposal according to University's guidelines for validation.

2.2 RSN follows the policies and procedures for programme design and approval as laid out in the University's Quality Assurance Handbook which enable Expectation B1 to be met.

2.3 The review team looked at Council and Course Board papers and degree validation reports, and talked with staff and students during the review visit. The team also looked at staff development and consultation activities that have helped academic staff in course design and in preparing for validation.

2.4 The team found that RSN has effective processes for programme design and approval. Council plays an integral role in course development through its annual strategic planning day, which involves all senior managers, and through Council meetings, which are attended by the Chief Executive and the Degree Course Leader. The latter was supported by a Council member with an academic background during course development. The review team heard that research undertaken by Council members led to Council agreeing to the development of a BA Hons degree to replace the FdA and BA top-up degrees.

2.5 There is evidence of significant involvement of students and employers in course development. The review team was advised that the design of the BA (Hons) degree was informed by student feedback at the Course Board and in tutorials with teaching staff. Discussions with employers on course development were also noted, particularly employers with students working on runway shows, and a commissioning employer. The extensive involvement of employers and students in programme design and development is **good practice**.

2.6 Overall, the review team concludes that there are effective processes for the design and approval of programmes and that Expectation B1 is therefore met. The level of risk is low.

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

**Expectation (B2): Policies and procedures used to admit students are clear, fair, explicit and consistently applied.**

**Quality Code, Chapter B2: Admissions**

**Findings**

2.7 Applicants to the degree course apply through UCAS to the University, who forward details to RSN where all applicants are then interviewed. RSN's admissions policy and procedures follow the University's Admissions Policy and allow Expectation B2 to be met.

2.8 The review team examined the operation of the admissions policies and procedures by scrutinising the information provided to applicants and staff, and at meetings with staff and current students during the review visit.

2.9 RSN promotes the degree course through recruitment talks and invitations to open days. Presentations are also given at trade events. Potential applicants are invited to see RSN as soon as possible, and are provided with the Open Day booklet in advance of a visit. The timetable and attendance requirements are discussed as part of any enquiry. It is very clear that, unlike RSN's other courses, the degree course is full-time. Open days at RSN allow potential applicants to meet staff from the degree course and students who met the review team said these are very useful.

2.10 Interviews are arranged by the University and held at RSN, and are normally conducted jointly by two members of the academic team. Interviewing all applicants allows RSN to decide whether an initial degree course applicant is more suited to the Certificate and Diploma, although initial informal enquiries to RSN generally allow this discussion to occur prior to application. Applicants are required to bring a portfolio of work to interview. The portfolio is viewed by more than one member of staff. Interviews are designed to allow the applicant to talk about their work, their motivations and what they hope to get out of the course. The interview questions are linked to a post-interview form completed by the interviewers for each applicant. In June 2014, the British Accreditation Council cited as a good feature the comprehensive interview process at RSN. Students who met the review team spoke positively about the interview process.

2.11 Interview decisions are uploaded by the Degree Course Leader onto the University's online portal. The outcome of the interview is disseminated to the candidate by the University and through UCAS. If an applicant is rejected, a pro forma is completed explaining the application decision, which is then uploaded to the University's system. The completed pro forma goes to the University's Head of School if there is an issue but this has never happened. The complaints and appeals procedures are described in Expectation B9. On acceptance, students are sent the University's welcome pack prepared by RSN. At the beginning of each year students are also provided with an up-to-date course handbook.

2.12 The annual academic monitoring procedure (Expectation B8) ensures RSN has appropriate policies for monitoring admissions requirements. The Degree Course Leader observes interviews from time to time to ensure their comparability. RSN Council receives an annual analysis of applicants to RSN from the Chief Executive and Degree Course Leader. The comprehensive, effective and rigorous admissions processes are **good practice**.

2.13 Overall, the review team concludes that RSN's policies and procedures used to admit students are clear, fair, explicit and consistently applied. Therefore Expectation B2 is met and the level of risk is low.

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



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

### **Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and teaching***

#### **Findings**

2.14 RSN's Teaching and Learning Strategy is one of 'learning through making' aligned with critical investigation through both theory and practice. The strategy supports a wide range of methods for learning and teaching, which are overseen and reviewed by the Degree Course Leader, supported by the Chief Executive. Matters concerned with teaching and learning are discussed formally at Course Board meetings, attended by the academic staff, degree administrator, Marketing Manager and student representatives from all three years of the programme. The Course Board forms part of the communication and feedback system between RSN and the University, and is an important forum for discussion and feedback between staff and students. Action plans are fed back to the student cohort and the minutes are published and disseminated. An Education Sub-committee of Council was established in 2011 to enable the Degree Course Leader and Chief Executive to discuss the course, including annual academic monitoring, with two Council members with experience in Higher Education. RSN's policies and procedures enable Expectation B3 to be met.

2.15 To determine whether this Expectation was met, the review team tested the evidence by speaking to students and staff of RSN and the University, and in addition by looking at relevant documentation, including Council and Course Board papers and the Student Submission.

2.16 Staff referred to students being challenged in tutorials and other teaching sessions to move forward in their personal exploration. Each tutorial is logged so that both tutor and student can see what is expected, and what has been advised or suggested for further exploration; reflective journals and workbooks are also used. Most students highlighted tutor contact and the availability of specialised facilities as helping them to learn. Students complete unit feedback forms as part of their learning experience, which allow staff to reflect on the content and delivery of units and explore new modes of delivery and content as appropriate.

2.17 The students who met the review team spoke of the effective role played by the Course Board in discussing learning and teaching issues, including student feedback. The team heard that there had not been a separate meeting of the Education Sub-committee of Council since 2012 and subsequently the academic trustee post had become vacant in 2013, and that matters are currently referred to the whole Council. Once a new trustee has been appointed the Sub-committee will reconvene with wider external membership. The Degree Course Leader currently makes a report on the degree courses, including proposed developments, for discussion at each meeting of Council.

2.18 Students had generally very positive comments about the library and stitching resources. Some students mentioned limitations on space for larger projects, such as printing, and difficulties with access to specialised facilities at the University. Staff commented that student work could be taken to the University provided it was sufficiently portable. The team was informed that the commercial studio is a separate space for client work, which students may visit to look at exhibitions, and that individual students may be selected to work on specific commercial projects. Staff and students commented on recent

improvements to RSN's information technology infrastructure in response to student feedback. The team learned of various enhancements to learning opportunities, including live projects, work placement opportunities and the contributions by visiting tutors, which are described more fully in Enhancement.

2.19 The team found that staff development is integral to the development of learning and teaching and that development needs are formally identified at staff appraisal. The review team was informed by staff of the opportunities available internally, at the University and externally. Annual academic monitoring reports record staff activities over the previous year, including research and scholarship that have contributed to the development of learning and teaching. There is an integrated staff appraisal and development programme managed by the Chief Executive. The degree teaching staff attend staff development events organised by the University, in addition to those organised by RSN.

2.20 Overall, the review team concludes that RSN has effective processes to support, monitor and enhance learning and teaching, including effective systems to receive and act upon student feedback and support for staff development. Therefore, Expectation B3 is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

**Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling student development and achievement**

**Findings**

2.21 RSN undertakes, through its University Partnership Agreement, to commit sufficient finance and resources for the operation of the validated courses. Resources and other issues relevant to student development and achievement are considered at an annual Collaborative Partnership meeting. The Finance Director reports to the Finance and Investment Sub-committee of the Council, which considers resourcing issues for the course. The Council holds an annual strategic planning day involving all the senior managers. Oversight of the provision by the University through annual academic monitoring (Expectation B8) is delegated to the appropriate University School Board of Studies attended by the Degree Course Leader and the annual partnership review meeting attended by the Degree Course Leader and the Chief Executive. Annual academic monitoring enables the staff team at RSN to review the arrangements and resources for students and how these are helping them to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. Action plans based on student feedback are monitored at Course Board meetings. School policies and procedures allow Expectation B4 to be met.

2.22 The review team considered the effectiveness of support and resourcing for students at meetings with staff and students, and through examination of supporting documentation provided.

2.23 RSN has a comprehensive admissions process to ensure students select the right course for them and new students are provided with a University welcome pack and a course handbook (Expectation B2). The team considers that student academic and pastoral support is well managed, although some students commented on difficulties encountered in accessing specialist support at the University's Epsom and Farnham campuses. It was clear from discussions with staff that there have been significant improvements in communication and services available at the University. University staff provide a series of presentations about the services available during student enrolment. Students can access disability support at either of the closest University campuses and online counselling support is also available. Pastoral support is provided by course tutors and the degree administrator plays an active role in signposting pastoral services.

2.24 Meetings with students and staff, and the documentation provided, strongly supported the stated aim of RSN to produce graduates who have been able to develop their academic, personal and professional potential through coursework, one-to-one tutorials, peer reviews, group work, seminars and lectures. Professional development opportunities are available through live projects, study visits, work placements and a Professional Development Symposium. Staff development is clearly integral to supporting and developing student achievement (Expectation B3).

2.25 The review team found that RSN takes a structured approach to improving the provision of learning resources through the Course Board and annual academic monitoring Expectation B8. Students and staff regard the specialist library facilities as excellent. Students can request book titles to be added to the library and can use the library facilities at the University's campuses. Course materials are available on RSN's virtual learning environment and online learning resources are also available on the University's portal. The team heard from students and staff of recent improvements in information technology.

2.26 Students can apply annually for a bursary to help support their studies. The team heard that 70 per cent of students are awarded a bursary and bursaries were cited as a good feature at course re-accreditation in June 2014 (Expectation B2). The bursary reports seen by the team and the students whom the team met testified to their value to students. The use of bursaries to encourage and support student learning is **good practice**.

2.27 Overall, the review team concludes that RSN has structured and effective systems in place to support student development and achievement. Therefore Expectation B4 is met and level of risk is low.

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

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

**Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student engagement**

**Findings**

2.28 Student participation is actively encouraged with all degree students being able to contribute to the quality assurance and enhancement of their course both directly through meetings with course tutors and course evaluation surveys, and indirectly through meetings with their course representatives who sit on the Course Board and the University's School Board. RSN's policies and procedures enable Expectation B5 to be met.

2.29 The review team considered the effectiveness of RSN's approach to ensuring effective student engagement at meetings with students and staff, and through examination of supporting documentation provided, including School Board and Course Board papers, and the Student Submission.

2.30 The review team heard from both staff and students of the effectiveness of the student representative system. Two student representatives per year group are elected by students under the University's Students' Union Course Representative Procedure and receive training through the University's Students' Union. One student representative is elected as the lead student representative who, together with year representatives, sits on the termly Course Board. Students whom the team met confirmed that RSN listens and responds to student feedback.

2.31 Formal meetings are scheduled between students and their student representatives termly and feedback given to staff at Course Board meetings, or to individual staff. Draft agendas for the Course Board are circulated in advance and all students can ask for items to be put on to the agenda by their representative. An action list is produced based on student feedback and progress is noted at subsequent meetings. Course Board minutes are disseminated to the student cohort by student representatives. Good ideas are shown to be taken forward and requests which are not possible are explained. There are also periodic meetings between year groups and a tutor to go through requirements, opportunities and expectations for the next part of the course. These are held at least once per unit, but more frequently for the first years than third years. The University's Teaching and Learning Unit also held a meeting with students in January 2014, which provided valuable feedback on student assessment (Expectation B6).

2.32 Student representatives are seen by students as the primary way RSN listens to the student voice. The effective systems in place to engage and respond to the student voice are **good practice**.

2.33 Overall, the review team concludes that RSN actively engages all students and has an effective student representation system, which is understood by both students and staff. Therefore Expectation B5 is met and the level of risk is low.

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

**Expectation (B6): Higher education providers ensure that students have appropriate opportunities to show they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the award of a qualification or credit.**

**Quality Code, Chapter B6: Assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning**

**Findings**

2.34 RSN complies with the University's assessment policies and procedures, including arrangements set out in the University's Quality Assurance Handbook to ensure there are appropriate policies for monitoring adherence to assessment regulations and for accreditation of prior learning. The external examiner ensures that the assessment processes and standards at School comply with those of the University. RSN's policies and procedures enable Expectation B6 to be met.

2.35 The review team met students and staff to discuss their experience of assessment and feedback, and the team looked at relevant documentation, including course handbooks, programme specification, the Student Submission, annual academic monitoring reports, external examiner reports, Board of Examiners' minutes, Course Board minutes, an accreditation report and examples of feedback to students.

2.36 RSN ensures that students are assessed in a range of ways, both formative and summative, which are aligned with the learning outcomes of the course, and that students are provided with appropriate feedback on standard and quality of their work. The external examiner has commented positively on the range of assessments used. Following the introduction of the University's Dissertation Policy in 2013, a Dissertation/Critical Reflection course unit will be introduced in 2014-15, which will closely align theory and practice, and further promote the use of the extensive resources available to students at RSN. Staff who met the review team confirmed RSN's assessment practices were aligned with the University's assessment policy and procedure. The team found that the academic timetable was developed to spread the workload for students and that assessments are not bunched; feedback on coursework is also timetabled. Staff attend University meetings and access other support on assessment practice, including staff development opportunities provided by the University's Teaching and Learning Unit. There is a clear system for recording, documenting and communicating assessment decisions. The Degree Course Leader attends all Board of Examiners' and Resit Board meetings.

2.37 The University's Link Tutor plays an important role in ensuring parity in terms of assessment quality and procedures between RSN and University, and to advise RSN on University procedures. The team saw feedback on assessment from a meeting between students and the University's Teaching and Learning Unit.

2.38 Students who met the team and who had contributed to the Student Submission, thought that the amount and timing of assessments were appropriate. Some students felt assessment and grading criteria could be unclear, although the tutors were always helpful when asked for clarification. Students were generally positive about the timeliness and quality of feedback on their work, and some recent improvements were noted. Delays on feedback when individual students had been given extensions for handing in their work were mentioned and students said that more notification of such delays would be helpful; staff are aware of this issue and are responding to it.

2.39 Overall, the review team found that the course provides students with appropriate opportunities to show that they have achieved the intended learning outcomes and that

RSN has an effective approach to the management of assessment. The team concludes that Expectation B6 is met and the level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.40 The role of the external examiner and their nomination and selection processes are described in Expectation A4 and are in accordance with the University's Quality Assurance Handbook. The external examiner is involved in ensuring that the learning outcomes of the degree programmes are assessed appropriately. The external examiner's report is sent to the validating partner who forwards it to RSN for consideration at RSN's Council. The report is then incorporated into the annual academic monitoring process, which is received by the University's School Board (Expectation B4). Through their quality assurance processes the University checks that any concerns or suggestions raised by the external examiner are acted upon or responded to. The procedures described allow Expectation B7 to be met.

2.41 The review team discussed whether effective use was made of the external examiner at meetings with the staff and students, and looked at the documentation provided, including external examiner and annual academic monitoring reports.

2.42 All newly appointed external examiners are required to attend training provided by the University; further training was provided when new Common Credit Framework and assessment procedures came out in 2012. The first external examiner for the degree courses was appointed in 2009 and completed their appointment in December 2013, with a new appointment approved in January 2014. The external examiner visits RSN during the summer term and attends the University's final Board of Examiners in June. The review team were told that in the early years of the foundation degree course, the external examiner paid a half-year visit to RSN to look at student work and to discuss the course with staff and students to ensure that standards were meeting expectations. This enabled the founding external examiner to make a significant contribution to curriculum development, especially with regard to art and design. The new external examiner has a strong background in research and the team heard from staff that this would help the course to develop further.

2.43 The university's external examiner report template guides the examiner to ensure coverage of key issues relating to academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. There is also an external examiners' serious concerns procedure. External examiner reports are posted on the University's intranet where they are accessible to all staff and students. Student representatives are informed of the external examiner process at Course Board and a report based on external examiner's visits and meetings with a representative sample of students are available on the course virtual learning environment. Students informed the review team that there were opportunities to meet the external examiner and student representatives are informed of the external examiner's visit at the Course Board. Some students were not aware that they had access to formal external examiner reports.

2.44 Overall, the review team concludes that students understand the role of the external examiner and that there is an effective system for considering and acting upon external examiner reports through annual academic monitoring. The team concludes that Expectation B7 is met and the level of risk is low.

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



**Expectation (B8): Higher education providers have effective procedures in place to routinely monitor and periodically review programmes.**

**Quality Code, Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review**

**Findings**

2.45 RSN is compliant with arrangements in the University's Quality Assurance Handbook for annual academic monitoring. Periodic review of the degree course is through revalidation by the University. In 2014, this event coincided with the partnership re-approval process by the University and degree re-accreditation. The procedures described enable Expectation B8 to be met.

2.46 To test the procedures for monitoring and review, the team met staff and students, and looked at the relevant documentation provided, including annual academic monitoring reports, action plans arising from annual monitoring, Council papers and minutes for Course Board and the University's School Board.

2.47 The programme is subject to regular review by the course team. Annual academic monitoring provides the formal framework to review the provision. The review team found that staff make full use of external examiner reports and performance data to reflect on course performance, which feed into the annual academic monitoring report and action lists. Annual academic monitoring reports and action plans are scrutinised by the University's School Board (Expectation B4), RSN's Council and Course Board. Once re-established, the Education Sub-committee will be involved in monitoring and review (Expectation B3). Students who met the team said that their views are listened to for annual monitoring and revalidation. RSN has fully complied with the 2014 revalidation recommendations and, following a re-approval event in April 2014, RSN Council has approved the renewal of the Partnership Agreement with the University.

2.48 Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation B8 is met and the level of risk is low.

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

**Expectation (B9): Higher education providers have fair, effective and timely procedures for handling students' complaints and academic appeals.**

**Quality Code, Chapter B9: Academic complaints and student appeals**

**Findings**

2.49 All students are made aware of the University's student academic appeals and complaints procedures through the University's online portal and website. There is also a section on appeals and complaints in the course handbooks. Students making an academic appeal do so directly to the University. The complaints procedure is clearly articulated in course handbooks and has additional steps to the University procedure in that the first point of review for a complaint is RSN's Degree Course Leader, then RSN's Chief Executive. Only if the complainant is not satisfied with RSN's response do they take it forward to the University. These policies and procedures enable RSN to meet Expectation B9.

2.50 The review team looked at the understanding and operation of the appeals and complaints procedures by talking to staff and students during the review visit.

2.51 The team found RSN has in place appropriate appeals and complaints procedures, which are both transparent and effective. RSN's academic team recognises that early intervention is key in preventing student concerns escalating into a more formal complaint. The staff and students whom the review team met knew where to look for information on how to make an appeal or a complaint and there was a general consensus that the system worked well. The team was informed by staff that since the degree courses began there have only been two complaints, both of which were resolved at School level.

2.52 Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation B9 is met and the associated level of risk is considered to be 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**

2.53 RSN's degree-awarding body takes ultimate responsibility for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities in relation to working with others. Here the review focuses on RSN's management of learning opportunities delivered by its work placement providers. RSN follows the University's Placement Learning Policy and Code of Practice, and there is clear guidance on the management of work placements. RSN's policies and procedures allow Expectation B10 to be met.

2.54 The review team reviewed documentation relating to the management of work placements and collaborative projects, and their role in the programme and assessment, and discussed these matters with staff and students.

2.55 Work placements can be self-initiated or obtained through RSN. In the former, the student will discuss the potential placement with the Degree Course Leader, including the expected learning opportunities, and how it fits with their course timetable and career plans. If suitable, the Degree Course Leader will contact the placement provider for confirmation of the placement opportunity and its suitability. Placements obtained through RSN may take place at RSN or externally, and may involve more than one student to work on a particular project. In such cases the Degree Course Leader will determine what is expected and select the optimum combination of students to achieve the required outcomes. Where it is a student's first off-site experience they are provided with general guidance on work placements. The review team heard of the opportunities available for potential work placement employers to see students work, for example, through student involvement in external exhibitions and shows, and that the very good links with employers can lead to opportunities for students to work on live projects.

2.56 Students write a reflective report on each work placement. Work placement experience is assessed as part of a Professional Development unit for level 5 (FdA) and can be included in a Professional Portfolio for level 6 (BA top-up). Some students focus on undertaking specific research or career investigation rather than work placements and are not disadvantaged if they chose to do so. Both students and staff spoke positively about the value of work placements.

2.57 Overall, the review team concludes that the relevant part of Expectation B10 is met, namely 'arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with organisations other than the degree-awarding body are implemented securely and managed effectively'. The level of risk is low.

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

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

**Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research degrees***

### **Findings**

2.58 RSN does not offer research degrees.

## Quality of learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.59 In reaching its commended judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published review handbook.

2.60 All applicable Expectations (B1 to B10) have been met and risk is considered to be low in each case. There are four features of good practice: the extensive involvement of employers and students in programme design and development (Expectation B1); the comprehensive, effective and rigorous admissions processes (Expectation B2); the use of bursaries to encourage and support student learning (Expectation B4); and the effective systems in place to engage and respond to the student voice (Expectation B5). There are no recommendations or affirmations in this area.

2.61 RSN has effective mechanisms for ensuring the quality of student learning opportunities. It has a strategic plan, which underpins the opportunities it offers students and its aim to promote and safeguard the traditional craft of hand embroidery. It is responsive to the student voice and offers very good opportunities to students to enhance their learning by participating in work placements, often with very high-profile clients, and through commercial projects as part of its commercial studio. Admissions processes are rigorous and RSN takes deliberate steps to ensure that students enrol on the course that will best meet their needs and develop their potential. Learning opportunities are further strengthened through the high quality of technical stitch tuition and the input of visiting tutors with current industry practice. The University provides effective support for non-academic issues and students are enabled to develop their skills and subject specialisms through effective academic support in class and through the tutorial system.

2.62 The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the RSN is **commended**.

### 3 Judgement: Information about higher education provision

**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 RSN publishes information about its higher education provision through RSN website and on social media platforms, in student handbooks, leaflets and student newsletters. RSN is responsible for ensuring that information it publishes is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy and has processes in place to fulfil this responsibility and meet the Expectation. All outward facing publicity materials must also be approved by the University.
- 3.2 The review team tested this Expectation by speaking to students and staff, and by scrutinising published materials, minutes of meetings, the relevant sections of the websites, and the Student Submission.
- 3.3 RSN's website includes comprehensive information about courses and facilities, and handbooks are available for each course. A newsletter featuring student work is published twice a year. Open days take place several times a year and RSN publishes marketing booklets which are distributed at education fairs attended by School staff.
- 3.4 The University issues paper-based prospectuses, and features RSN's degree courses within its main website and on the microsite for the University's School of Craft and Design. Detailed information about the course specification is only available on the University website and is accessed by a link from RSN website. This ensures that information on RSN website is correct and synchronised with the information published by the University.
- 3.5 The Marketing Manager and External Relations Manager approve all publicity and promotional material on the University website that relates to degree courses at RSN. Similarly, all RSN's marketing and publicity materials are approved by the University before publication. RSN and University marketing and external relations staff work closely together to ensure the quality of published information.
- 3.6 A website is under development for the new degree programme. This development is partly as a result of student feedback, including that contained in the Student Submission, and students have been involved in the gathering requirements for the new website. All stages of development, including content topics, design and implementation will be signed off by the Degree Course Leader, the Chief Executive and the University.
- 3.7 Students whom the team met confirmed that they receive relevant information on their course. They agreed with the Student Submission that the information on the website was helpful in making decisions about applying to study at RSN and that an updated website that includes more detail on the degree courses would be an improvement.
- 3.8 The review team concludes that the quality of the information produced about the provision at RSN is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy and that Expectation C is therefore met. The level of risk is low.

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

## Information about higher education provision: Summary of findings

3.9 In reaching its judgement about the quality of information RSN provides about its provision the review team matched its findings with the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the handbook.

3.10 RSN has clear processes for internal approval of published material and works closely with the University to ensure that information provided on both institutions' websites and in prospectuses is synchronised and accurate. Information published by RSN about its provision is approved by the University and anything published on the University's website is also approved by RSN. A new website is being developed with input from students and partly in response to comments made by them.

3.11 There are no features of good practice, affirmations or recommendations for this judgement area.

3.12 The team concludes that information produced by RSN about learning opportunities at the Royal School of Needlework **meets** UK expectations.

## 4 Judgement: Enhancement of learning opportunities

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

### Findings

4.1 RSN has a managed approach to enhancement of learning opportunities through its committee structure and processes that invite the engagement of staff, students and employers in course development. The academic team aims to deliver enhancements in terms of course breadth, student experience, professional skills and professional portfolios. The Teaching and Learning Strategy refers to students exploring and formulating innovative approaches to designing and making.

4.2 The review team evaluated RSN's approach to enhancement through discussions with staff and students, and by examining the policies and procedures that underpin enhancement, including the University's Quality Enhancement Review Process, the role of the University's School Board, annual academic monitoring reports and action plans, external examiners reports, the Professional Development Symposium, student bursary reports and other student feedback, and feedback from employers,

4.3 The Course Board is the formal meeting point between staff and students (Expectation B3) and provides the opportunity for student representatives to raise points for discussion that may enhance student learning opportunities. The review team heard from staff and students of various examples of enhancement outcomes from such discussions, including the creation of more flexible learning and teaching spaces. Student feedback from the Course Board informs course action plans and areas for discussion through annual academic monitoring reports.

4.4 In relation to professional development, the courses provide many and increasing opportunities for students to enhance their learning, which are well received by students. Employability is embedded in the course through work placement opportunities (Student Employability). Each year the course team works to enhance course delivery through a mixture of new projects and by working with visiting tutors to give students a different perspective on ways of working. In 2013-14, first and second year students worked together on a project led by a member of staff and an external tutor and textile designer. The work placement and project experience of students and those of visiting tutors brings good practice into RSN, which is publicised on its website. A variety of exhibitions, demonstrations, visits, and attendance at professional conferences and workshops are also organised, and feedback from students on these, and on the annual Professional Development Symposium for all year groups, has been positive. Students are given opportunities to exhibit their work alongside that of their peers. They are supported by a Professional Development Unit with sessions on practical matters relating to employment which are timetabled in year 2 and year 3.

4.5 Student learning is enhanced through the professional development opportunities available for staff and managed through staff appraisal (Expectation B3), and through staff professional activities.

4.6 Overall, the review team concludes that RSN takes deliberate steps to enhance its higher education provision and that the Expectation concerning enhancement of student learning opportunities is met. The level of risk is low.

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



## Enhancement of learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.7 In reaching its judgment about the enhancement of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

4.8 The Expectation in this area is met and risk is judged low with no recommendations, affirmations or good practice arising. RSN takes deliberate steps to enhance the learning opportunities of students through its committee structures and processes that engage staff and students in identifying and developing opportunities for improvements. The Course Board is central to this process and is used effectively to respond to student feedback. It provides a forum for discussion and monitors impact through action plans and annual reports. In addition a wide range of work-based learning opportunities are offered to students. The course team seek to promote these and other classroom-based activities that facilitate student learning and enable students to further develop their technical ability and employability skills.

4.9 The review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at RSN **meets** UK expectations.

## 5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

### Findings

5.1 Employability is embedded in the course through a number of mechanisms. These include work placement opportunities, flexibility in the course structure to allow for independently securing placements, professional development projects, research work, internal commissions and live projects, consideration of professional practice and career opportunities in years 2 and 3.

5.2 Students can work on special commissions in RSNs' commercial studio alongside tutors and students from different parts of the institution. This enables students to experience working to deadlines and taking responsibility for small project leadership.

5.3 Each year the tutor team works to enhance course delivery through a mixture of new projects and/or working with different visiting tutors to give students a different perspective on ways of working. In 2013-14, first year students worked with second year students on a jointly delivered design and stitch project led by a Senior Lecturer from RSN and an external tutor and textile designer.

5.4 In addition to professional development presentations, students have been given support by a Professional Development Unit on practical matters relating to developing CVs, artist's statements and potential employment avenues. These are timetabled in as part of years 2 and 3 of the course. Additional career guidance is also given by the University's Career Services during presentations at RSN.

5.5 Employers were consulted as part of the development of the newly validated BA (Hons) and were involved in discussions regarding curriculum content. On an informal basis, the Degree Course Leader talks to employers involved in work placements and this has informed the thinking behind the development of the course. Potential employers are also involved in offering work placements for the students and speak very favourably in support of the new BA (Hons) course.

5.6 The degree team organises an annual Professional Development Symposium which contributes specifically to the Professional Development and the Professional Portfolio units. All year groups and students from all areas of RSN are invited. The programme is well received by students and gives them a wider view on work opportunities after they graduate.

## 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 in the [Higher Education Review \(Plus\) handbook](#).

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

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

### Academic standards

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

### Award

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

### Blended learning

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

### Credit(s)

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

### Degree-awarding body

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

### Distance learning

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

### Dual award or double award

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

### e-learning

See **technology enhanced or enabled learning**

### **Enhancement**

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

### **Expectations**

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

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

### **Framework**

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

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

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

### **Good practice**

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

### **Learning opportunities**

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

### **Learning outcomes**

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

### **Multiple awards**

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

### **Operational definition**

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

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

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

### **Programme specifications**

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

### **Public information**

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

### **Quality Code**

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

### **Reference points**

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

### **Subject benchmark statement**

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

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

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

### **Threshold academic standard**

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

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

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

### **Widening participation**

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

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