



# Higher Education Review of Nottingham Trent University

February 2015

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## About this review

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

- Mr Gregory Clark
- Professor Diane Meehan
- Mr Mark Irwin
- Ms Penny Renwick
- Emeritus Professor Malcolm Cook
- Mr Lyes Bouakaz (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review the QAA review team:

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

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

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

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

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.<sup>3</sup> A dedicated section explains the method for [Higher Education Review](#)<sup>4</sup> and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents. For an explanation of terms 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/quality-code](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code).

<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/aboutus](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus).

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

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about Nottingham Trent University

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Nottingham Trent University.

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

### Good practice

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

- The innovative approach to employability including the engagement of all stakeholders (Expectations B4 and B10).
- The partnership between the University and the Students' Union which effectively responds to the diverse and complex needs of the student body to ensure students are engaged individually and collectively (Expectation B5 and Enhancement).
- The extensive range of research-informed teaching and learning projects which are enhancing the student experience, for example grade-based assessment, Scale Up, Epigeum, 'Redefining measures of teaching quality' (Enhancement, Expectations B3 and B4).
- The effective use of management information which supports the University's quality assurance framework (Expectation C).

### Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Nottingham Trent University.

By September 2015:

- ensure the inclusion of independent external input on all programme approval and periodic review panels, for both on-campus and collaborative provision (Expectations A3.4, A3.1, A3.3, B1, B8 and B10)
- strengthen the involvement of the external examiner in the oversight of minor programme modifications (Expectations A3.4, A2.2, B1 and B7)
- strengthen external examining arrangements to ensure effective oversight of dual awards delivered with partner institutions (Expectations B10 and B7).

By January 2016:

- develop arrangements to ensure the University retains ultimate responsibility for the appointment and function of external examiners in validated provision (Expectations B10 and B7).

## Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The actions being taken by the University to restrict the extension of external examiner appointments beyond their specified term of office (Expectations B7 and B10).
- The actions being taken by the University to ensure greater consistency for the oversight of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities for its research awards delivered at collaborative partners (Expectations B10 and B11).

## Theme: Student Employability

The University is taking effective steps to provide and enhance the career prospects and employability of its students. Drawing on its long history as a vocational institute, the University has embedded in its current strategic plan the importance of employability-related activities.

Over the last three years the University has developed its Employability and Enterprise team by appointing Employability Coordinators in each School, and creating School employability boards. The University has also brought together enterprise and employability activities and centralised placement administration while maintaining subject expertise within subject teams. Support for entrepreneurial activity is evidenced by such initiatives as 'the Hive' and incubator space for business start-ups with a significant track record: HeadStart and SmartTrak business development programmes, 'Future Factory', the Bio City and Cobden Chambers retail incubator sponsored by Santander. The University also runs 'Acceler8', an extracurricular employability development award completed by around 250 students a year and encourages student membership of the Institute of Directors.

The self-evaluation document refers to 'strong partnerships with employers' and an 'outstanding record of student employability'. The University's new strategic plan 2015-20 (currently being consulted on) will also include employability as a major area of focus, with aims to make career management proficiency an integral part of all courses.

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

## About Nottingham Trent University

Nottingham Trent University (NTU) is situated across three campuses: the Nottingham City Centre campus, which accommodates two thirds of NTU students, the Clifton campus, and the Brackenhurst campus. NTU's student population is just under 27,000, with approximately 5,200 postgraduate (taught and research) students. The student population is diverse with the proportion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds well within Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) benchmarks. NTU has just under 2,700 full-time staff of whom 1,065 are academic.

The University is structured around three Colleges: the College of Arts and Science; the College of Business Law and Social Sciences; and the College of Art and Design and the Built Environment. Nine academic Schools sit within these Colleges. The Colleges provide business and administrative functions while the Schools are the focus for academic activities. The NTU Graduate School works in partnership with the nine Schools to support the management of postgraduate research degrees.

The University defines itself as a teaching-intensive and research-active University and aims to prioritise activity that promotes and enhances high-quality learning opportunities for all students, including raising their awareness and experience of research. The University's mission is to deliver education and research that shapes lives and society, and this mission is evidenced by five strategic aims which guide the activity of the University, enacted in the latest Strategic Plan 2010-15 through seven strategic platforms, including a Student Experience that Inspires and Enables Students' Ambitions, The Development and Impact of Research, the Application of Market Insight & Management Data, and an Integrated International Strategy.

NTU works in collaboration with 94 partners in a range of different collaborative arrangements such as validated service, franchise, consortium, and joint and dual awards. The total number of students currently enrolled on such provision is approximately 6,650. Each provision is subject to a signed agreement between the centre and the University. The maximum period of approval for all collaborative provision is three years. The University applies an assessment of risk procedure in the management of collaborative partnerships.

There have been developments in the management of collaborative provision. In 2011-12 a new office was established: the Collaborative Partnerships Office (CPO) whose role is to oversee the whole of the University's collaborative provision. A revised approach to Periodic Collaborative Review has been introduced more recently. The collaborative strategy is currently under review.

The University responded effectively to the findings of the QAA Institutional Audit in 2008 and has addressed the recommendations formulated and built on the good practice identified. Most recently the University is piloting periodic course review, to take forward the periodic school review process the audit team highlighted in one of the advisable recommendations.

The University has addressed the two desirable recommendations from the Collaborative Audit in 2010 (see further details in section B10), and is currently further enhancing the nature of its collaborative provision.

## Explanation of the findings about Nottingham Trent University

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Findings**

1.1 The University indicates that all awards are mapped to the appropriate level within the FHEQ and new courses are designed appropriately. Full details of how the process works are given in the comprehensive Quality Handbook, which also lists the University's awards in accordance with the titling conventions specified in the FHEQ. The University acknowledges that there is potential for the NTU Quality Handbook to be enhanced further by more direct reference to the FHEQ.

1.2 At the end of each academic year, courses are required to submit a Course Standards and Quality Report which is considered by the School Academic Standards and Quality Committee (SASQC). There is a requirement to evaluate the currency of the course and to make reference to external benchmarks and reference points.

1.3 The review team met a number of senior and academic staff, and considered a range of documentation as part of the evidence provided by the University. This documentation included the NTU Quality Handbook, external examiner reports, and minutes of the Validation Service Sub-Committee (VSSC), the Academic Standards and Quality Committee (ASQC) and SASQCs to see how account was taken of the FHEQ and other appropriate benchmarks.

1.4 Academic approval requires that standards are set for new courses which align to the appropriate FHEQ qualification. The process is clearly described and ample evidence of the process in practice was seen by the review team.

1.5 Compliance with Subject Benchmark Statements is sought where such benchmarks exist, if not with cognate areas at the end-of-year reporting (CSQR), which is overseen by SASQCs. Courses are required to evaluate explicitly the currency and health of the course, making reference to external reference points. The VSSC has responsibility for ensuring that new or revised benchmarks are circulated to validated centres. The effectiveness of the process was confirmed by staff involved in quality processes.

1.6 New or revised Subject Benchmark Statements are disseminated to Schools from CADQ (Centre for Academic Development and Quality) and are recorded at the appropriate committees. Schools then must decide whether changes to courses are required and instigate changes if necessary.

1.7 Decisions about credit transfer and accreditation of prior learning are made at approval according to a clear set of requirements articulated in the NTU Quality Handbook Supplement. While the requirements are clear, there is some variability of practice in the University as Schools make decisions that are appropriate to their academic discipline (see Expectation A2.1 for further details).

1.8 The review team concludes that the arrangements in place are appropriate, and the process is thorough and comprehensive and applied effectively to ensure adequate focus on the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements. Guidance in the Quality Handbook is clear. Thus, the Expectation is met and the risk is low.

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



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

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

**Findings**

1.9 The University's academic frameworks set out the requirements in terms of credit points, credit level, learning hours and award designations for the qualifications awarded by the University and the provision for credit transfer and advanced standing. Full details of the Common Assessment Regulations are found in the Quality Handbook. The Common Assessment Regulations are reviewed annually. At the time of the visit the regulations for research degrees were being amended.

1.10 The documentation on APL and APEL is comprehensive and allows for applications to be processed either as part of a formal agreement or by individual request (see Expectation B6 for further details).

1.11 The review team met academic staff and students, and considered a range of evidence provided by the University, as well as looking at the information available on the University's website, including in particular the NTU Quality Handbook where full details of academic frameworks and regulations are given. Operational management for approval and review of the framework and regulations is delegated to ASQC. The team saw minutes of ASQC which showed the process was working effectively.

1.12 Academic Board has ultimate responsibility for the approval and review of the University's academic framework and regulations, but much of the work is delegated to ASQC. ASQC approves new award titles on behalf of Academic Board and responsibility for the approval of new courses is delegated from ASQC to Development and Approval Groups (DAGs). DAGs are chaired by trained academic staff. Such decisions are made after the appropriate business evaluation and sign-off.

1.13 Course and module specifications are used as a reference point for the delivery of teaching and the assessment of learning outcomes.

1.14 The University has recently introduced a grade-based scheme for assessment (GBA). The University's Common Assessment Regulations (CARs) set out the minimum standards for a pass at module level and for progression between levels. Although the student submission contains some negative comments on the way in which GBA was introduced, the team found during the review visit that students met by the team were now generally satisfied with the new grading system and agreed that it was an improvement over the previous one.

1.15 The review team concludes that transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations are in place, which appropriately govern the award of credit and qualifications. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

## **Findings**

1.16 The definitive record for each programme of study is the course specification which is available on the University website. These documents are required and analysed as part of the process of academic approval. A common template is provided for these specifications and they are used, together with the associated module specifications, as the reference points for the delivery of teaching and the assessment of learning outcomes.

1.17 The review team met staff who had been involved in course approval and review, and students. The team also viewed evidence provided by the University and consulted the University website, including for course and module specifications.

1.18 Course and module specifications are used as a reference point for the delivery of teaching and the assessment of learning outcomes, a process overseen by external examiners. The team noted that full course details are available on the University website and that each course is fully described and includes the course specification, with details of learning outcomes and assessment methods. The specifications are also part of the information set provided for review panels for periodic school review and PSRB recognition or accreditation. Details of the process are given in the Quality Handbook.

1.19 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the risk is low. There is a reliable process whereby a definitive record of each programme is kept and this information is readily available to students, alumni and external stakeholders.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.20 The University's processes for the approval of new undergraduate and postgraduate taught courses and postgraduate research programmes of study, together with processes for the modification of courses, are set out in the Quality Handbook and its supplements (see also Expectations B1, A3.4). Processes are subject to regular review. Provision delivered through an arrangement with a partner institution is subject to an academic approval process comparable to that for on-site provision. Consideration and academic approval of major changes and proposals for new courses is delegated from Academic Standards and Quality Committee to Development and Approval Groups. Modifications are approved by School Academic Standards and Quality Committees and minor modifications by Course Committees.

1.21 The review team tested the application of the policies and processes for approval of, and modifications to, courses by scrutinising the Quality Handbook, its associated supplements and reports of several approval events, and discussing the approval process with groups of staff. The team also considered minutes of Academic Standards and Quality Committee, School Academic Standards and Quality Committees and Course Committees.

1.22 The University's processes require Development and Approval Groups to confirm that courses are set at the appropriate standard for the level of the award(s), take account of subject and qualification benchmark statements and that proposals are appropriately specified with respect to the award and credit framework articulated in the Quality Handbook. Reports of programme approval events demonstrated that alignment with level and subject benchmarks and other external reference points is embedded in course design and approval processes and this was also confirmed by staff whom the team met. Course teams provide assessment strategies and curriculum maps supporting the teaching and assessment of learning outcomes which are considered as part of the approval process (see also Expectation B6).

1.23 The University takes a variable approach to the inclusion of external experts on Development and Approval Groups, basing the decision on the type of programme being approved and the associated risk (see Expectation A3.4). The Quality Handbook states that where a programme is new or ground-breaking an external expert should be included on the Development and Approval Group. Evidence provided to the team relating to the composition of Development and Approval Groups during 2012-13 and 2013-14 showed that external experts were not always included on these panels, even where the University may have considered that the programmes under approval could constitute 'higher risk' as in the case of collaborative partnerships and in one case where the programme being approved was designated as new and ground-breaking (see recommendation under Expectation A3.4).

1.24 Currently Development and Approval Groups do not routinely include student members. The University has developed a training programme for students undertaking this role and is piloting the inclusion of students on these panels from 2014-15 with the aim of

including students in all approval events from 2015 onwards. Students were positive about this development.

1.25 The review team concludes that the University's framework for the approval of taught programmes and research degrees ensures that academic standards are set at an appropriate level. Overall, the mechanisms for securing standards in the design and approval of programmes are comprehensively documented and well understood by staff. Processes are subject to regular review, but their requirements and application have been evidenced as variable in circumstances related to external input into the approval process. As a result, the team concludes that the Expectation is met, with the associated level of risk being moderate.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.26 The University has a robust system for ensuring that standards are met through the achievement of module and course outcomes and this process is well documented in the University's Quality Handbook. The Quality Handbook has a specific section devoted to assessment, and this states the main purposes of assessment are to judge the students' achievement of learning outcomes and to safeguard threshold academic standards. Formal processes for the approval of new courses and for major changes to courses are set out in the Quality Handbook. Course approval and review processes require that all courses and modules have a clearly defined structure with learning outcomes expressed at course and module level.

1.27 The review team tested the system in place through reviewing documentation relating to the Quality Handbook, approval documentation and external examiner reports. The review team discussed assessment arrangements in a range of meetings and reviewed information regarding assessment for students on the virtual learning environment.

1.28 Course specification guidance states that outcomes must be set at the appropriate level in the FHEQ and produced with reference to Subject Benchmark Statements and/or any other relevant forms of externality, and that learning outcomes should be expressed in a form that permits their achievement to be demonstrated through assessment. In meetings during the review staff confirmed that FHEQ levels are embedded in approval processes.

1.29 Assessment is subject to the Common Assessment Regulations and the Regulations for Research Degrees provided in the Quality Handbook. The Common Assessment Regulations include sections on the achievement of academic credit, the determination of marks, progression and the conferment of awards. The regulations also include details for dealing with compensation in case of marginal failure.

1.30 The University adopts the approach whereby learning outcomes can be taught or assessed, stating that assessed outcomes are the essential learning outcomes that should be achieved to pass the module, whereas taught outcomes are intended to guide student learning and help to constitute the overall coherence and balance of the course. In meetings the review team found uncertainty among staff about the purpose and use of the taught learning outcomes and students were equally unclear. The review team concluded that while there was potential for this concept to be a useful mechanism to support course coherence, it was not currently understood sufficiently.

1.31 Module specifications, which include module learning outcomes and details of the assessment tasks, follow University guidance. The learning outcomes assessed for each assessment task are clearly set out for students. Students whom the team met during the review were clear about their assessments and said they found feedback helpful.

1.32 There are clear procedures for moderation, and assessment is moderated internally and by the external examiner where work contributes to classification. All award-bearing courses with taught elements must have both an external examiner and an exam board. Conferment of research degrees is delegated from the University Academic Board to the Research Degrees Committee. External examiners are required to assess whether the standards set for the course are appropriate for its awards by reference to national subject benchmarks and to comparability with the sector.

1.33 Overall, the review team concludes that credit and qualifications are awarded where achievement of relevant learning outcomes has been demonstrated through assessment. Assessment regulations are clear and understood by all stakeholders. Thus, the Expectation is met and the risk in this area is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.34 The University's processes for annual monitoring and periodic review are set out in the Quality Handbook and its supplements. Key processes are Annual Monitoring which requires courses to demonstrate they remain current and valid; and Periodic School Review (being piloting from the academic year 2014-15) which is operated on a five-year cycle and is designed to test the ongoing currency and health of courses, as well as assess the effectiveness of the School's governance and quality management strategy and processes in ensuring that academic standards are secure. Periodic Collaborative Review operates on a three-year cycle and is designed to test the effectiveness of the partner in ensuring appropriate academic standards are maintained and the quality of learning opportunities is enhanced (see Expectations B8, B10).

1.35 The review team tested the application of the policies and processes by scrutinising the Quality Handbook and its associated supplements, Course Standards and Quality Reports, School Standards and Quality Reports, Standard and Quality Management Overview Reports, and reports from several Periodic School Review and Periodic Collaborative Review events, and by discussing the annual monitoring and periodic review processes with groups of staff and students. The team also considered minutes of Academic Standards and Quality Committee and Validation Service Sub-Committee.

1.36 The Annual Monitoring process requires course teams to produce Course Standards and Quality Reports which are considered and approved by School Academic Standards and Quality Committees. Analysis of Course Standards and Quality reports feeds into School Standards and Quality Reports which are considered by Academic Standards and Quality Committee. At University level, the annual Standards and Quality Management Overview report is produced by the Centre for Academic Development and Quality and considered by Academic Standards and Quality Committee. Annual monitoring of collaborative provision broadly follows an equivalent process; oversight of monitoring and review of Validated Centres and their courses of study is managed through the Validation Service Sub-Committee.

1.37 The review team considers that all monitoring reports are comprehensive and analytical and use a range of appropriate evidence. School and Course Standards and Quality Reports include action plans which are followed up. Staff confirmed that they found the processes to be effective in helping to maintain the quality and standards of courses.

1.38 The University's annual Standards and Quality Management Overview reports draw on a wide range of evidence from its monitoring and review processes together with external examiner reports; these reports highlight good practice, identify issues to be addressed and make recommendations to Academic Standards and Quality Committee in relation to strategic actions for the next academic cycle.

1.39 The report of the University's 2008 Institutional Audit recommended that it was advisable that the University remain mindful of the recommendation of the previous Institutional Audit with respect to programme oversight, as it assesses the

comprehensiveness and fitness for purpose of its new Periodic School Review process. The University has continued to regularly reflect on and review its Periodic School Review process; a review in July 2012 resulted in minor amendments and a re-mapping of the framework to the developing Quality Code. A further evaluation of the process carried out in July 2014 recommended some further minor amendments.

1.40 Periodic School Review panels include external and student representatives; Schools select a minimum of six courses to be audited as part of the process. Academic Standards and Quality Committee approves Periodic School Review Reports on behalf of Academic Board. Reports of reviews show that the process is thorough; reports generally focus on strategic issues rather than detailed course-level information. The report of the Periodic Review of the Graduate School, University-wide Research Degree Provision provides a good example of the thoroughness and critical approach of the process (see Expectation B11).

1.41 The review team also explored the issue of ongoing monitoring of the currency of courses with the University and saw evidence of this happening routinely through Course Committees and School Academic Standards and Quality Committees.

1.42 The University is piloting a Periodic Course Review process from 2014-15 for implementation in 2015-16 which is intended to complement and support its current mechanisms for ensuring the maintenance of the academic standards of courses. Collaborative arrangements are subject to Periodic Collaborative Review which staff confirmed has recently been revised. At the time of the review, it was too early to comment fully on the effectiveness of the revised process; however, in the evidence consulted, the team found that the University's approach in relation to the involvement of independent external expertise in Periodic Collaborative Review was inconsistent including for those partnerships the University considers higher risk (see recommendation under Expectation A3.4, see further details under Expectations B8 and B10).

1.43 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met. The University's approach to annual monitoring and review is effective in ensuring courses are monitored regularly and that academic currency is maintained. Processes are comprehensively documented and well understood by staff. The Periodic Course Review process has the potential to further enhance the focus on course-level monitoring. However, there is insufficient emphasis on a consistent level of involvement of independent external expertise in Periodic Collaborative Review and so the risk is moderate.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**



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

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

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

**Findings**

1.44 The policies regarding the use of external and independent expertise in setting and maintaining academic standards are set out in several sections of the Quality Handbook. The Handbook only requires the involvement of an expert who is external to the institution when course proposals are new or ground-breaking, where PSRBs require it, or for higher-risk collaborative provision.

1.45 The review team tested Expectation A3.4 through reviewing documentation relating to the Quality Handbook, approval documentation, Standards and Quality Management Reports, documentation concerning Periodic School Reviews, the categories of collaboration and a list of partner documents. The review team also discussed arrangements for the involvement of external and independent expertise in a range of meetings.

1.46 The University operates a clearly documented process for the approval of new courses using a risk-based approach to determine whether there should be involvement of an expert who is external to the institution at the final approval stage. The Academic Standards and Quality Committee has considered membership of Development and Approval Group Panels and the University has recently decided that an additional colleague drawn from within the University but external to the specific School should serve on Development and Approval Groups. The evidence provided shows that membership of Development and Approval Group Panels involves a sufficient range of University staff drawn from the School that is proposing the course and from other Schools. Independent expertise may be consulted during the development and scrutiny stages of new courses. Evidence was provided for the review that demonstrated that the involvement of independent external expertise at the approval stage is variable, and in one case the University's own requirements were not met even when a programme was ground-breaking (see also Expectation A3.1).

1.47 The University operates a Periodic School Review process during which a sample of courses are selected for audit. This process involves an external from another university. Periodic course reviews with an external such as an employer are currently being piloted.

1.48 In reviewing all of these processes in regard to the involvement of independent external expertise, the review team concludes that this needs to be strengthened at the approval stage and **recommends** that the University should ensure the inclusion of independent external input on all programme approval and periodic review panels, for both on-campus and collaborative provision.

1.49 PSRBs play a significant part in the assurance of appropriate standards and quality and are also consulted in the development of courses that wish to acquire accreditation. PSRBs receive annual monitoring reports from the University. School Academic Standards and Quality Committees receive PSRB reports.

1.50 External examiners have the right to be informed of major changes to courses and the University states they should be consulted in advance about proposed changes, particularly where they affect the course awards, titles, outcomes or the assessment scheme, major changes to modules or course closure. School Quality and Standards Committees maintain oversight of modifications to ensure that they do not accumulate to a level where course outcomes are not met. However, external oversight of minor modifications was weak in that explicit consultation about minor modifications with the external examiner was not evidenced. Therefore the review team **recommends** that the University strengthen the involvement of the external examiner in the oversight of minor programme modifications.

1.51 In their annual reports external examiners confirm that programmes currently meet UK threshold academic standards. However, the review team observed that the University risk-based approach to the use of external and independent expertise in setting and maintaining academic standards is inconsistently followed. The team considers that the use of external and independent expertise needs to be consistently applied to provide greater reassurance that standards are secure. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met but the risk is moderate.

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

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

1.52 In reaching its positive judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published University handbook. All of the Expectations for this judgement area are met. The associated levels of risk are low for all Expectations except A3.1, A3.3 and A3.4, for which the risk is moderate. Expectation A3.4 contains two recommendations: the first regards the need for NTU to strengthen the involvement of external examiners in the oversight of minor programme modifications, and the second relates to the routine inclusion of independent externals on all programme approval and periodic review panels, for both on-campus and collaborative provision. The former is cross-referenced to Expectation A2.2, whereas the latter is cross-referenced to both A3.1 and A3.3. These recommendations are indicative of weaknesses in the procedures and some shortcomings in the rigour with which procedures are operated. The review team identified no features of good practice and no affirmations for this judgement area.

1.53 The review team concludes that the setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered at the University **meet** UK expectations, as procedures are deemed to be broadly adequate, and there is evidence that the University is aware of its responsibilities and will address weaknesses promptly and professionally.

## 2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.1 The University's processes for the approval of new undergraduate and postgraduate taught courses and postgraduate research programmes of study, together with processes for the modification of courses, are set out in the Quality Handbook and its supplements (see also Expectations A3.4 and B1). Processes are subject to regular review. Processes have been enhanced in recent years with the aim of increasing efficiency and prioritising the developmental aspects of course development and curriculum design.

2.2 The University has a two-stage process of design and approval of courses, namely business approval, which was reviewed and updated in 2012-13, separated from and carried out prior to academic approval. Consideration and academic approval of major changes and proposals for new courses is delegated from Academic Standards and Quality Committee to Development and Approval Groups. Provision delivered through an arrangement with a partner institution is subject to an academic approval process comparable to that for on-site provision. Approval may lead to indefinite approval or fixed-term approval; approval of courses being offered under collaborative arrangements is limited to a maximum of three years. Modifications are approved by School Academic Standards and Quality Committees and minor modifications by Course Committees.

2.3 The review team tested the application of the University's policies and processes for approval of, and modifications to, courses by scrutinising the Quality Handbook and its associated supplements and reports of several course approval events, and by discussing the approval process with groups of staff. The team also considered minutes of Academic Standards and Quality Committee, Validation Service Sub-Committee, School Academic Standards and Quality Committees and Course Committees.

2.4 Development and Approval Groups are chaired by a senior member of staff and comprise staff from the University and, where appropriate, from another UK higher education provider. Staff involved in Development and Approval Groups receive appropriate staff development. As noted under Expectations A3.1 and A3.4, membership is flexible according to the proposal being considered and the associated risk. The Academic Quality and Standards Committee has recently considered the membership of Development and Approval Groups resulting in a decision to include an additional colleague drawn from within the University but external to the School involved in the course under development. From 2014-15 students are being trained and included as Development and Approval Group members and this development was welcomed by students.

2.5 Reports of approval events showed that with the exception of approval of courses involving PSRBs involvement of an expert external to the University at the final approval stage of the process varies within Development and Approval Groups (see also Expectation A3.1 and recommendation under Expectation A3.4). Course teams are expected to consult a range of external parties during the design and development stages of a programme and include a note of the consultation in the documentation, and there was evidence of this in

documentation provided for the review. Notwithstanding comments regarding externality, the consultative approach taken by Development and Approval Groups is supportive of course teams, documentation is of good quality and the process is thorough.

2.6 For Validation Service provision (see Expectation B10), academic approval is undertaken by a validation panel on behalf of Academic Standards and Quality Committee. Initial approval takes place at the partner institution and the evidence provided demonstrated that a panel member external to the University is included as part of the process. For School-based collaborative provision, which is considered higher risk by the University, approval normally follows the Development and Approval Group process outlined above. In the majority of cases initial approval takes place at the partner institution. Provision considered by the University to be lower risk, such as advanced standing or progression agreements, is delegated to the relevant School Academic Standards and Quality Committee for approval. Oversight of these arrangements is maintained by Academic Standards and Quality Committee.

2.7 The review team also considered evidence related to the minor modification of courses which showed that changes are considered and approved locally by course committees with appropriate oversight through School Academic Standards and Quality Committees. Supplement 5b to the Quality Handbook states that, 'it is expected that proposed changes will be discussed with staff, students and external examiners...and that consultation and inputs from external parties are particularly important in respect of major changes, while *some* minor modifications to modules may be more "light of touch" in this respect'. However, the team did not see any evidence of explicit consultation about any minor modifications with external examiners (see also Expectation A2.2 and recommendation under Expectation A3.4).

2.8 The Centre for Academic Development and Quality provide Academic Standards and Quality Committee with an annual analysis of developmental trends and good practice based on an analysis of all University approval reports in that period. The review team noted that this report has led to changes and enhancements to processes.

2.9 Overall the review team concludes that the procedures for the development and approval of new programmes facilitate the design and development of courses to an appropriate standard and that the developmental approach is effective in supporting course teams. The Expectation is met and the risk low.

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

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

**Quality Code, *Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission***

**Findings**

2.10 The University has an admissions policy which encompasses recruitment, selection and admission. The policy is reviewed annually, and amendments are considered by the Academic Standards and Quality Committee.

2.11 Admissions for taught students, including the majority of decision-making, are now handled by a centrally located team. All staff involved in these processes must have completed training, and have access to an online Admissions Handbook.

2.12 Information about courses and the application process is provided in a variety of formats. Notably, these include newsletters and an online virtual open day as well as information targeted at parents and carers.

2.13 A complaints and appeals process for applicants is in place and forms part of the admissions policy. It comprises procedures for making informal complaints which are encouraged as well as procedures for making formal appeals or complaints, and explains in which cases appeals and complaints are permitted. Indicative timescales are also provided.

2.14 The University provides information on the application process tailored to international students and has in place robust procedures for determining the equivalency of offers for international students. For assessing English language requirements, a scale is in use.

2.15 The review team tested the operation of the procedures through scrutiny of documentation and discussion with staff and students at the University.

2.16 Where changes to entry requirements are made during the application cycle, these must be approved by the Admissions Manager. Such changes are only allowed in exceptional circumstances, such as in response to PSRB requirements. There have been no such changes during the previous four cycles.

2.17 Successful applicants have access to online induction resources which provide information about the transition to current students and what should be expected. A Welcome Week Steering Group is also set up to design events targeting all groups of students joining the University.

2.18 Students met by the review team confirmed that the information provided to them at each stage of the recruitment, selection and admission process was accurate, adequate and up to date and that the University responded quickly to admission enquiries by email. Where an application is unsuccessful, feedback is provided to the applicant. The level of feedback provided is determined by each School, but standard feedback is available to all applicants.

2.19 Admission of students at collaborative partners is handled by the partner, using admissions criteria approved by the University. The recruitment, selection and admission of students at collaborative partners is explored in more detail under Expectation B10.

2.20 Overall the review team concludes that the University's recruitment, selection and admission policies and procedures are accessible, reliable and inclusive and are supported by appropriate structures and processes. The Expectation is met, and the associated 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**

2.21 The University sets out its approach to the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices in its Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Strategy 2010-14, which is consistent with its Academic Plan 2012-14 which in turn cross-refers to its Strategic Plan 2010-15 and especially the latter's first strategic platform, 'a student experience that inspires and enables students' ambitions'. The Strategic Plan 2010-15 also sets out the graduate attributes at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels of the University's students. These target graduate attributes (intellectual quality; information, communication and organisational skills; and global citizenship) are described as framing the curriculum and learning opportunities at the University.

2.22 The Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Strategy confirms oversight at institutional level by Academic Board and Academic Standards and Quality Committee and, at School level, by School Academic Standards and Quality Committees. The Strategy also sets out executive responsibility: the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic) at institutional level and the Dean, assisted by a range of staff including Associate Deans, Academic Team Leaders, Programme Leaders, School Learning and Teaching Coordinators and School Quality Managers at School level. The Strategy is also supported by a number of professional services units including the Centre for Professional Learning and Development, the Centre for Academic Development and Quality, Information Services and the Library.

2.23 The University's approach to the professional development of its staff who teach and support learning is described as spanning the whole 'employee journey', emphasising the reflective practitioner. The University's Learning and Teaching Continuous Professional Development Framework is accredited by the Higher Education Academy and leads to both a University award and professional recognition. The Framework is managed by the Centre for Professional Learning and Development. The Framework is underpinned by a Learning and Teaching Professional Development Policy and articulated Learning and Teaching professional standards aligned with the UK Professional Standards Framework for Teaching and Supporting Learning. The University sets ambitious targets for the number of staff achieving a set level in the University Framework.

2.24 Apart from specific monitoring mechanisms for the Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Strategy itself, the University's broad quality assurance procedures, including annual monitoring and periodic review, also allow reflection on the quality of learning and teaching for a diverse student body. The University's effective use of management information in support of its quality assurance framework is set out more fully in section C (see good practice in section C).

2.25 A University Student Charter, agreed jointly by the University and Nottingham Trent Students' Union, sets out the respective responsibilities with regard to teaching and learning for the University and the student. In addition, a new post of Student Engagement Manager, based in the Centre for Academic Development and Quality, has recently been established to supplement the existing broad range of student representation mechanisms to focus on increasing students' involvement and participation in teaching and learning.



2.26 The review team tested the University's approach to learning and teaching through scrutiny of relevant strategic documents and action plans which are diarised in accordance with a Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Strategy annual calendar. Additionally, the review team followed the consideration and monitoring of those action plans and of significant academic topics at deliberative academic committees at institutional and School levels.

2.27 The review team also saw evidence of the commissioning of tasks relating to strategic academic developments, such as digital learning, and the significant revision of the University's provision of learning opportunities in such recent initiatives as the Undergraduate Curriculum Review, Academic Course Tutorials and the promotion of Research-Informed Teaching, such as in Scholarship Projects for Undergraduate Research (SPUR) and Student-Centred Active Learning Environment with Upside-down Pedagogies (Scale Up). The way in which an extensive provision of research-informed teaching and learning projects is enhancing the student experience is set out more fully in the section on Enhancement below (see good practice under Enhancement). The review team also took the opportunity to discuss the provision and monitoring of learning opportunities directly with staff, students and collaborative partners. The review team found the University's approach to learning and teaching and strategic academic development and their operational underpinning to be appropriate and effective.

2.28 The review team viewed a comprehensive set of detailed Human Resources procedures, including the Probation Policy and Procedure, the Guide to Planning Staff Induction for Managers, the New Staff Induction Check List and exemplification of their local level application, covering induction, mentoring and probation for academic staff and explored these, and other staffing issues, such as professional development and workload balancing, directly with academic and professional services staff in meetings. The staff whom the team met commented that their induction was helpful and that the Performance, Development and Contribution Review (appraisal) process was effective and clearly linked to the identification of staff development needs. The team found those procedures and their application to be appropriate.

2.29 The review team concludes that the University is systematic in its provision and monitoring of learning opportunities and teaching practices. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.30 The University articulates its mission through its five strategic aims, among which are 'to develop confident and ambitious graduates to shape society' and 'to provide education that promotes both intellectual initiative and the highest academic standards to prepare students for life and career'. The University goes on to advise that its approach towards those strategic aims is student-centred, holistic and coordinated, and guided by five principles: it is a collaborative endeavour; there is a commitment to high-quality facilities and resources; decision-making is evidence-based; student transitions are duly managed; and delivery is by a qualified and knowledgeable staff.

2.31 The University's Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Strategy and its implementation and monitoring are fully described under Expectation B3. The University's arrangements and resources for enabling students to develop their potential and the monitoring of those arrangements and resources are embedded within that Strategy and especially its Objective 2, which is 'to foster an engaging and inclusive learning environment'.

2.32 Additionally, the University's Estate Strategy Review 2011-14 links the University's academic and estate strategic approaches, so that the estate is developed to achieve the University's mission, by cross-referencing the respective strategic objectives and platforms. This includes the evaluation of the fitness for purpose of the current estate, of disabled access and of facilities for hearing and visually impaired students.

2.33 The University also emphasises the role of Quarterly Business Reviews in monitoring implementation of the University's Strategic Plan 2010-15 by Colleges and professional services units against a set academic cycle as 'an opportunity to discuss progress in Colleges and Schools...to improve the student academic experience, students' employability and learning resources'.

2.34 At an operational level, the University stresses the collaborative and coordinated nature of its approach to arrangements and resources for enabling students to develop their potential via its deliberative academic committees and their cross-membership and student membership at institutional and School level; via ad hoc task and finish groups (often commissioned by Academic Standards and Quality Committee; via regular meetings of forums and networks, such as School Quality Managers and School Learning and Teaching Coordinators; and by indicative examples of the close co-working of academic and professional services staff.

2.35 The University offers a comprehensive range of Student Support Services, both face-to-face and online, and cites positive external and internal evaluations of those services. Institutional equality objectives have informed the University's active monitoring of the student experience and support for particular minority groups.

2.36 The University provides appropriate information via a range of media including print, online and social media, throughout the lifecycle of potential and actual students from pre-entry, to application, to admission, to induction and on programme. The University also provides a range of specific support for enhancing academic skills. The way in which an extensive provision of research-informed teaching and learning projects is enhancing the

student experience, in terms of enabling the development of their potential, is set out more fully in the section on Enhancement (see good practice).

2.37 The University seeks to maximise employability for all its students through a breadth of mechanisms: programme design; links with PSRBs; specialist learning spaces and resources on campus; dedicated academic (an Employability Coordinator in each School) and professional services (Careers Consultants and Employability Advisers on each campus); and institutional and local-level initiatives. The University evidenced the significant efforts it makes to support its students' employability from one-to-one consultations; to an 'employability learning room' on its virtual learning environment; to career planning via 'My Career Explorer', an online placement finder and guidance; to an online vacancy register for employers, 'Future Hub'; to the promotion of entrepreneurship via 'The Hive', the University's Centre for Enterprise and Entrepreneurship; and to a central brand coordinating employability support, 'YouFirst'. The University also evidenced the supportive steps taken to develop those of its staff involved in the enhancement of students' academic, personal and professional development. The team considers that the University's innovative approach to employability, including the engagement of all stakeholders, is **good practice**. A fuller description of the University's approach to employability is set out in the Commentary on the Theme of Student Employability below, and the University's arrangements for delivering with others those learning opportunities which enhance employability are set out under Expectation B10.

2.38 The review team considered a range of strategic and operational documentation on the University's enabling of student potential, not least in the form of case studies in the self-evaluation document and especially exemplification of the application of policies and initiatives at both central and local level. The review team also discussed the University's enabling of student potential with both academic and professional services staff, employers and students.

2.39 The review team concludes that the University has in place and appropriately maintains arrangements which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.40 In the self-evaluation document the University details a number of opportunities for students to engage in the quality and enhancement of their education: student representation is included at course level, School level and University level. Meaningful dialogue with students is established in a number of ways including: student representation on committees; module and course evaluation surveys; student representation on School periodic review panels; and focus/task and finish groups for specific projects. The University surveys student satisfaction at module and course level effectively and also engages proactively with national student surveys. The University has achieved some significant improvements in survey scores. The University includes the student voice in the periodic review process, where Student Union officers are included as panel members and the panel meets with current students and alumni. The University has recently made a successful bid to the Higher Education Academy for a project aimed at involving students in curriculum development and approval. Furthermore, the University has engaged in a wide range of initiatives to enhance the learning opportunities of students, as discussed in the section below on Enhancement.

2.41 The review team's meeting with the Nottingham Trent Students' Union confirmed that the Students' Union is actively involved at senior levels within the University and Union officers have formed effective professional relationships with senior staff. Students and staff describe the relationship as a partnership where issues and concerns can be raised and discussed effectively and openly. The University and the Students' Union have recently jointly issued a statement on student engagement and representation and convened a Student Engagement and Academic Representation Steering Group (StEAR). StEAR has only met once and plans for further work include benchmarking student representation across the University.

2.42 In the review team's meetings with both taught and research students, the students indicated awareness of the range of ways that they are represented and engaged, and that their individual and collective views were both heard and acted upon. The Students' Union also acknowledges that there are examples of the University being responsive to the student voice at all levels and this is borne out by the evidence provided by the University. The University acknowledges that it is not enough to value the student voice, and that it must also show how student input is valued and acted upon. The University started a 'you said - we did' campaign in 2013, which is confirmed to be accessible and effective. The University also engages students in University and NTSU teaching awards. Professional services at the University have engaged proactively with students in a variety of ways, and there are clear examples where student feedback is valued and has been used effectively to improve those services. The University is a large and multifaceted organisation and the partnership between the Students' Union and the University to effectively respond to the diverse and complex needs of the student body and to engage students individually and collectively is **good practice**.

2.43 Training and support for elected student representatives is provided by the Student Union and this support is both appropriate and comprehensive. The Students' Union confirmed that representation has become more effective at School level recently since the Union revised its training and support for representatives. However, the review team's meeting with students indicated that there might be further work to do in ensuring that

undergraduate student representatives (and undergraduate students more generally) are aware of the role of external examiners and opportunities to feed into course annual monitoring.

2.44 The review team concludes that the University is taking deliberate and effective steps to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities and therefore meets the Expectation with the associated level of risk being low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.45 The policy framework for assessment and accreditation of prior learning is articulated in the Quality Handbook and assessment rules and regulations are set out in the Common Assessment Regulations.

2.46 The review team scrutinised relevant policy documents and regulations, the documentation relating to grade-based assessment and the three-week return of work policy, together with a wide range of external examiner reports. The team met with students and reviewed assessment-related information provided for students on the virtual learning environment.

2.47 Assessment and feedback are clear priorities for the University as articulated in the Institutional Academic Plan. On behalf of the Academic Board, the Academic Standards and Quality Committee systematically evaluates institutional assessment policies. Periodic review within Schools tests the robustness of assessment and assessment is reviewed within annual monitoring processes.

2.48 Assessment is considered as part of course design and all courses have an assessment strategy. This is designed to ensure assessment is planned at course level, rather than the design of individual modules, and an assessment and feedback plan is agreed when the course is approved. A curriculum map for each course shows in which modules the course outcomes are taught and assessed and ensures that all course learning outcomes are assessed in at least one of the course modules. Assessment and feedback plans are monitored by Schools to ensure timeliness of feedback.

2.49 The review team scrutinised a number of course assessment strategies and observed that while some are detailed and specific, providing clear information on matters such as learning outcomes, feedback, anonymity, marking and moderation, others were brief and generalised. For example, although the University issues a guide on designing for inclusion and claims that inclusion is built into assessment strategies, there was variability in how this was addressed. However, the review team also noted that the University had other processes to ensure inclusion in assessment and makes effective provision for reasonable adjustments to assessment for students with disability.

2.50 The University is currently in the process of bedding in a new grade-based assessment system for all taught students that has been introduced to enhance several aspects of the assessment process. This has been a major project for the University that has been carefully managed and rolled out over the past three years. A review of the scheme has shown it to have been successfully implemented, though some issues remain including some confusion among students about the scheme, and work on how to handle multiple elements through the scheme is underway. Work following the review is due to report later in 2015. The University is also developing the use of marking matrices. The students whom the team met during the visit reported that they were content with their feedback and its turnaround time.

2.51 Accreditation of prior learning operates under clear guidelines articulated in the Quality Handbook, and Accreditation of Prior Learning schemes are considered during the approval process. The University admits students onto a number of courses via accreditation of prior learning through formal agreements and can also be approached by individuals who are supported through an application process, though this opportunity is not promoted to students on the main course websites. Students who are admitted with advanced standing are provided with bespoke induction arrangements.

2.52 There is a comprehensive moderation policy that sets out the requirements for marking and moderation. If the assessment contributes to the classification of the final award, the external examiner is involved in this process. Evidence provided for the review demonstrated a robust and detailed approach to moderation processes. External examiners comment on the internal verification process and input into assessment design and confirm moderation takes place including between postgraduate programmes.

2.53 Staff are provided with detailed guidance on assessment design and a range of resources about assessment are available on the CADQ website. Assessment currently has a high profile within the University and this has provided a stimulus for sharing good practice and for staff development.

2.54 The virtual learning environment provides students with detailed and clear guidance on the assessments for each of their modules. An internal survey elicits feedback from students about their perceptions of assessment and staff produce detailed responses at School, course and module level. Standardised assessment pro formas with additional notes concerning achievement and areas for improvement are provided. A range of marking grids are used to provide feedback to students and these expect moderation to be noted.

2.55 The Academic Officer is the policy owner for academic irregularities for undergraduates and taught postgraduates. Academic irregularities are managed through the Quality Handbook. Assessment and examination regulations are communicated to students in the Student Handbook and in Course Handbooks, and include sections on correct referencing and plagiarism. A range of useful feedback guidance pamphlets is produced for students. The students whom the team met during the review reported that they were provided with a lot of advice about academic irregularities. The University has an exceptional circumstances policy and process, and an appropriate assessment appeals policy that is in line with sector expectations. There is an annual report to Academic Standards and Quality Committee concerning academic appeals and irregularities.

2.56 A review of feedback in 2013 raised a number of concerns concerning inconsistencies in relation to several aspects of feedback quality, quantity, timing and timeliness. This was followed up with a range of staff development opportunities and enhanced guidance.

2.57 The Board of Examiners is convened on behalf of the Academic Board to oversee the conduct of assessment according to the University's own regulations, and to make progression and award decisions. The Quality Handbook sets out the requirements for the operation of assessment boards and flexibility is permitted in that a Board may operate a two-tier, Award Board/Subject Board structure. Board members are fully briefed annually. Senior University staff can also make unannounced visits to exam boards to ensure compliance. The Board of Examiners uses the curriculum map to ensure safe decisions with respect to module failure and progression.

2.58 The review team concludes that the University operates valid and reliable assessment processes which allow students to demonstrate their level of achievement in relation to learning outcomes. The University has used the move to grade-based assessment to further secure all aspects of assessment. The Expectation is, therefore, met and the risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**



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

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

#### **Findings**

2.59 External examiner roles and responsibilities for University awards including those involving collaborative partners are laid out in the Quality Handbook and associated supplements, which map onto the Quality Code. The University has clear criteria for the appointment, induction, period of appointment and termination arrangements and responsibilities of external examiners.

2.60 The review team tested this through reviewing documentation relating to the Quality Handbook, external examiner reports and responses to them, together with a review of minutes of Academic Standards and Quality Committee. The team discussed external examining arrangements in a range of meetings and reviewed information for external examiners provided on the University's website.

2.61 Approval of external examiners is the responsibility of Academic Board delegated to External Examiner Appointments Panel and Academic Standards and Quality Committee. Course teams propose appointments vetted locally by School Academic Standards and Quality Committee. For validation service provision, scrutiny of the nomination is by the External Examiner Appointments Panel following approval by the partner's Academic Board, though the partner is responsible for the appointment of the external examiner. In not maintaining responsibility for the appointment and function of external examiners in validated provision, the ability of the University to fully discharge its obligations for the maintenance of academic standards is placed at risk (see recommendation under Expectation B10). A minimum of one external is appointed for each course, and where a course is delivered at more than one delivery site the same external examiner is appointed to cover all locations. The appointment pro forma includes a check to ensure no reciprocity and that a record of external examiner roles is kept; the review team found that this was generally the case, with one exception noted.

2.62 New external examiners are written to with relevant guidance documents attached and invited to attend an external examiner induction event that is open to validated partners. These events run biannually and are enhanced through reflection on feedback from previous events. Mechanisms are in place to provide induction support for external examiners who are unable to attend the induction events. There is a dedicated external examiner website with a range of information and guidance. Validated centres provide their own induction and the effectiveness of this is evaluated by the University verifiers.

2.63 External examiners are required to attend examination boards where awards are conferred and sign a conferment statement. They are required to write a report to a standardised template, which is submitted online. Reports are received by the Centre for Academic Development and Quality, who refer any serious issues identified in the external examiner reports to the School concerned or beyond to Academic Standards and Quality Committee for action. External examiners may also raise serious concerns directly with the Vice Chancellor. The external examiners' report explicitly asks them to comment on the UK qualifications framework, external benchmarks, achievement of learning outcomes and comparability with other UK higher education programmes. The University has a number of partners where programmes may be delivered and assessed in languages other than English. Where this occurs it is a requirement that the external examiner is fluent in the relevant language. External examiners provide feedback about the effectiveness of assessment design and implementation at the examination boards.

2.64 School Standards and Quality Reports provide an overview of external examiner feedback and in turn the Academic Standards and Quality Committee reflects on external examiner feedback as part of its annual review of course quality. All actions in response to external examiner reports are tracked. External examiner reports and institutional responses are shared with students and staff via the virtual learning environment. However, it is clear from the student submission and in talking to students that only a minority of students are aware of the external examiner report and role. Additionally, the team did not find it appropriate that personal contact details of external examiners were being shared with students despite the University's claim that there is agreement from external examiners.

2.65 The Centre for Academic Development and Quality External Examiner Overview Report raised concerns regarding the appointment and capabilities of external examiners in some validated centres and evidence for this was seen in external examiner reports. Support is being provided by the Collaborative Partnerships Office for validated centres to ensure that they have the skills and knowledge to induct their externals to the same standard as the Schools' external examiners. The University has experienced difficulties in the late nomination of external examiners, particularly at Validated Centres. The University is working to reduce the volume of requests for extensions to external examiner appointments as a number of external examiners have been in post for extended periods. The review team **affirms** the action being taken by the University to restrict the extension of external examiner appointments beyond their specified term of office.

2.66 At School level external examiner reports are considered by course committees and included in annual monitoring of provision. External examiners are expected to be consulted over proposed changes to courses or assessment. However, explicit consultation about minor modifications with the external examiner was not evidenced, so that explicit confirmation about changes by an independent expert is lacking (see Expectation A2.2 and recommendation under Expectation A3.4).

2.67 The University offers dual degrees with nine collaborative partners. The arrangements for external examining are expected to be determined during the academic approval process but the attention given to external examining arrangements is not always clearly specified. The University's position is that it recognises that other countries have equivalent means by which to assure the standards of their courses. The review team were told that these arrangements meant in effect that a second year of study taken at a partner institution does not involve the Nottingham Trent external examiner, despite that year of study contributing to a Nottingham Trent degree. A Collaborative Approval Document states that the Nottingham Trent external examiner will look at work performed by home and partner students in year four of the programme. These arrangements create the risk of insufficient external examiner scrutiny in dual awards (see recommendation under Expectation B10).

2.68 The review team concludes that the arrangements for external examining are largely secure but there are some weaknesses, particularly in the management of the appointment and tenure of external examiners in collaborative provision, and the involvement of external examiners in relation to minor modifications. In relation to validated provision, the team noted that the University does not retain responsibility for the appointment and function of external examiners which raises a risk regarding the ability of the University to fully discharge its obligations for the maintenance of academic standards. Therefore, the Expectation is met but with a moderate risk.

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

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

### **Quality Code, Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review**

#### **Findings**

2.69 The University's processes for annual course monitoring and periodic review are set out in the Quality Handbook and associated supplements. The University has made enhancements to the guidance and structure for course and School monitoring and reporting in recent years.

2.70 Course teams complete annual Course Standards and Quality Reports on a standard template. These are considered by School Academic Standards and Quality Committees. Evaluation of Course Standards and Quality Reports and external examiner reports feed into School Standards and Quality Reports which are also produced to a standard template. School Standards and Quality Reports are considered by Academic Standards and Quality Committee as part of its annual monitoring meeting and are peer-reviewed through the Quality Managers' Forum. School Standards and Quality Reports contain a section on collaborative partners for School-based collaborative provision. In respect of Validation Service collaborative arrangements, the Validated Centre complete Course Standards and Quality Reports on a bespoke template. Centres offering several University-approved courses or with multi-site delivery submit a Validated Centre Standards and Quality Report. These reports are reviewed at an annual monitoring meeting of the Validation Service Sub-Committee.

2.71 Periodic School review assesses the effectiveness of the School's processes for the management of quality and standards and for students' learning opportunities and covers all taught courses, including School-based collaborative arrangements. Academic Standards and Quality Committee approves Periodic School Review reports on behalf of Academic Board.

2.72 The review team tested the application of the policies and processes by scrutinising the Quality Handbook and Course Standards and Quality Reports, School Standards and Quality Reports, Standard and Quality Management Overview Reports, reports from several Periodic School Review and Periodic Collaborative Review events and by discussing the annual monitoring and periodic review processes with groups of staff and students. The team also considered minutes of Academic Standards and Quality Committee and Validation Service Sub-Committee.

2.73 Course Standards and Quality Reports refer to a range of evidence including module leader reports, external examiner comments, student outcomes and an action plan. School Standards and Quality Reports are comprehensive documents which reflect on a range of evidence both with respect to course-specific issues and those relating to wider School-level processes and practice that include action plans. Reports produced by Validated Centres are referred back for resubmission if it is considered they need to be improved. An overarching Validation Service standards and Quality Report reviews the Validation Service provision as a whole. The review team saw evidence of effective oversight of reports and their action plans through the University's Committee structures. The team also saw evidence that the University had made improvements in the provision of data to inform monitoring and review and this was confirmed by staff.

2.74 The Periodic School Review process is thorough and has a number of elements. Schools prepare a Reflective Analysis Document, the Centre for Academic Development and Quality undertake a check on the School's compliance with quality management processes prior to the event and a set of course audit trails are undertaken. Review panels are chaired by a member of the University's Senior Management Team and include an external member and an elected Student Union officer, together with other University staff. Schools draw up action plans to address any recommendations and progress on action plans is reported in the next School Standards and Quality Report.

2.75 The University is piloting a Periodic Course Review process from 2014-15 for implementation in 2015-16 which is intended to complement and support its current mechanisms for ensuring the maintenance of the academic standards of courses.

2.76 Collaborative arrangements are subject to Periodic Collaborative Review which staff confirmed has recently been revised. The maximum period of approval for all collaborative provision is three years. The University has introduced a revised approach to Periodic Collaborative Review in 2014-15. However, the review team found evidence of gaps in the involvement of independent external expertise in Periodic Collaborative Review including for those partnerships the University may consider higher risk (see Expectations A3.3 and B10 and recommendation under Expectation A3.4).

2.77 A significant element of the University's oversight of its monitoring and review process is the University Standards and Quality Management Overview Report which is considered and approved by Academic Standards and Quality Committee at its annual monitoring meeting. A wide range of evidence is used within the report including School Standards and Quality Reports, external examiner reports, student-related data, course approval reports, Periodic School Review reports and evidence related to collaborative provision. Recommendations are made to Academic Standards and Quality Committee related to strategic actions for the next academic cycle.

2.78 The review team concludes that the University's processes for the monitoring and review of its provision are effective overall. Reports produced as a result of annual monitoring make a useful contribution to its oversight of standards and lead to enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities. While the Periodic School Review process is thorough, the new Periodic Course Review process has the potential to further enhance monitoring at course level. In addition there is potential to further enhance Periodic Collaborative Review by the inclusion of external experts on all Development and Approval Groups. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the risk is low.

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

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.79 The University handles appeals and complaints using separate frameworks. These are embodied in the Academic Appeals Procedure and the Complaints Procedure for Students, respectively. Academic appeals made by research students follow a separate procedure, detailed in the Quality Handbook.

2.80 Appeals are managed locally by contacts within the relevant School, and each School has a designated contact. The University aims to informally resolve issues that may lead to appeal via the Notification of Exceptional Circumstances process.

2.81 Complaints are managed centrally, but support is provided to School staff to support informal resolution, which includes workshops outlining the complaints process using case studies. Complaints which cannot be resolved informally are escalated to formal complaints.

2.82 Information about the procedures for appeals and complaints is provided in the Student Handbook which includes links to the official procedures, although students report that they usually obtain information about the processes by speaking to members of staff within their School.

2.83 The complaints procedure includes information for groups of students wishing to make a complaint, and details the University's position on anonymous complaints. It contains indicative timeframes for the handling of complaints and also explains where the responsibilities lie in handling complaints with collaborative partners. Students are advised that they may seek advice from the Students' Union prior to making a formal complaint. An annual report detailing statistics and subjects of complaints is sent to Academic Standards and Quality Committee.

2.84 The complaints policy has recently been mapped to Chapter B9 of the Quality Code, and the outcomes of the mapping are expected to have been effected in a review of the process no later than March 2015, which includes a plan to introduce student involvement to the development of the procedures.

2.85 The appeals procedure describes its scope and in which circumstances appeals may be permitted. It explains the processes for handling appeals which also contain complaints, and details how and where complaints should be made when collaborative provision is involved. Staff are able to attend an annual briefing on the policy. The policy is reviewed and developed at Academic Standards and Quality Committee using data from appeals in previous cycles.

2.86 Both policies include information about when a student may refer their complaint or appeal to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator. Completion of procedure letters are issued to students once they reach the end of the University's internal complaints or appeals procedures.

2.87 The review team tested the complaints and appeals policies by scrutinising relevant documentation and by meeting with staff and students to gain an understanding of their operation.

2.88 Taught students at the University met by the review team reported that they are aware of the complaints and academic appeals procedures, and that they understand how to invoke them. Students at UK collaborative partners met by the review team indicated that while they are not familiar with the University's procedures, if they had an issue they would inform the course leader in the first instance who would explain the procedures to them. The review team met students at an overseas partner institution, who reported that they were familiar with the complaints and appeals processes and where to find the formal procedures. Research students met by the review team reported that they are aware of how to make a complaint. Staff new to teaching reported that they were given a detailed introduction to the Quality Handbook, in which the complaints and academic appeals procedures are published.

2.89 The review team concludes that the University has appropriate and effective procedures for handling complaints and academic appeals. The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.90 The QAA Audit of Collaborative Provision in 2010 gave a judgement of confidence in the University's standards and learning opportunities, with processes around approval and the strength of the partnerships being considered areas of good practice. Two desirable recommendations were made: that data should be disaggregated for effective analysis of provision and that details in the student transcripts at validated centres should be modified. This has now been done. Practice was mapped against the new code in December 2012. The University has worked on enhancing the nature of collaborative provision, in particular by strengthening governance arrangements and making improvements to organisational oversight.

2.91 During the review visit the review team was able to consider evidence presented in the self-examination document and in the evidence files, and it also held meetings with collaborative partners at home and overseas and spoke with staff with particular responsibility for collaborative provision.

2.92 Academic Board delegates oversight of collaborative provision to ASQC. Operational aspects of validation provision are carried out by the Validation Service Sub-Committee (VSSC), while for School-based provision such oversight is provided by the School Standards and Quality Committees. Two meetings each year of the VSSC are dedicated to annual monitoring. The team saw minutes of such meetings and recognised the depth and awareness that the meetings offered to the security of the collaborative processes. The speed at which the University can react to areas of concern has been increased, responding to concerns raised by external examiners or university verifiers. The verifiers are involved in the appointment of external examiners and act as the intermediary between the institution and NTU. Verifiers, who act as link tutors, are major figures in the collaborative process and much depends on their ability to note any issues that arise and communicate any concerns to VSSC. Course coordinators undertake the same action in School-based collaboration. Revised annual report templates allow cross-centre comparisons of student progression and student learning opportunities. External examiners are required to address parity of standards, achievement and student learning opportunities. Where there are any problems identified, 'enhanced support' is offered.

2.93 In 2011-12 a new office was established: the Collaborative Partnerships Office (CPO), whose role is to oversee the whole of the University's collaborative provision; verification of standards and quality of validation service provision is achieved through the work of university verifiers. The maximum period of approval for all collaborative provision is three years, to ensure that the University is not tied to lengthy partnerships and also that more frequent review of such partnerships can take place.

2.94 The Quality Handbook Supplement CP1 shows the different categories of collaborative provision which map to the Quality Code. The most recent review of the taxonomy has resulted in the delivery of a joint delivery category, and a re-articulation of the franchise and distance delivery definitions.

2.95 Each School-based collaborative framework requires the development of a Collaborative Framework Document. The Collaborative Framework sets out a shared understanding of the mechanisms by which the collaboration operates.

2.96 In 2012 a working group consisting of a range of stakeholders from across the University was convened to undertake a wholesale collaborative framework review. This led to a revised risk-based process for the evaluation of business and due diligence, an enhanced mechanism for managing School-based collaborations and a strengthening of withdrawal and teach-out processes. Due diligence processes have been enhanced through the introduction of the Partnership Agreement Risk Assessment Tool (PARAT).

2.97 A revised approach to Periodic Collaborative Review has now been introduced which proposes clear criteria to assess the effectiveness of the partnership. At the time of the review visit it was too early to test the effectiveness of this new approach.

2.98 The University works in collaboration with 94 partners in a variety of arrangements. The collaborative strategy was being reviewed at the time of the visit (report expected in March 2015). The Quality Handbook, sections 10A-C, gives details of policies, regulations and principles. The University states that it works in this area on the basis of an assessment of risk and that subsequent management is to some extent based on this assessment of low, medium or high risk. The University states that it has high expectations of its partners and it further claims that the quality processes of its partners are as rigorous as those of its home courses. The University claims that it has 'good risk-based quality management processes' that are recognised in the sector. The team noted that different practices were indeed used in the management of collaborative provision, potentially correlated with the risk level associated with various partnerships, but these were not always consistently applied.

2.99 There is a two-way process for initial approval of validated provision: business evaluation and due diligence is completed before academic approval or review takes place. Each provision is subject to a signed agreement between the centre and the University. The review of collaborative partners takes place every three years. The review team found some lack of clarity in how a risk-based approach was applied, given that clear criteria for defining risk were not apparent. Much depends on the efficacy of the verifier or the course coordinator, who act as link persons between the partner and the University. The Quality Handbook recognises that Validation Service collaborative provision is the 'highest risk provision' but the review team could not find evidence of a clear process for identifying the nature of the risk within the high-risk areas.

2.100 Validated Centres take operational responsibility for admissions and recruitment, functioning within the principles of the University's admissions code set out in the Quality Handbook. The University's website has a useful section giving advice to international students and agents used by the University are able to attend an annual conference where details of the University are communicated.

2.101 The University approves the appointment of external examiners of validated institutions but does not actually appoint them. The team heard that there was some difficulty for validated partners to appoint external examiners and, in one instance, this led to periods in which a course was running without the safeguard of an external examiner. Additionally, as external examiners are not formally employed by the University, the University can only dismiss those who are not performing satisfactorily with the express agreement of the validated partner. Consequently, the external examiner's appointment cannot be terminated by the University; the University can only propose termination and seek agreement from the validated partner for such action. The review team **recommends** that the University develop arrangements to ensure that the University retains ultimate responsibility for the appointment and function of external examiners in such provision. The team concluded that the process



by which external examiners are nominated by a validated partner and approved by the University is not working effectively, but the team noted that actions were being taken to restrict extensions of appointments (see affirmation under Expectation B7).

2.102 The review team heard that dual awards which present a second year of study at the partner institution do not involve an external examiner from the 'home' institution overseeing the final award, and that work done in the second year of study is not given the rigorous oversight provided by an external examiner. It was stated that while external examiners for dual awards comment on the 'whole course' they do not oversee work that is assessed in the partner institution in the final year even though the eventual award is a dual one. There is an element of risk here that is not being addressed as awards are being given in the name of the University even when there is no oversight of work by the University's external examiner. The team therefore **recommends** that the University should strengthen external examining arrangements to ensure effective oversight of dual awards delivered with partner institutions (see also Expectation B7).

2.103 The University described in detail the process that determined the review of the collaboration with Pearl Academy in India to be brought forward. This was a direct result of concerns that had emerged through the University's monitoring and review processes. A team from the University visited the Centre and its different campuses and it was concluded that as a result of rapid expansion by the Centre, the corresponding growth in quality management was not in place. A member of the University was appointed to support the Centre on a consultancy basis and extended visits were carried out while a series of supportive measures were put in place. Eleven conditions were placed on the institution. The University did not include membership external to the University in this early review procedure as it was considered that sufficient 'external' expertise resided in the home University. The outcome was satisfactory and during the review visit the panel was able to engage in discussion with staff and students at Pearl Academy. In short, an issue was identified and dealt with in a satisfactory manner, and in a way that might well be used in the future. The review team considers that external membership of the review panel would have given further objective strength to the procedure (see recommendation under Expectation A3.4); the team also felt that if home processes had been working satisfactorily, issues that arose might have been identified at an earlier stage.

2.104 The design of collaborative certificates was reviewed in January 2013, following the recommendation at the last audit. The design for each collaborative category has recently been agreed and can be found in the Quality Handbook supplements.

2.105 As part of its employability agenda there is a commitment in NTU to provide as many students as possible with the opportunity to gain experience of the workplace or study abroad. Less than 10 ten percent of students are currently not offered this. Placement awards are approved the University's normal approval processes. Oversight and management is achieved through the work of a centralised employability team and academic Schools. Minimum standards are articulated in the Quality Handbook. The review team heard from employers about the effectiveness of the employability agenda, seen by employers as beneficial both to the University and to themselves (see good practice under Expectation B4).

2.106 Erasmus exchanges and study abroad are managed effectively by the International Exchange Office which reports to the Pro Vice-Chancellor (International). Each School has its own online Erasmus space where opportunities are advertised.

2.107 The University delivers research awards with collaborative partners. The quality assurance framework for overseeing collaborative provision of such awards is deemed adequate in its design. However, the Periodic Review evidenced weaknesses in the

operation of these arrangements and the consistency with which they were applied at collaborative partners (see affirmation under Expectation B11).

2.108 Overall, the review team considers that the Expectation is met, with employability engagement being noted as good practice. However, the weaknesses identified in relation to the arrangements regarding external examiners in validated provision and dual awards, externality in programme approval and review for collaborative provision, and the application of oversight arrangements for research degrees delivered in collaboration raise the associated level of risk to moderate.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

**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**

2.109 The University has recently revised its Research Regulations purposely to reflect changed governance and oversight arrangements and to differentiate them from the now separate Regulations for Professional Doctorates. The Regulations are explicitly designed to ensure alignment with the Quality Code, the FHEQ and the University's own generic level descriptors. The University also offered evidence of mapping against the QAA Doctoral Degree Characteristics. The Regulations were revised mid-session but the University argued that the changes were primarily technical, that they did not impact on existing students and that a more fundamental revision of the Regulations was proposed after the end of the current academic session. The Regulations were approved by Academic Board through University Research Committee and are overseen at University level by University Research Degrees Committee and at local level by College Research Degrees Committees. The University explained that the local oversight of research degrees is an exception to the primarily planning and management function of the College level on the basis that the number of research degree candidacies in certain Schools would be too small to warrant oversight at School level. Nevertheless, the University has sought to enhance collaboration between the University Research Degrees Committee, the Graduate School and Schools by instituting the role of Postgraduate Research Tutor in each School (whose tasks and cross-committee memberships are aimed to provide linkage and two-way communication between the institutional and local levels).

2.110 Research degrees are subject to the University's Periodic Review process and the above proposed and approved changes to the governance and oversight of research degrees followed a detailed Periodic Review report in January 2013 with updates on the meeting of its recommendations in September 2013 and December 2014. The Periodic Review and its recommendations have had and continue to have significant impact on the University's governance and oversight of its research degrees. The Regulations are supplemented by a Code of Practice for Research Degrees which is made available to all research students and is available online on the website of the Graduate School, established in 2011 to improve consistency of practice across Colleges and Schools. There is also a separate postgraduate 'Starting at NTU' handbook and a dedicated induction programme for research students covering a comprehensive range of topics and services including research ethics.

2.111 As a result of the Periodic Review, the structure and extent of annual monitoring of external and internal performance indicators relating to research degrees by University Research Degrees Committee and College Research Degrees Committees have been enhanced so as to include application rates; offer and acceptance rates; completion rates; reflection on equality and diversity; withdrawal rates; student feedback including the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey and Professional Doctorate course committees; and professional services feedback. University Research Degrees Committee commissions task and finish groups to investigate by exception when performance indicators so suggest, for example when completion rates were quantified as below the national average and University Research Degrees Committee then monitors consequent impact. However, the Periodic Review still saw this as an area for further improvement.

2.112 The University explains its research environment to prospective and current students via a Postgraduate Research Environment Statement which, after referral, was approved by University Research Degrees Committee in January 2014, setting out the role of the Graduate School, the academic governance and quality assurance and enhancement arrangements for research degrees, the research framework of support for research students (coordinated by the Graduate School but delivered at both institutional and local level), and the provision made for research training and supervisor training.

2.113 The University has developed a Postgraduate Diploma in Professional Research Practice as the keystone of its research training. Attendance is compulsory for full-time students and strongly recommended for part-time students. The University is increasing its online research training, specifically to enable better access for part-time students. All research students have access to the University's virtual learning environment. Other provision for research students includes ePortfolio (an electronic personal development log), an annual research student festival, research seminars and the Vitae Research Development Framework for both supervisors and students. Attendance at appropriate teacher training is compulsory for all research students selected to teach.

2.114 The University has clear criteria for admissions, including entry requirements, arrangements for accreditation of prior learning, an interview process and approval of a research degree project, which are overseen by College Research Degrees Committee. Related communications with applicants are clear. The College Research Degrees Committee also oversees the appointment of a supervisory team of at least two duly qualified staff led by a Director of Studies as a main supervisor. Supervisor training is compulsory for all new supervisors and available to all supervisors. The University is aware of the need to ensure sufficient members of qualified staff are available for candidates and that supervisors individually have those duties adequately reflected in their workloads. The Code of Practice for Research Degrees advises on the frequency of supervisory meetings and their recording.

2.115 Student support needs are analysed from initial interview onwards and reviewed at least annually. Student progress is reviewed at a meeting between the student, supervisory team and a College Research Degrees Committee-appointed independent assessor to whom the student submits a written report and from whom the student receives feedback. These same arrangements were extended to Professional Doctorate students from January 2015 so as to cover all research students.

2.116 Research students have available clear arrangements for academic appeals and complaints, with the latter clearly differentiated from research misconduct. A synopsis of the minimal numbers of individual research student academic appeals and complaints over the past three academic sessions was provided to the team, as was evidence of inclusion of academic appeal and complaint matters in the University Research Degrees Committee annual report.

2.117 Student feedback is gathered through student membership of relevant academic governance committees, including University Research Degrees Committee, College Research Degrees Committees and, for professional doctorate students, Course Committees, the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey and termly informal meetings with the Head of Graduate School, although the Periodic Review noted that there was a need for better recording of outputs from such informal mechanisms so that they might be duly considered by the academic governance structures.

2.118 Progression and assessment criteria are clear. Procedures for final assessment include an internal examiner, at least one external examiner and an independent chair with College Research Degrees Committees overseeing appointments and training and clear

task descriptors provided for examiners and independent chairs. The process is supported by comprehensive documentation, including separate preliminary examiners' reports, a joint examiners' report, an independent chair's checklist and clear subsequent guidance to candidates.

2.119 A significant part of the University's governance and management arrangements for research degree programmes are therefore new or revised. In relation to their design, the new arrangements are fit for purpose in terms of oversight of academic standards and quality of learning opportunities, but the review team was not able to test their full cycle of application. However, the review team did test all continuing arrangements and the predecessors of revised arrangements by reading the procedures, related guidance, handbooks and other documentation cited above, as well as extracts from the minutes of the institutional and local-level academic governance committees with oversight of the University's research degrees.

2.120 The review team met a range of research students including full-time and part-time, home and international and MPhil/PhD and Professional Doctorate students. In brief, the review team questioned the research students on their direct experience of all facets of the typical candidate's life cycle set out above. Broadly, the students whom the review team met were satisfied with the University's provision for them and confirmed that, from their viewpoint, the procedures operated as intended. In particular, they viewed the provision of information, induction arrangements (for those registering at the start of the academic session) and supervision as University strengths but saw the perceived lack of sole-user study spaces as a weakness. They also felt listened to when offering comments and feedback and generally felt themselves to be integrated into the University's research community.

2.121 The review team also met senior research-engaged academic staff, supervisors and postgraduate research tutors, who cumulatively discharged a range of research roles (including in relation to collaborative provision) and institutional and local committee memberships. The University staff placed particular emphasis on the strengthening of the role of the Graduate School (including in representing the research and research student voice in the wider University) and on continuing the momentum for change in the aftermath of the Periodic Review.

2.122 The University's self-evaluation document advised that research degrees delivered with collaborative partners are broadly subject to the same quality assurance arrangements as taught degrees which are described more fully under Expectation B10. The review team confirmed, with a group of research-engaged senior academic staff, what this meant in actual application for home and overseas programmes and for PhDs/MPhils and Professional Doctorates. In addition, the review team was advised of examples of cross-representation on the respective partners' academic governance committees, shared supervision of candidates and shared progression boards and comparison of student achievement on programmes delivered both by the University itself and a collaborative partner. The review team also considered the full report on the Periodic Collaborative Review of Southampton Solent University in 2013, particularly as the Periodic Review report and updates identified some deficiencies in the application of oversight of collaborative research degrees in such aspects as the need for fuller oversight of and guidance to supervisors, more systematic sharing of good practice, greater monitoring of research training and cross-comparison of student outcomes and greater follow-through on completion of necessary actions identified in the annual report process. In addition, the Periodic Review recommended the development of a system to respond to areas of non-compliance should these occur in a collaborative partner.

2.123 The review team found that the University's quality assurance arrangements for collaborative provision provided a framework (including partner and academic approval, periodic collaborative review, monitoring of quality and standards through annual reporting and link tutoring) which was fit for the purpose of overseeing collaborative partners delivering research degrees. However, the University itself, through the Periodic Review, had identified weaknesses in the operation of those arrangements and the consistency with which they were applied at collaborative partners. The review team noted strengthening of and changes in Graduate School staffing as one factor in the University's progress in addressing the self-identified deficiencies in the application of those arrangements raised by the Periodic Review and its commitment to resolve all residual issues by the end of the current academic session. In that light, the review team **affirms** the action being taken by the University to ensure greater consistency for the oversight of academic standards and quality of learning opportunities for its research awards delivered at collaborative partners.

2.124 Overall, the University provides secure academic standards and a suitable research environment for the appropriate quality of learning opportunities for its research awards. However, the review team notes weaknesses in the operation of collaborative provision arrangements regarding research awards and insufficient consistency in the oversight of these arrangements. The University has already commenced a programme of actions to address those weaknesses but has yet to see that programme through to full conclusion. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is currently moderate, as weaknesses were evident in the operation of part of the University's arrangements for the oversight of research awards, and the risk is maintained until the actions currently being undertaken prove their effectiveness.

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

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

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

2.126 All of the Expectations for this judgement area are met. The associated levels of risk are low, except for Expectations B7, B10 and B11 for which the identified risk is moderate. Features of good practice are identified within Expectations B4 and B5 and cross-referenced in Expectation B10 from B4 and B3 and B4 from Enhancement. These relate specifically to: the approach to employability, the partnership with the Student Union and the research-informed teaching and learning projects. Recommendations are formulated under Expectation B10 and urge the University to review the oversight of dual awards and to review arrangements regarding external examiners in validated provision. Expectations B1, B7, B8 and B10 cross-reference to recommendations noted in Part A, in relation to oversight of minor programme modifications and inclusion of appropriate levels of externality for programme approval and periodic review. Two affirmations are formulated in Expectations B7 and B11 regarding actions being taken to restrict external examiner extensions and, respectively, actions being taken to enhance the oversight of academic standards for research awards delivered with collaborative partners.

2.127 The recommendations entail a revision of current arrangements and their application, in relation to which the University recognises its responsibilities. The affirmations confirm that the University acknowledges and has itself identified, through internal procedures, the need for amendments and/or developments in the areas highlighted, and actions are underway. Responses to previous external review activities demonstrate that the provider has the capacity to address weaknesses promptly and professionally.

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

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

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

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

#### **Findings**

3.1 The University's policies and procedures surrounding information are provided on the 'About NTU' section of its website, which is directly accessible from the home page. The pages include the University's 'Guide to Information' which provides information to the public, lists contacts for further information, and links to the Freedom of Information Procedure. The governance structure of the University is described on the website.

3.2 The enrolment conditions for students contain guidance on what information is collected about them and how it is used, for data protection purposes. Web policies relevant to website visitors are also available. Information on the University's web pages is maintained by the Head of Digital Marketing and is reviewed and updated annually.

3.3 A large amount of the information made available to prospective students is presented via the website. The course finder, also on the website, contains an entry for each course. These entries contain information about the course content and delivery, including skills developed, work placement information where applicable, further opportunities such as study abroad, and the standard entry requirements for the course. Each entry shows information specific to the course, including Key Information Set data. General information for applicants is also on the website, and is complemented by a Parents' guide.

3.4 Printed prospectuses are also available, as are course brochures. The former provide general information about the University and include for each course a 'fact file', and the latter offer more specific information on a particular course. Open days are run on campus which provide tours of the facilities and there is also a virtual open day on the website. The information provided to applicants is explored in more detail under Expectation B2.

3.5 The transition from prospective to current student is supported with information on the 'Starting at NTU' web pages, including resources specific to each course. Handbooks are also provided for both undergraduate and postgraduate students. There are induction events to familiarise students with the facilities and campus as well as with their School and course. The 'NTU Student Handbook' is published online and maintained by Student Support Services, and course and module handbooks are also published with more specific information. Current information for research students is posted on a designated area of the website.

3.6 Assessment information is also available on the 'Starting at NTU' web pages in summary format and in more detail on NOW, the University's virtual learning environment, in the form of an Assessment and Feedback Plan for each course which is available from the beginning of the year. External examiner reports are also routinely posted on NOW for each course. A course representative finder can be found on the Students' Union web pages. In a survey conducted by the University, the vast majority of students felt that the information on the website is user-friendly, kept up to date, and accurate. Students consider that they are kept sufficiently up to date with changes at the University.



3.7 After completion of their studies, students receive a transcript and diploma supplement from the University. These are sent on paper to the student. They can also be retrieved at any point. The Higher Education Achievement Report will be implemented from September 2015, and the processes and policies for this are still under development.

3.8 The University publishes its Quality Handbook, containing policies and regulations, on its website. It is available publicly and is reviewed and updated annually, then approved by Academic Standards and Quality Committee in October. The last major revision was in October 2013 which included a mapping of the document to the new Quality Code.

3.9 The team tested the processes through exploration of relevant procedural documentation, and through meetings with staff and students at the University and its collaborative partners.

3.10 Taught students met by the review team indicated that they were satisfied with the amount and format of induction and course information they receive, and that they had all seen their course handbook either electronically, in printed form, or both. Research students met by the review team report that they had all received the Postgraduate Research Handbook and Code of Practice, that induction arrangements were very good and that information was generally accurate.

3.11 The University's collaborative partners produce their own publicity information, which is then subject to approval by the University. Information on partner websites is also periodically checked by the University. Students at collaborative partners met by the team report that they received an induction, and have access to useful and accurate course and module handbooks, which contain information on rules, regulations and complaints and appeals procedures.

3.12 The University introduced a management data reporting tool, Cognos, in 2010. It is used throughout the University to provide staff with immediate self-service access to data, and recently has been used for benchmarking and comparison of statistics from league tables and the National Student Survey at School level and course level. Cognos is also used to provide access to data to support annual course monitoring and review processes. The review team found that the effective use of management information which supports the University's quality assurance framework is **good practice**.

3.13 The University has effective structures and processes in place to ensure that the information it provides to students and other stakeholders is fit for purpose, trustworthy and accessible. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

3.14 In reaching its positive judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The Expectation for this judgement area is met and the associated level of risk is low. Good practice is noted in relation to the use of management information. The review team formulated no recommendations and no affirmations for this judgement area.

3.15 The review team considers that the University's information systems are appropriately robust for checking the accuracy of internal and external documents, and information is consistently and readily available to the appropriate audiences. The review team therefore concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the University **meets** UK expectations.

## 4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

### Findings

4.1 The self-evaluation document specifies where the University is clearly taking deliberate steps to enhance the quality of students' learning opportunities and this is well documented and embedded in a culture of continuous improvement that is also built upon its commitment to student engagement as discussed previously. The University has recently appointed a new Vice Chancellor, thus the previous strategic plan for the University is currently being consulted on and revised. Furthermore, the University is benchmarking enhancement activity in this area against national standards including the Quality Code and areas such as digital literacy. Additionally, the University issues clear guidance to staff on enhancement in course design and management.

4.2 The University is currently engaged in a wide range of enhancement-based projects detailed in the self-evaluation document, including: the development of the web-based student dashboard; sustainability work across the University embedding this topic into curriculum and beyond; enhancement in learning and teaching, including the 'Scale Up' project - promoting active learning through resource design and flipped teaching, and promoting collaborative learning and problem solving; a research-led approach to revision of the academic tutorial system to promote identity, belonging and community and improve retention and achievement; a research-led approach to revision of the teaching observation scheme to formalise management observation of teaching across the University; a research-led project with the Higher Education Academy to redefine measures of teaching quality; research and development work on supporting equality and diversity, improving the experience of students from disadvantaged backgrounds and international, postgraduate and part-time students and those studying under collaborative arrangements; research-led approaches to the enhancement of assessment and feedback, including categorical marking (grade-based assessment), student-devised assessment criteria, electronic submission and feedback; research-led enhancement of the first-year undergraduate experience and the suitability and development of physical resources; and research-led enhancement of course monitoring and review. The team also acknowledges the significant emphasis on employability at the University, which also demonstrates an effective commitment to enhancing the student experience (see section 5: Employability). The range of research-informed teaching and learning projects, which are enhancing the student experience, for example grade-based assessment, Scale Up, the HEA project redefining measures of teaching quality including Epigeum, represent **good practice**.

4.3 The Students' Union is also actively involved in the enhancement agenda and sees the University as taking a much more collaborative approach (see good practice under Expectation B5). The Students' Union noted that it would be keen to extend its involvement even more in this area. The Students' Union also commented on the lack of visibility of the enhancement agenda with two-thirds of students still unaware of the amount of enhancement work the University is engaged in. In the review team's discussions with students it was also clear that although some enhancement work was visible (the Student Dashboard project, for example), other aspects were less clear to students (Scale Up, for example). The University's stated aim to include enhancement in its new strategic plan will begin to address this and further measures to ensure the visibility of and engagement with the enhancement agenda.

4.4 The review team's meetings with staff and Students' Union representatives identified a shared vision of enhancement that will become a part of the University's new strategic plan. Meetings with students also indicated some awareness of enhancement, particularly regarding resources, and the provision of technology. The University's enhancement agenda was additionally evidenced through the continuation of projects reported in the self-evaluation document including: the Student Dashboard project; the Scale Up project, including the provision of additional physical, technological and training resources; and further work on staff development around teaching and learning, including further Higher Education Academy projects around supporting staff to meet professional standards (Epigeum).

4.5 The review team concludes that the University is taking deliberate and effective steps to enhance the quality of students' learning opportunities and therefore meets the Expectation with the associated level of risk being low. Under the new strategic plan, this work and its communication to students, partner institutions, employers and other stakeholders may benefit from a more unified public presence and profile. Additionally, the engagement of students in the management of this area could become more widespread and better supported in the future, also through the partnership between the University and the Students' Union.

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

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

4.6 In reaching its positive judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The Expectation for this judgement area is met and the associated level of risk is low.

4.7 Good practice is identified in relation to the research-informed teaching and learning projects at the University, and the partnership between the University and the Students' Union. The latter is cross-referenced to Expectation B5. The review team formulated no recommendations and no affirmations for this judgement area.

4.8 The University has plans to bring this area into a more strategic focus in the future and this might address some of the visibility issues the team noted. In addition, the intention to include this area in the new strategic plan has the potential to further secure the engagement of all stakeholders with enhancement-led initiatives. The review team, therefore, concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the University **meets** UK expectations.

## 5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

### Findings

5.1 In the self-evaluation document the University explains that it has a long history as a vocational institute and the institution's strategic plan emphasises the importance of employability for its students. The self-evaluation document refers to 'strong partnerships with employers' and an 'outstanding record of student employability'. The University's new strategic plan 2015-20 (currently being consulted on) will also include employability as a major area of focus. The University aims to make career management proficiency an integral part of all courses and has reviewed and revised the curriculum to embed these skills. This work is ongoing with some success and some areas where students have reported that employment skills modules need clearer purpose. The University is aware that there is further work to be done to embed employability at the local level within its School structure and ensure academic staff participation. Over the last three years the University has developed its Employability and Enterprise team to take a lead role in this development with Employability Coordinators appointed from existing staff in each School, and the creation of School employability boards. The University has also brought together enterprise and employability activities and centralised placement administration while maintaining subject expertise within this team.

5.2 Support for entrepreneurial activity is also a key focus for employability, including 'the Hive', an incubator space for business start-ups with a significant track record; HeadStart and SmartTrak business development programmes (which have been engaged in by students as well as local small businesses); 'Future Factory' (which provides support for businesses in sustainable design); and the Bio City (a Bio-Science business incubator) and Cobden Chambers retail incubator sponsored by Santander. The University also runs 'Acceler8', an extracurricular employability development award completed by around 250 students a year and encourages student membership of the Institute of Directors. However, the student submission notes that this award is limited to 600 students and is oversubscribed.

5.3 Employability is high on the University's agenda and a key part of its strategy. It is also supported by management and teaching staff. In the review team's meetings with employability staff it became clear that the research-led approach to the adoption of a stakeholder model for delivering employability services with students, employers and the academy has been highly successful with employability coordinators playing a vital role in embedding the culture of employability within the Schools and careers/employability advisers/consultants working with students and employers. The amount of activity and focus in this area is exceptional with the business School alone providing 700 placement opportunities. This approach provides effective centralised support while also maintaining an employment focus at the local level.

5.4 Centrally managed employability initiatives include the establishment of a customer relationship database, and engagement with employers including Santander's internship scheme, the Nottingham Creative Quarter - Cobden Chambers, the 'Notts TV' regional television station, and legal advice and work with CEB/SHL, providing students with experience of psychometric testing. The restructuring of the Employability and Enterprise department has also led to the development of centralised event management and business development teams available to all stakeholders. In the review team's meetings with employers it became clear that the University is engaged with a wide range of mutually beneficial employer engagements and that these relationships have a positive impact on the experience and career development of students and produce clear benefits for all stakeholders.

5.5 In the review team's meeting with students, there were indications of variable practice across the Schools, particularly regarding placements. However, students were also confident that improvements had been made over the past year. The University recognises that it needs to engage its students with the employability agenda and has also invested in resources to support employability with the creation of 'one-stop shops' on each campus. The University has also run a programme of recruitment fairs (where attendance has doubled over the last two years due to a more targeted approach), surveyed students at enrolment on employability, and provided a range of online resources including 'employability learning rooms' on the VLE, the 'My Career Explorer' section on the University website, an electronic placement management system - 'In Place' (being piloted currently), and the 'Future Hub'. These resources are promoted on social media and the web. Much work also takes place at the local level including work-based learning and placements, guest lectures and employer-sponsored projects. There are also examples of PSRB engagement with specific projects in Schools. Art and design students in particular make comments on the positive use of industry live briefs.

5.6 The review team concludes that the University is taking deliberate and effective steps to provide and enhance the career prospects and employability of its students.

## Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 29 to 32 of the [Higher Education Review handbook](#).

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

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

### Academic standards

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

### Award

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

### Blended learning

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

### Credit(s)

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

### Degree-awarding body

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

### Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

### Dual award or double award

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

### e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning



### **Enhancement**

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

### **Expectations**

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

### **Flexible and distributed learning**

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

See also **distance learning**.

### **Framework**

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

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

A published formal structure that identifies a hierarchy of national qualification levels and describes the general achievement expected of holders of the main qualification types at each level, thus assisting higher education providers in maintaining academic standards. QAA publishes the following frameworks: *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and *The Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland* (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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Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB

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

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