



Higher Education Review of the University of Kent

March 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 University of Kent. The review took place from 9 to 12 March 2015 and was conducted by a team of five reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Elizabeth Barnes
- Professor Amanda Dowd
- Professor Geoffrey Elliott
- Professor Ieuan Ellis
- Mr James Perkins (student reviewer)

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

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

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

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

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

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

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

² Higher Education Review themes: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106

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

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

Key findings

QAA's judgements about the University of Kent

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

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

Good practice

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

- The responsive and timely approach to supporting prospective students in their admission to the University across all levels of provision (Expectations B2, B11 and C).
- The strategic approach to creating an internationalised environment, which enables students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential (Expectation B4).
- The range of informal and formal opportunities provided to postgraduate research students, which create a vibrant and interdisciplinary academic community (Expectation B11).
- The accessibility of university-level information available on the website to stakeholders (Expectations C and B3).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to the University of Kent.

By September 2015:

- implement an effective mechanism for the institutional oversight of decisions taken by Boards of Examiners in the implementation of the assessment regulations to ensure consistency and fairness (Expectation B6)
- develop and implement a mechanism to enable oversight of the cumulative effect of incremental modular changes to programmes (Expectation B8)
- ensure consistency in the typology and arrangements for partner providers and establish a mechanism to ensure more effective oversight of its partner provision (Expectation B10)
- ensure transparency for stakeholders through a consistent description of academic levels across all programmes as outlined in the FHEQ (Expectation C).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The steps being taken to monitor the impact of the categorical marking and new classification approach and its consistency of implementation across all provision (Expectation A3.2).
- The planning and implementation of developments to the estate across campuses to enhance the learning environment and improve equity of access in light of the growth in student numbers (Expectation B3).
- The planned implementation of the revised Assessment Framework policy to ensure greater consistency in assessment practice (Expectation B6).

Theme: Student Employability

The Employability Strategy sets out the approach to student employability in line with the overarching Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy. Key features of the approach are embedding relevant skills within the curriculum, providing opportunities for work-related learning, recording personal development and providing access to career search skills through the Careers and Employability Service. The Student Experience Committee maintains oversight of the strategy through the work of an Employability and Skills Subcommittee that oversees and coordinates activity across faculties and schools. Employability groups are established at faculty and school level to consider student employability issues, progress central and local initiatives and to share good practice. The central Careers and Employability Service works closely with schools in the planning and delivery of the University agenda.

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

About the University of Kent

The University of Kent (the University) is a research-intensive institution that awards taught and research degrees under a Royal Charter granted in 1965. The University operates from three locations in Kent: a main campus in Canterbury; a campus at Medway which is shared with three other providers of higher education; and a Centre in Tonbridge which delivers part-time professional programmes. The University also has four European postgraduate centres in Brussels, Paris, Athens and Rome, the largest of which is the Brussels School of International Studies established in 1998. In December 2014, the University had 19,074 students, including 2,629 students on postgraduate taught programmes and 1,180 registered for postgraduate research degrees.

The University mission is to: provide education of excellent quality; enlarge knowledge by research; be an intellectual and cultural focus in Kent; support national and regional economic success; build on its close ties within Europe; and continue developing wider international relationships. This vision is underpinned by a Strategic Plan 2012-15. The strategic direction is managed by the Executive Group which reports regularly to Senate and Council. This group is led by the Vice-Chancellor and includes a Senior Deputy and two Deputy Vice-Chancellors, two Pro Vice-Chancellors for learning and teaching, and for research respectively and the Director of Finance. The University has 20 schools and 11 academic centres which are organised into three faculties: Humanities; Social Sciences; and Sciences. The senior management structure includes the deans for each faculty as well as deans for Medway, Europe, Kent Health and the Graduate School who meet with the Executive Group through a regular Managers' Forum. Central support functions are grouped under five professional services: Student Services; Information Services; Academic Division; Corporate Communications and the Development Office with Directors of these services represented on key management groups and committees. The University works closely with the Students' Union which operates under the name of Kent Union.

The senior committee structure is headed by Council which receives reports from Senate. Subcommittees of the Senate include the Learning and Teaching Board, which has quality management oversight of undergraduate provision and the Credit Framework, and the GSB, which has quality management oversight of all postgraduate provision, the Student Experience Committee, and Faculty Boards. The division of taught and research programmes is continued throughout the committee structure. Faculty Boards receive reports on taught and research matters from Faculty Learning and Teaching Committees and Faculty Graduate Studies Committees respectively. Each School also operates a Learning and Teaching Committee and a Graduate Studies Committee which report to the faculty counterparts. Boards of Studies and student-staff liaison committees operate at programme level within schools and centres to manage and monitor programme delivery. Directors of Learning and Teaching, and Directors of Graduate Studies are appointed at both faculty and school level to coordinate and oversee the operation of quality assurance mechanisms. The core quality assurance approach is outlined in two internal codes of practice namely the Code of Practice for Taught Programmes of Study and the Code of Practice for Research Programmes of Study. These two documents are supplemented by other key documents outlining additional policies, the Credit Framework and assessment regulations.

The University has a number of partnership arrangements through which it awards both taught and postgraduate academic qualifications in line with its strategic priorities. These include: a number of postgraduate dual awards with international partners; joint awards with European and UK universities; undergraduate degrees, diplomas and certificates delivered by three further education colleges in the county; articulation arrangements; and a range of undergraduate and postgraduate taught degrees delivered by specialist institutions, predominantly in the areas of health and dance. The University maintains a collaborative

provision register for all partnership provision that leads to academic qualifications and publishes this online through the Quality Assurance Office.

Since the previous review in 2008, the structure and organisation of the University remains largely unchanged, although two new schools have been added at the Medway campus. The Graduate School, in its infancy at the time of the last review, is now established and works across the University to develop all aspects of postgraduate study. The senior management structure outlined above has been in place since July 2014 following an internal restructure of roles and there have been some changes to administrative responsibilities between schools and faculties following a review of school administration in 2009.

QAA conducted an Institutional Audit in 2008, and a Collaborative Provision Audit in 2010, and in both cases concluded that confidence could be placed in the soundness of the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. Good practice was noted in both audits. The University has responded appropriately to the recommendations arising from the audits, monitoring progress through action plans submitted periodically to the Learning and Teaching Board (LTB). The actions taken in response to the three recommendations from the 2008 audit have been broadly effective, although the Student Submission recommends further work on raising student awareness around two of the areas: the strategic approach to enhancement, and the training requirements for Graduate Teaching Assistants. Actions taken in response to the ten recommendations from the Collaborative Provision Audit have largely resulted in revisions to the internal Codes of Practice and Collaborative Provision Policies and Procedures documents and are reflected in the evidence provided on the current practice for managing and operating partnerships.

Explanation of the findings about the University of Kent

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 Key external reference points for academic standards have been internalised by the University through incorporation in core regulatory and procedural documentation, notably the Codes of Practice for taught and research programmes, the Credit Framework and Academic Regulations. These documents outline the processes for the design, approval, delivery and monitoring of programmes and include annexes and templates which make explicit reference to level descriptors and relevant Subject Benchmarks Statements. Consideration of professional, regulatory and statutory body requirements are incorporated into the design and approval processes where appropriate.

1.2 The review team explored the approach through the consideration of documentation, including quality assurance procedures, minutes of meetings, external examiner reports, and specifications for programmes and modules. In addition, the team met with staff to discuss the setting and maintenance of academic standards.

1.3 *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and other benchmarks have been embedded into the University's Codes of Practice and Credit Framework, and work effectively as a key reference point for ensuring appropriate credit volume and threshold academic standards. The Codes of Practice and related templates are extensively used by staff and referenced in the design, approval, delivery and quality monitoring of programmes. The University has deliberately and

systematically mapped its internal processes and procedures to the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) to ensure an appropriate regulatory framework for quality assurance. While there is evidence that programme learning outcomes are clearly mapped to the appropriate levels of the FHEQ, the terms used by the University to describe academic levels relate to a previous version of the FHEQ rather than the current numerical designations 4-8.

1.4 The review team considers that the design and delivery of the University's qualifications makes appropriate use of external reference points in setting academic standards and ensuring that qualifications reflect national qualification, credit and Subject Benchmarks Statements and characteristics. The team therefore concludes that the expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.5 The general framework for the award of credit and qualifications is outlined in the University Academic Regulations documents for taught programmes and research programmes. The detail on the conventions for awarding credit are set out in the Credit Framework document and procedural information is outlined in the Code of Practice for Taught Programmes of Study and Code of Practice for Research Programmes of Study. These documents apply to all academic provision although bespoke assessment regulations may be approved for dual or joint awards at the point of validation. Oversight of the implementation and review of these regulatory and procedural documents rests with the University LTB, although detailed consideration of issues and advice to LTB are undertaken by various subgroups, notably the Working Group on Regulations and Conventions (WGRC).

1.6 The review team analysed the academic and regulatory framework in place at the University as documented in the internal codes of practice, Credit Framework and Academic Regulations. The team also met staff across different campuses and partnerships to discuss the approach.

1.7 The University has a comprehensive and detailed regulatory framework governing the assessment and award of qualifications for both taught and research programmes of study. It offers a range of award types including dual and joint awards and the credit framework sets out in comprehensive detail the conventions for awarding credit and academic qualifications. External examiner and Boards of Examiner processes and procedures are extensively codified. There is evidence that assessment regulations and credit frameworks are kept under continuous review through the WGRC with appropriate consideration of comments from external examiners. The University provided examples of the management of the framework through examples such as its approach to the application and fairness of different methods of classification and the comprehensive inclusion of all partnership provision. Staff met by the review team demonstrated a sound understanding of the frameworks in place.

1.8 The review team noted that the University takes a pragmatic approach to the introduction of changes to the regulatory framework. For example, although a new credit framework was introduced in 2002, it was not fully adopted across all partners until 2013. Similarly, a new categorical marking scale was introduced in 2011-12 although this was optional for the first year. LTB and GSB have now mandated that both the credit framework and marking scale are adopted across all provision from 2014-15, although one validated institution has an exemption until 2015-16. The University plans to change the postgraduate pass mark and in this case, has stated universal adoption from 2015-16 and staff met by the review team, including those at partnerships, were aware of the nature and timing of the changes.

1.9 The review team considers that the University has a comprehensive set of academic governance arrangements, frameworks and regulations to secure academic standards and the award of credit and qualifications. The team therefore concludes that 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

1.10 The University maintains a definitive record of each programme and qualification through programme and module specifications published on its website. Programme specifications are formatted to common templates and outline the requirements for delivery, assessment, progression and the accumulation of credit for award for both taught and research degrees. All new programme specifications are approved by the Programme Approval Subcommittee (PASC) which has delegated authority to approve programmes from the LTB. The programme and module specifications are the key reference points in the delivery and assessment of programmes, in annual monitoring and review and in the provision of records of study to students on completion. These specifications are also the direct source for the information provided in the online and hard copy prospectus made available to prospective students.

1.11 The review team analysed the University approach to definitive programme records by reviewing key documents including the internal codes of practice, programme specifications and transcripts. The team also met academic and support staff to discuss the approach.

1.12 The review team confirms that programme specifications are written to a standard template and therefore provide consistent and comparable information for prospective and current students. Programme specifications for research degree programmes of study provide similar summaries of information. Programme and module specifications form an integral part of the approval documentation submitted through PASC. The Faculties Support Office maintains version control of programme specifications and revised versions are uploaded following programme modifications although no routine updating is undertaken. As a result, the team noted that transient information required by the templates, such as names of supervisory staff and reading lists, is not always current in the published versions.

1.13 Standard templates are used for the provision of records of study to students and graduates, including the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR) issued to all undergraduates since 2013-14. This information is drawn from the student data system and based on the programme specification. Examples reviewed by the team confirmed that records are fit for purpose and effective in providing definitive information on the programme and extra-curricular activities.

1.14 The review team considers that the University maintains definitive records of each programme of study and qualification that it approves and that these are used as a key reference point in the delivery, monitoring, review and assessment of programmes. The team therefore concludes that the expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.15 The University process for the approval of new programmes is articulated in the internal Codes of Practice for research degrees and taught programmes. The Code of Practice for taught provision also outlines the approval process for new modules. The design of the processes ensures that academic standards are appropriately set with reference to external frameworks and that the qualifications also meet the University's own requirements for academic programmes and awards. New proposals for programmes are initially approved, in principle, by the University Executive Group. Responsibility for programme development and design is then assigned to the schools with consideration taking place through the relevant committees for undergraduate or postgraduate programmes. Proposals then proceed to the Faculty Learning and Teaching Committee or Graduate Studies Committee which check adherence to internal and external requirements before submission to PASC which makes the final decision on approval under delegated authority from the University LTB and the GSB. An annual report is submitted to Senate detailing all programmes approved through PASC.

1.16 The review team explored the approach by reviewing the internal Code of Practice and relevant annexes, approval documentation and programme specifications, examples of the approval processes and committee minutes, and information available through the University website. The team also met a range of staff to discuss programme approval.

1.17 The module and programme approval documentation reviewed by the team demonstrate systematic consideration of University regulations and key external reference points in the design and approval of modules and programmes, across all levels of provision and at all delivery locations. Programmes and modules undergo detailed design, which is considered and approved through school, faculty and university level committees, where they are checked against framework standards. The University provides programme and module templates for use by developers, which encourages consistency in the design and approval of new programmes and modules in relation to setting academic standards.

1.18 In addition to the committee structure, the University has an online documentation and discussion forum called Programme and Module Approval System (PMAS), which provides a thorough and clearly documented audit trail of the faculty level consideration of new module and programme proposals prior to submission to PASC. Comments in the approval discussion threads and in PASC minutes indicate that consideration is given to setting appropriate learning outcomes and ensuring compliance with the internal codes of practice. The University uses a Programme Module Mapping document at approval that maps relevant module learning outcomes onto programme learning outcomes and ensures that an outcome-based approach is adopted for taught programmes.

1.19 External commentary, guided by a pro forma, is expected at the programme approval stage for any new programme that is substantially new. Substantial is defined as where new modules equate to 50 per cent or more of the credit at the degree classification stages. The review team was satisfied that, where required, such external commentary is

provided, including explicit reference to standard setting, and that departments deliver a comprehensive response to that commentary.

1.20 The review team considers that the University has clear and effective processes for the approval of new programmes of study which ensure that academic standards are set at a level which meets the UK threshold standards. These processes are followed in accordance with internal academic frameworks and regulations and the team therefore concludes that the expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.21 The processes and regulations for assessment, award of credit and classification of qualifications are outlined in the University Credit Framework document and Assessment Regulations. The Credit Framework document establishes that credit may only be awarded where a student successfully demonstrates achievement of the specified programme and module learning outcomes. As noted above, such outcomes are set with reference to internal and external reference points and are published in the approved programme and module specifications. The achievement of outcomes, award of credit and classification of awards are formally approved by boards of examiners operating in accordance with requirements outlined in the Code of Practice for taught programmes.

1.22 The review team tested the University approach to the implementation of the credit framework through analysis of documentation including key policy and framework documents, minutes of committees and reports from external examiners. The review team also met staff and students.

1.23 The use of standardised module specification templates ensures that new modules set out specifically how the learning and teaching strategy and assessment methodology relate to, and ensure the testing of, the intended learning outcomes. Programme specifications are supplemented by Programme Module Mapping documents that set out the intended learning outcomes of specific modules and map these onto the programme-level learning outcomes. These are considered at the point of programme approval and revisited at boards of examiners to ensure that qualification are awarded only on achievement of the full outcomes being demonstrated. Following initial programme approval, mechanisms exist to consider and approve major and minor modifications to modules, although mapping documents are not formally revisited at this point and the team identifies a potential weakness in oversight of the incremental changes to modules (see section B8, paragraph 2.72).

1.24 Award classification outcomes are reached in consultation with, and are subject to the agreement of, the relevant external examiners who provide confirmation of the accuracy of these outcomes both at the meeting of the Board of Examiners and subsequently in their annual reports.

1.25 There is evidence that assessment regulations and credit frameworks are kept under continuous review through the WGRC, a standing group that advises the LTB and GSB on the operation and development of the Credit Framework, codes of practice and related procedures. In 2011-12 the University implemented changes in the marking methodology and to the methodology used for determining the final degree classification. Changes to the approach were devised and considered through the Working Group on Classification Methodologies, a bespoke group established specifically to review

classification procedures. . Marking is now based on a 'categorical approach' and degree classification, while still based on the long-established 'average' and 'preponderance method', no longer allows schools to opt out of using the latter, except in cases where exemptions have been granted to comply with professional, statutory and regulatory body accreditations (PSRB) requirements. The impact of these changes became particularly evident in 2013-14 as the first three-stage cohort graduated under the new systems of marking and degree classification at which point a number of external examiners expressed concern over the inflationary impact on the final degree award. These concerns have been appropriately reported and considered by the LTB and the University has undertaken detailed analyses on degree classifications compared with previous years and in comparison with degree classifications across the higher education sector. The review team noted in a report from the WGRC that no further action was proposed on analysing the impact of the regulations, although the review team was assured by senior management that analysis would continue. The review team therefore **affirms** the steps being taken to monitor the impact of the categorical marking and new classification approach and its consistency of implementation across all provision.

1.26 The Credit Framework allows for the award of credit via mechanisms for compensation (narrow failure in a prescribed volume of credit) and condonement (mitigating circumstances) and allows for credit exemptions. The review team noted that these aspects of the regulations have been raised by some external examiners and saw evidence of these regulations applied in practice by Boards of Examiners. Although these decisions are recorded in accordance with University requirements, the review team did not see evidence of how these decisions are overseen with regard to evaluating the impact and implications of these assessment regulations (see section B6, paragraph 2.48).

1.27 The University LTB took the decision in March 2013 to require all programmes at validated institutions to fall in line with the standard Credit Framework, ending the historic practice of permitting some partners exemptions related to marking and classification practices. The University has also confirmed a change to the pass mark for all taught postgraduate awards to be implemented from September 2015. Support and guidance has been provided to partners to adopt this standard marking and classification methodology. The review team found through meetings with staff and students, including those in partner institutions, that these changes were generally well understood.

1.28 Overall, the review team considers that the University has processes in place to ensure that awards are made on the basis of successfully achieved programme learning outcomes and that these meet UK and internal standards. The University is taking appropriate steps to monitor the ongoing impact of categorical marking and degree classification and ensure consistency of implementation across all provision. The team therefore concludes that the expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.29 The University has regular monitoring and review processes for all modules and programmes which take place both annually and periodically on a six-year cycle. These processes are set out in the internal Codes of Practice and apply to all provision wherever delivered. Schools are responsible for the annual monitoring of modules, programmes and student progress and for determining appropriate actions and are required to report on these matters to Faculty Boards. Each delivery partner is required to submit an annual report for consideration by the relevant host school at the University. An Annual Monitoring Review report is produced for each programme following consideration of the programme at Boards of Studies meetings, and these reports are submitted to the relevant School Learning and Teaching Committee or Graduate Studies Committee. The annual monitoring process then escalates through a consolidated report from the school to the faculty-level committees which report to the University LTB or GSB.

1.30 Periodic Programme Reviews (PPR) are undertaken at school level and cover all taught and research programmes offered by that school, including programmes delivered through partnership arrangements. The exception to this are the validated institutions which are subject to a separate PPR. The PPR explicitly addresses the currency of the programmes under review as well as compliance with the internal Codes of Practice and UK threshold standards. PPR reports, and the School's response to any recommendations for action, are considered at faculty level prior to being submitted to the LTB or GSB.

1.31 The review team explored the effectiveness of the approach by analysing the relevant sections of the internal Code of Practice, module and programme monitoring reports submitted by schools and partner organisations, PPR reports and evidence of consideration through various committees. The review team also met staff and students to verify how procedures are operated in practice.

1.32 One of the stated purposes of the annual monitoring process is to address whether UK threshold academic standards are achieved and whether academic standards are being maintained. The Code of Practice was revised for 2014-15 following an internal review to make this aim more explicit. The security of standards is achieved by consideration at module and programme level. At module level this is achieved through annual module monitoring reports, which require module convenors to explicitly comment on the achievement of academic standards by students taking the module. This applies only for modules which meet set conditions as defined in the Code of Practice. The Directors of Study review the module reports for their programme(s) and produce an annual programme review report against a set template. The programme review reports, external examiner reports and other statistical data are consolidated into a School Annual Report. The review team found evidence in the annual monitoring documentation reviewed of careful consideration of the achievement and maintenance of academic standards and actions planned to address any shortfalls. A standardised format and inclusion of required elements for consideration is achieved by templates provided for module and programme monitoring reports and the documentation reviewed by the team indicates that these templates are

consistently used by the schools and partner organisations for taught programmes. In June 2014, the GSB resolved to introduce an enhanced template for research degree annual monitoring reports to improve consistency across the faculties and this template is now available.

1.33 Similarly, a core objective of the PPR process undertaken at six-year intervals is to ensure maintenance of academic standards. A PPR report template is also used to record the outcomes of the review and this specifically directs panels to comment on academic standards. Panel membership for the PPR reports reviewed by the team demonstrates effective externality and student engagement. PPR reports, together with school responses and action plans, are scrupulously considered by faculty committees and by the LTB or GSB as part of the regular faculty report.

1.34 The team considers that the University has appropriate processes for monitoring and reviewing the academic standards of programmes and that these operate effectively. The team therefore concludes that the expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.35 The University uses independent external expertise at key stages of programme approval and periodic review and through the use of external examiners to set and maintain the academic standards of awards. Reports from external advisers are required as part of the approval process for most new programmes and external experts are additionally invited to attend Faculty Panels in cases where these are required. Periodic Programme Reviews include two external panellists. External examiners are required for all taught programmes and for the assessment of research degree programmes. The requirements for externality, including the criteria for appointment and guidance on the role of external advisers, panellists and external examiners is outlined in the relevant Codes of Practice for taught and research degree programmes.

1.36 The review team explored the effectiveness of the University's processes for engaging external expertise through the review of documentation including relevant policy and procedures, external examiner reports, minutes of internal committee meetings, and through meetings conducted with staff from across campuses and selected partner institutions.

1.37 The University normally engages external advisers in programme approval to ensure appropriate threshold standards are set and require advisers to comment specifically on academic levels and relevance to Subject Benchmark Statements. The review team identified some variation in both the requirements and the practice of involving external advisers based on whether new awards represent major or minor changes from existing awards, or are deemed to be 'cognate' (closely aligned to existing academic provision of schools) or 'non-cognate' (such as the awards delivered through partner dance conservatoires). Direct involvement of external experts on panels usually takes place for all 'non-cognate' awards delivered with partners although the team heard of exceptions to this approach. The contribution of external experts to PPR is outlined in the report of the review meeting and demonstrates that external input is sought on setting and maintaining academic standards.

1.38 The external examiner system operates effectively in monitoring and confirming standards of assessment and qualifications. External examiners oversee assessment decisions and are required to attest in their annual reports whether the standards set are appropriate for the level of qualification. Responses to external examiner reports are provided through the online External Examiner Report Submission System (EERSS) which allows for University-wide analysis of the issues and actions in place across the institution. The University LTB or GSB exercises institutional oversight, receiving external examiner reports where there are any stated concerns related to the achievement of standards. For example, LTB has carefully considered external examiner reports regarding concerns on the inflationary effect of the new classification methodology and categorical marking which

informed detailed analysis work led by the Assessment and Feedback Steering Group (ASFG).

1.39 Professional, statutory and regulatory bodies are appropriately involved through accreditation in approving and affirming standards of the University awards. Employer involvement in securing and maintaining standards was reported to the reviewers as usual practice in vocational programmes in social work and dance, although, there was little evidence of institution-wide strategic approach to the involvement of employers in setting and maintaining standards of awards.

1.40 The review team considers that the University has detailed, well documented policies and processes that allow for independent external expertise in the setting, achievement and maintenance of academic standards. The team therefore concludes that the expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

1.41 In determining its judgement on the setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards at the University of Kent, the review team considered the findings against the criteria as outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All expectations in this area are met and the level of risk is considered low in all cases.

1.42 The University has a comprehensive set of regulatory and procedural documentation that govern the approach to quality assurance including the setting and maintenance of academic standards. Key external reference points are embedded within standard policies, procedures and templates to ensure a consistent and thorough consideration of standards at the point of approval, delivery, assessment and monitoring. Internal frameworks and regulations for the assessment of students are kept under constant review through the work of standing groups with oversight exercised through the senior level committees. The implementation and impact of changes to assessment regulations and approaches have been carefully monitored to date as the University moves towards greater consistency in the adoption and use of the assessment framework across all provision.

1.43 The review team therefore concludes that the setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards at the University of Kent **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, Chapter B1: Programme Design and Approval

Findings

2.1 The processes for programme design and approval are outlined in the internal Codes of Practice for taught and research programmes and described in section A3.1 (see paragraph 1.15). The same process is followed for programmes delivered at university campuses and at partner organisations, although additional policies and procedures specific to collaborative partnerships are outlined in Part 1 of the Collaborative Provision: Policies and Procedures.

2.2 The review team tested the approach by reviewing the internal Code of Practice and relevant annexes, approval documentation, programme specifications, committee minutes and information available online. In addition, the review team met a range of staff and student representatives who had experience of the process in operation.

2.3 Schools review plans for teaching and learning annually and contribute to the Faculty Strategic Plan submitted to the University Executive Group (EG) which includes any planned new programme developments. An outline approval is required for initial approval by the EG after which Schools proceed to detailed development and submission of the full proposal. Normally new programmes are advertised only following full approval, although in exceptional cases, the EG may grant permission for advertising prior to full approval, with appropriate provisos in such advertisements.

2.4 The University has module and programme templates which are used for the submission of all new programmes. The Programme Approval document becomes the Programme Specification, which is published on the faculty website following approval. The review team saw evidence that these templates are consistently and effectively used. Training for staff involved with the approval process has been a focus for improvement following a review of administrative procedures in 2012-13. The University provides guidance on issues for consideration in the design process within the internal Code of Practice. Staff the team met also confirmed that training is provided by the Faculty Director of Learning and Teaching and staff are guided to the clear and helpful materials on the web. Training is also provided through the Learning and Teaching Network, Unit for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching, Quality Assurance Office and Faculties Support Office. Staff reported favourably on this training as well as the Learning and Teaching Innovation module of the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education. The Partnership Forum provides an opportunity for partner staff to be briefed on University procedures.

2.5 Module and programme proposals are considered asynchronously through the online approval PMAS prior to consideration for approval by PASC. This allows for new and amended module and programme specifications and associated documentation to be discussed in an online forum by the members of the relevant faculty Learning and Teaching Committee or Graduate Studies Committee. It also allows for the decisions of the PASC to be disseminated. All three faculties have implemented a rota system to ensure proactive contributions from designated staff and students at all times throughout the academic year.

Staff the team met appreciated this approach as it allows thorough consideration of the proposals to be undertaken at times that suit the reviewing staff and students and also allows experiences to be shared across schools. However, there was evidence that at times of high volume, identifying modules that require priority and tracking the modules being considered was challenging. The review team also identified considerable difference in the timescales for processing approvals through PMAS, varying from one month to nine months. A recommendation from an internal review of administrative procedures in 2012-13 aimed to reduce the timing to three weeks although PMAS system transcripts demonstrate that this is not yet being consistently achieved. The review team was informed that the University plans to move the functionality of PMAS to a different platform in 2016, which it anticipates will be more effective.

2.6 New programmes that are substantially different from existing provision require supporting statements from external academic adviser(s), for which a template is provided indicating the areas to be addressed. 'Substantial' is defined in the Code of Practice for Taught Programmes as where new modules equate to 50 per cent or more of the credit at the degree classification stages, although there is no such definition in the Code of Practice for research degrees. The evidence available to the team demonstrates that statements from external advisers are considered and systematically acted upon by schools although, as indicated in section A3.4 above, there are cases where no external input is required under University procedures. With partnership programmes, the involvement of externals is deemed particularly important when a programme is non-cognate (that is where there is no, or limited, subject expertise in the linked school). In these cases, external expertise is bought in as part of the approval procedure.

2.7 Employer engagement is not routinely sought at the programme approval stage with the exception of vocational courses and those linked to PSRB accreditation where strong links to employers and practitioners are used in the programme development and approval stages. With the exception of programmes linked to PSRBs, engagement with external academics and/or practitioners is undertaken as school level prior to the PMAS stage and externals are not involved in decisions regarding final approval.

2.8 Students are actively involved with the design and approval of new programmes through their representation on boards and committees at school and faculty levels and through access to PMAS. The team also heard evidence of student views being sought at the initial design stage through a variety of means and the student experience of this involvement was positive.

2.9 Overall, the review team considers that the University operates sound processes for the design, development and approval of programmes, which appropriately discharge responsibilities for enhancing the quality of learning opportunities. The team therefore concludes that the expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.10 Student recruitment, selection and admission priorities are built in to the University strategy and annual planning processes. The Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor chairs the Student Recruitment Board (SRB) which is a senior board of faculty academics and relevant professional staff that coordinates, monitors and reviews the recruitment process. Faculty Recruitment and Outreach committees (FROC) meet regularly to oversee faculty processes, provide the opportunity for discussion among schools, and report to SRB as appropriate.

2.11 The Admissions Policy is designed to incorporate principles of fair admissions and is kept under review by the SRB. Information for applicants, including entry requirements, is available in printed publicity, on the University website and through attending open events. A central admissions team handles undergraduate admissions conducted through UCAS, while postgraduate students apply directly to schools. All students can track progress of their application online through UCAS or the internal applicant portal. The policy allows for unsuccessful applicants to appeal rejection on the basis of failure to meet procedure or unlawful discrimination. Recruitment, admissions and selection policies and procedures are annually audited to ensure compliance with internal policy requirements.

2.12 The review team tested the effectiveness of the approach through the consideration of internal policies and procedures, printed marketing materials, information on the University website and internal audit reports. The team also met students from all levels of provision to discuss their experience of admissions and met senior managers and support staff.

2.13 Academic and professional staff the team met demonstrate a sound understanding of recruitment, selection and admissions policies and procedures, which is enabled through training and ongoing support and a formal code of practice for admissions officers. Faculty and school managers expressed confidence in the annual planning process, which provides opportunities to discuss recruitment, particularly in the context of recent strategic increases in postgraduate recruitment. The schools' planning template directly addresses recruitment and admissions trends and the effectiveness of relationships with central services to ensure appropriate mechanisms and strategic approaches exist. Support staff highlighted the dedicated admissions roles within schools and central admissions staff as providing effective oversight of admissions.

2.14 Where a conflict with agreed protocols for offer making arises, a process of escalation through school, faculty and ultimately to the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor is in place which enables robust offer making. Suspending a programme during recruitment is discouraged, but where this had occurred, the UCAS procedure had been followed, including offering similar courses internally or at other institutions. A similar approach was adopted in the case of postgraduate taught students.

2.15 During 2013, a new admissions system was introduced and the University took this opportunity to review its processes, particularly with regard to communicating with applicants. Academic staff highlighted the value of this new system in introducing protocols and promoting efficiency throughout the admissions process. Students the team met

reflected positively on their application experience, with particular reference made to the extent of contact with the University, the simplicity of the process and the timeliness of responses. The online application portal was praised by students for its ease of use, step-by-step support, timely prompting during the application process and general level of communication. Admissions requirements are clearly stated within the programme handbooks, and mirrored in information provided in the prospectus and online. The University website and prospectuses provide all necessary information and were found to meet the needs of prospective students. Information packs given to undergraduate and postgraduate students provide relevant insights to various points of the student lifecycle, ranging from accommodation or financial information, campus-specific guides, to extra-curricular activities. Such printed information is complemented with student-friendly online support to aid admission and transition from prospective to enrolled student status. The team considers that the responsive and timely approach to supporting prospective students in their admission to the University across all levels of provision is a feature of **good practice**.

2.16 The annual audit of admissions processes ensures that appropriate governance arrangements are in place, that the supporting IT infrastructure is fit for purpose and selection activity is undertaken in line with policy and promotes staff awareness of relevant policy and procedure. Forums such as FROC allow for a broad range of issues relating to recruitment, selection and admission to be discussed and escalated as appropriate to the SRB and University Senate and demonstrate effective oversight of internal arrangements.

2.17 The review team considers that there is an effective basis for admissions within the institution, supported by a newly implemented admissions system for the timely and efficient management of student recruitment. The team therefore concludes that 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

2.18 Student and staff responsibilities for the learning experience are outlined in a Student Charter developed in partnership with Kent Union. The Institutional Strategic Plan 2012-15 sets out a fundamental objective to 'enhance our students' capabilities and prepare them for the future'. The strategic approach to the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practice is set out in the Learning and Teaching Enhancement Strategy (LTE) 2012-15. Senate has responsibility for oversight of the strategy and implementation is primarily discharged through the University LTB and the GSB. Progress on the LTE Strategy is reviewed annually through the LTB based on the annual monitoring and planning reports from Schools and the plans from faculty and central support services.

2.19 School strategies are produced to a standard template and include enhancement of learning and teaching for taught and research programmes. Central Services strategies are developed in line with the Institutional Plan and reviewed with faculties and schools on a monthly basis and feed into the annual planning process. The Faculties Support Office and the Unit for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (UEL) provide support for the implementation of university, faculty and school-level strategies. Internal and external data and benchmarking is used to monitor the effectiveness of the strategic approach. Internally, module evaluations and an undergraduate survey are used and further supported through the review of student performance data within the annual monitoring processes. Participation in the National Student Survey, student barometer and Postgraduate Research/Taught Student Experience surveys provide external benchmarking.

2.20 The review team explored the approach through the analysis of documentation including key strategies, minutes of committees, survey responses and information available to students through the website. The team also met students, and academic and support staff from across the provision, including those in partner institutions.

2.21 The review team found that the University systematically reviews learning and teaching practice and the student experience and makes appropriate use of internally and externally derived data and benchmarking. Minutes of the LTB indicate a thorough consideration of the annual progress reports on the LTE strategy implementation and demonstrate successful outcomes in improving the student experience, including positive National Student Survey results and a 2014 Times Higher Education Supplement (THES) award.

2.22 Support for academic staff is principally provided through UELT. This includes an academic practice team that deliver the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education (PGCHE) and Associate Teacher Accreditation Programme (ATAP) through the Centre for the Study of Higher Education (CSHE). Completion of the PGCHE/ATAP is a condition of probation for those without teaching qualifications and 30 per cent of staff have recognition from the Higher Education Academy. All staff participate in the Reflect, Plan, Develop approach to annual appraisal and academic staff on probation are reviewed on their contribution to teaching and research. Staff identified the value of recognition for outstanding contribution to teaching through the Kent Union teaching awards and University teaching

prizes. Those receiving awards disseminate their practice and staff indicated that achievement of awards was an accolade to which they aspire. Staff can also undertake PhDs supporting research informed teaching, with a fast track route for completion by publications which provides a positive practical mechanism for achieving doctorate level qualifications. The CSHE provides an interdisciplinary educational research resource for the University offering a varied programme of research seminars, guest lectures, and opportunities for postgraduate study which reinforces the links between research and scholarly activity. Staff valued the range of support offered across teaching, research and student support and opportunities are systematically reviewed.

2.23 UELT provides effective support for the sharing and development of practice through the cross-institutional Learning and Teaching Network and the online website resources, which provide examples of innovative practice across the sector and facilitates e-learning forums. An e-learning summer school is also provided to enable staff to develop their skills in the use of technologies to support learning. Staff engagement with learning technologies is monitored by Faculty Deans through regular/annual data reports. The Information Services Strategy (ISS) and the E-Learning Strategy support the implementation of new digital technologies and a Changing the Learning Landscape programme is reviewing current practice and strategic priorities for technology enhanced learning with a wide variety of student and staff stakeholders. Lecture capture is available but not widely used partly due to staff concerns regarding intellectual property and student attendance. However, student feedback is very positive about the benefits this technology brings and students would welcome wider use.

2.24 The University's virtual learning environment (VLE) has been set up with templates that allows for flexibility, recognising the different needs across disciplines. Feedback from students indicates considerable inconsistency in the use of the VLE for information, support and teaching methods across programmes and modules. There is currently no minimum expectation set out for staff use of the VLE but the team reviewed evidence that indicates that VLE use is developing and appropriate support is in place. Students the review team met did, however, comment positively on the Student Guide website information which provided easily accessible information on their programmes and was extensively used (see section C, paragraph 3.9).

2.25 The Student Learning Advisory Service (SLAS) team work with schools to provide generic and tailored guidance and information on learning and study skills to all students. Examples of initiatives facilitated by SLAS include the VALUE programme which is a partnership initiative between students and participating academic schools. This programme is directed at Stage 1 students and aims to develop participants' academic knowledge and understanding, key skills and learning strategies through a range of activities. Students who had accessed this programme confirmed that this was beneficial in supporting their progression and achievement. A further example is the VALUE Grad programme for postgraduate students which aims to develop academic skills. Significant numbers of students have engaged with this programme and those met by the review team reported that this was helpful, particularly in developing language skills and in preparation for study abroad.

2.26 University figures indicate that there has been a significant increase in the usage of SLAS in recent years. However, students the review team met had not used this service and although covered at induction, were not conversant with the range of support it provides. Furthermore, awareness of the range of academic support initiatives provided by other central services was also limited. It was evident from meetings with staff that access to some of these activities is largely determined by schools and there is considerable variability in whether, and how, students from different schools and across different campuses can access these resources.

2.27 Students report general satisfaction with the teaching provided by academic staff. The review team saw evidence of effective links between staff research and student learning and students reported that they derive benefits where research centres are located within schools. Students spoke positively about the contribution of Graduate Teaching Assistants to programmes and their ability to provide informed advice and support. Some programmes require students to share learning and teaching activities with students at different levels, such as joint lectures for levels 5 and 6 or for students studying at level 6 and 7. Separate assessments are set to reflect the level of study. Some dissatisfaction has been expressed by students and the review team heard of a case where students progressing between levels felt there was insufficient differentiation. However, in the main, staff and students identified benefits of sharing modules with students studying at other levels recognising the variety of experience that can be drawn upon.

2.28 The emerging institutional strategy for the next five years includes a focus on the development of the campus environment. Challenges in terms of learning spaces have been identified by the University, particularly library and study spaces. IT and the library are assessed through surveys and reflected upon by Information Technology and Library User Panels. To address concerns, the University is moving towards greater dependence on e-resources which are favoured by students, and are undertaking a significant extension of the library building on the main campus. Student feedback indicates concerns regarding study space on campus, particularly with regards to dedicated space for postgraduate taught and research students in light of the recent increase in postgraduate student numbers. Students the team met reported differences in the quality and provision of resources based on their level of study, academic discipline and location of study. The University has a programme of campus developments currently underway to address these concerns and the review team **affirms** the planning and implementation of developments to the estate across campuses to enhance the learning environment and improve equity of access in light of the growth in student numbers.

2.29 Overall, the review team considers that the basis for effective learning and teaching is expressed clearly to staff and students through a range of policies, strategies and procedural information. The learning environment and resources are generally sound although there are some actual and perceived differences across campuses which current planned developments seek to address. The review team therefore concludes that 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 Institutional Strategic Plan 2012-15 sets out a fundamental objective to 'enhance our students' capabilities and prepare them for the future' and the Student Charter reiterates this intent. A Student Experience Support framework sets out the full range of student support extending across the student journey from pre-induction to alumni. Specific components to this approach are outlined in a range of strategy documents including strategies for Learning, Teaching and Enhancement, Widening Participation, Employability, the Graduate School, Internationalisation, Information Services, E-Learning and Student Services. Oversight is managed through the Executive Group and specifically the Pro Vice-Chancellor Learning and Teaching and Students who oversees all academic and non-academic support for students. Ultimately Senate and its supporting committees have responsibility for oversight of each of the strategies that deliver the framework. Kent Union are represented on key boards and committees to help shape the direction and implementation of these strategies.

2.31 The review team explored the approach through the analysis of the relevant strategies, policies and procedures, projects and information available online. The team also met a range of students from all academic levels and a range of delivery locations, and discussed the approach with academic and support staff.

2.32 Students receive a range of information pre-arrival and those the team met were positive about the support and information that they received prior to and on arrival at the University. In 2012 the schools developed a transition module through the VLE available on the website that aimed to help students acclimatise to higher education. Interaction with the site has been increasing year on year since its introduction. Induction arrangements are determined and managed at a school level with central services invited to contribute and students receive a school-based induction plan. For postgraduate students, the Graduate School organises campus-based inductions with school input. A welcome week best practice guide is available to staff as a checklist on desired activity and information to cover. Kent Union arrange events independently of the schools. The team identified a mixed approach to induction across the institution with varying levels of student satisfaction, particularly across campuses and levels of study. Students the team met reported that there was little differentiation between postgraduate and undergraduate induction activities and therefore the induction was less valuable for those who progressed internally from level 6 to 7. Induction activities for students at its European centres were considered comprehensive by students at those locations. Overall, students reported that they were sufficiently supported in their transition to study.

2.33 The Student Support section provides information and help to students with a disability. The website provides advice to staff and students such as establishing an Inclusive Learning Plan (ILP), reasonable adjustments to assessments and monitoring student progress. Students who had used the service reported to the team that their needs were fully met and that they received excellent support that had enabled their progression and achievement. Students are provided with access to faculty handbooks and pre-arrival packs so that students with particular needs can plan their orientation and induction accordingly. A programme of induction events for students with specific needs has been introduced but only taken up by 11 of the 20 schools.

2.34 The Personal Academic Support System (PASS) provides academic and personal advice, guidance and support for students throughout their period of study, both within schools and through central University services. This system is outlined in the Code of Practice and establishes three key roles for the purpose of supporting students in their pastoral and academic development: a Senior Tutor; an Academic Adviser; and a Student Support Manager/Officer. A review of the implementation of Academic Advisers was undertaken in 2011 and 2013 and additional support provided to advisers through a handbook, website links and opportunities to share practice through the Learning and Teaching Network and the PASS network. The website information for staff and students is clear and comprehensive (see section C, paragraph 3.10). The review team found that students are well informed about the system, are actively engaged and are able to access appropriate and helpful support in a timely manner.

2.35 The holistic strategic approach adopted allows both for the overarching coordination of activity in supporting student development and achievement and for its implementation in an integrated way in the respective areas of activity. For example, the Employability Strategy and Graduate School Strategy support the LTE strategy in developing skills for employability and career development, with a particular focus on the acquisition of discipline-specific and transferable skills through the curriculum. Student employability is also a key priority in the Kent Union plan. Three faculty-based employability advisers and a Kent Experience of Work (KEW) framework have been developed to support this approach and Destination of Leavers Higher Education (DLHE) data is used to identify where additional and tailored support may be required. There is evidence from student feedback that more course-focused support for employability is required although students met by the review team were positive and specific careers advice is provided for international students and for those studying at European Centres.

2.36 The University encourages students to use an e-portfolio and Personal Development Planner (PDP) tool to support their development. Students are encouraged to use this independently with reference to Careers and Employability Services website resources and this can also be supported through academic advisers or incorporated into module learning. Students the review team met reported minimal use of this tool and an internal report to the LTB also confirms that take up is low. However, students that used the tool primarily used it to record their employability points which was regarded as a valuable activity.

2.37 The Placement Development and Employability Team (PDET) is based on the Medway campus co-located with SLAS, which facilitates a close working arrangement between the two teams in supporting student placements. A new central database for placements has recently been implemented advertising opportunities to students and updates are provided to the schools on a weekly basis. Schools are supported in the development and delivery of modules relating to work experience, ensuring that students maximise the experiential learning opportunities. The review team heard of a range of peer mentoring schemes in place for placements that made a positive contribution to student support. A broad range of placement opportunities is provided to students both in the UK and overseas and numbers of students accessing these opportunities is increasing although there is some variability between schools in the effectiveness of communication to students about opportunities available and ease of access. PDET assists schools in developing induction programmes for students commencing work experience or entering a year in industry. Online advice and support is also available and the International Development Office run briefing sessions. Students receive supervision while on placement and return to complete a mid-year presentation to share their experience. The Kent Student Certificate for Volunteering offers students the opportunity to gain credits for undertaking volunteering placements, supported by lectures and reflective activities. Students value these opportunities in developing their employability skills.

2.38 The Internationalisation Strategy seeks to equip its students and staff to thrive as 'global citizens' through processes allied to learning and skills development. The students and staff the team met spoke positively about the international environment supported by a valuable international mix of students and staff on all campuses, interaction across campuses and the range of opportunities for study and partnership working overseas. Ongoing development work is being undertaken through UELT and the Graduate School, to assess the nature and scope of an internationalised curriculum and to embed its dissemination. A new Faculty Director of Internationalisation post has been introduced to lead on this activity within learning teaching and research. Postgraduate taught students can complete a Global Skills Award Programme through attending a required number of lectures and workshops that support their personal development. Students described its value both in terms of their development but also for networking opportunities which are particularly advantageous for international students.

2.39 Part of the strategy is to provide opportunities for students to spend time in another country as part of their studies and the review saw evidence that a significant number of students undertook study or work abroad. European summer school scholarships and other awards are available to support student attendance on programmes held in Brussels and Paris and for overseas campus students to visit Kent. Similarly, staff are supported and encouraged to undertake teaching exchanges from which benefits for student exchange and staff joint research, projects and other opportunities are derived. International students in the UK and students travelling overseas are supported in their language development through Language Exchange community led by the Centre for English and World Languages. The review team was provided with evidence of a broad range of international opportunities for both staff and students that made a significant contribution to the University's Internationalisation Strategy. Students the team met that had studied overseas described the impact on their learning and internal analysis by the University indicated that such students perform better in the final year. The review team considers that the strategic approach to creating an internationalised environment enables students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential and is **good practice**.

2.40 The review team considers that the University has appropriate mechanisms for enabling student development and achievement, and that these are routinely monitored and evaluated. The team therefore concludes that the expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student Engagement

Findings

2.41 The University defines student engagement as encompassing individual and collective feedback through student representation on committees and involvement in the quality assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. A commitment to student engagement is presented within the University's strategy and underpinned in the Codes of Practice for both taught and research programmes. The mutual expectations on staff and students are presented in a Student Charter which outlines the value of student representation, encourages student feedback and explains the role of Kent Union in local and national representation. Students are represented on committees at school, faculty and university levels and Kent Union provides training and ongoing support to encourage informed discussions. Student representation is recognised through certification and formal awards. Students are also encouraged to take active roles as partners in institutional projects. Student feedback is sought through internal surveys administered at module and institutional level and through external surveys including the Postgraduate Taught/Research Experience Survey and the National Student Survey, the outcomes of which are used to inform and monitor performance against institutional level key performance indicators and the Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Strategy.

2.42 The review team considered evidence of student engagement including University regulations, annual programme monitoring reports, minutes of Senate committees, internally-conducted audits and issues addressed within the Student Submission. The extent of student engagement was explored in meetings with a range of students and with staff operating at central, faculty and programme levels.

2.43 There is a strong connection between Kent Union and University senior management, with a monthly meeting between student officers and senior management allowing for issues to be discussed. Staff confirmed that recommendations made in the Student Submission reflected ongoing issues which the senior team are working to address. The team saw evidence of an ongoing dialogue with students, who collectively were familiar with the programme representation system and its operation. Generally, programme representatives are elected, although on some programmes, arrangements for the selection of representatives are less formal particularly at research degree level. Students are aware that representative training is provided by Kent Union and this was further supported through specific induction sessions provided at a school level by staff or from the central Graduate School. Education Forums run by Kent Union for student representatives are helpful for some students, allowing experiences to be shared and ideas disseminated although others reported limited benefit as the issues discussed were not relevant to all programmes.

2.44 At programme level, students the team met reported that their views are encouraged and discussed. The Staff-Student Liaison committees that operate in all schools were particularly noted in this regard although there is considerable variability in the frequency and length of these meetings between schools with some students expressing concerns that the time allocation is insufficient. Academic staff met were positive about the contributions of student representatives to committees, providing agenda items and in some cases co-chairing meetings. Student representatives are further encouraged to contribute to school and faculty-level committees although some students commented that more places for student representatives on faculty committees would be welcomed. Actions taken on issues raised within committees are normally reported to subsequent meetings. At the

institutional level, the University has introduced several initiatives to better publicise the value of student feedback and highlight improvements made. Although meetings with students during the review indicated some awareness of this, students were not always clear how their feedback is taken forward and postgraduate students did not expect to always benefit from changes, given their short tenure .

2.45 Students the team met confirmed that opportunities are provided to share views through completion of institutional surveys module evaluations, and surveys designed by central services to monitor student satisfaction or identify enhancement. The changes made to modules as a result of module evaluation are reported to students the following year. The team met students who had participated in programme and module development activity and committees, and both staff and students commented positively on their involvement as partners in that process.

2.46 Annual monitoring reports at programme and school level consider feedback from student-staff liaison committees. Module leaders are only required to provide monitoring reports if a module meets certain criteria such as first time delivery, concerns raised through external examiner and student feedback, or poor progression and completion rates. Where required, module reports are submitted in addition to module evaluation outcomes, to the relevant Board of Studies, School Learning and Teaching Committee or School Graduate Studies Committee. Module evaluation outcomes are considered at Boards of Studies where students are members. However, this approach specifically addresses modules with potential risks to the quality of students' learning opportunities and the team did not identify evidence that module evaluation data is monitored regularly at module and programme level in full and therefore the ability of students to support enhancement of provision through this mechanism is limited.

2.47 A pilot audit of student engagement, undertaken by the University in 2013, found examples of good practice in creating a culture of engagement, and the work of staff who support students in engaging with feedback processes. Similar approaches to student engagement were shown by staff and students to take place on the University's European sites , which uses the nature of smaller-scale teaching to create an informal environment for student engagement.

2.48 The review team considers that the University creates an appropriate environment for encouraging student engagement and supports students through its governance structures, and student representation system. The team therefore concludes that the expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.49 The University Credit Framework and the Codes of Practice for Taught and Research Programmes of Study establish the assessment regulations and policies for taught and research programmes of study, awards, credits and progression. These documents also outline the procedures for the Accreditation of Prior Experiential and Certificated Learning (APECL). Management and oversight of the assessment framework rests with the University LTB and is supported by various standing and ad hoc working groups. The assessment approach is supported by an Assessment Framework guidance document to encourage good assessment practice and greater consistency across schools and faculties. The Unit for Enhancement in Learning and Teaching (UEL) offers support and training to those involved in assessment processes, including module assessors, Graduate Teaching Assistants, members of Boards of Examiners and external examiners.

2.50 The review team explored the effectiveness of the University's processes for assessment and recognition of prior learning through the review of documentation including the relevant frameworks and codes of practice, minutes of internal meetings and external examiner reports. The review team also conducted meetings with staff and students based across different campuses and from selected partner institutions.

2.51 The University assures itself that academic staff are prepared to undertake the assessment of student work through the Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education which is compulsory for academic staff and through an equivalent programme for staff who are part-time or appointed on a sessional basis. UELT plays a central role in identifying, developing and disseminating good practice across the University. The review team was provided with examples across the institution of the effective role of UELT in preparing staff for assessment, through projects and development activity related to e-learning, assessment and feedback, academic practice, student support and quality assurance.

2.52 The Assessment Framework document published by UELT sets out guidance to schools on good assessment practice. This document was drafted in response to issues raised in the 2004 Institutional Audit to clarify the relationship between internal regulatory documents and to ensure equality of student experience and assessment across the University as a whole. It has since been revised in response to changes in the QAA Code of Practice. The Assessment Framework is designed to enhance academic staff engagement with key principles of learning including mapping assessments to learning outcomes, transparency and consistency in setting and marking assessments and management of assessment such as timing and workload for staff and students. As a guidance document, schools are expected to apply the Assessment Framework 'as best suits their individual contexts'. The review team saw evidence that internal concerns about the variability of assessment practice across the University are extant, notably in the minutes of the recently constituted Assessment and Feedback Steering Group (AFSG) which identified highly variable practices and gaps in monitoring. In response a draft new Assessment and Feedback document has been developed by the AFSG and at the LTB meeting in March 2015 it was agreed that this will have the status of a policy document rather than guidance. During the review, the team was assured that this new Assessment

Framework policy will provide a consistent set of expectations which must be adhered to by all schools. The review team therefore **affirms** the planned implementation of the revised Assessment Framework policy to ensure greater consistency in assessment practice.

2.53 The Academic Advisor System and the Student Learning Advisory Service (SLAS) provide a range of academic support for students, including support for assessment. Students the review team met generally reported that they were well prepared to undertake assessments and were clear on the assessment tasks. Students are also generally satisfied with the timeliness of assessment feedback although there is variation in the quality of feedback between modules. Regulations for the return of assessed work are outlined in the Credit Framework, although there is variation in the institutional approach to monitoring the timeliness of feedback with warning systems in operation in some schools, which are used in different ways. In response to student concerns about exam feedback, an Exam Feedback Steering Group was convened by the LTB. The interim report presented in 2013 addressed several areas of concern with exam feedback including consistency of student experience. Piloting of feedback to students on examinations is currently taking place and will be evaluated through a report to the LTB later in the year.

2.54 The University has been involved in a number of enhancement projects relating to assessment, notably the Transforming the Experience of Students through Assessment (TESTA) and Evidence-based Quality Improvement Programme (EQUIP) both of which have been progressed with student involvement. TESTA is an assessment mapping process developed as an National Teaching Fellowship project by the University of Winchester and adopted by the University within some schools. The University acknowledges that there are indications from TESTA that assessment volume and timing may not be managed well in some programmes and these issues have been remitted to other groups and projects to address. The EQUIP project is supported by the Higher Education Academy and is producing faculty resources and templates on the informed design of assessment, including appropriate use of level descriptors, learning outcomes, and assessment criteria. The University anticipates that in future these resources will be discussed more widely at the AFSG, which is working towards enhancing consistency in assessment practice. It is anticipated that the resources will be applied in the coming academic year, with the final project report due in the spring term 2015.

2.55 The University defines and operates consistent processes for internal and external moderation which is confirmed in the reports of external examiners. Academic discipline and good academic practice is taught to students within schools and by the SLAS. The Academic Integrity website provides information for staff and students about unacceptable academic practice and also contains the University guidelines for using plagiarism-detection software. Meetings with students during the review demonstrated that there was a good understanding of acceptable academic practices across levels and locations.

2.56 Boards of Examiners and Assessment Panels have defined powers and accountability which are embedded in the internal Codes of Practice The Credit Framework allows for the award of credit via mechanisms for compensation (narrow failure in a prescribed volume of credit) and condonement (mitigating circumstances). Decisions on condonement, compensation and credit exemption are made through the Boards of Examiners attended by external examiners, some of which have raised concerns about these arrangements and the review team saw examples where the cumulative effect of the regulations resulted in a significant amount of discounted credit. Although the decisions taken by the Boards were in accordance with the regulations, the review team was not assured that there is an effective mechanism in place for the institution to have oversight of such individual cases across the institution and to consider the impact of regulations in practice. The review team therefore **recommends** that the University implement an effective

mechanism for the institutional oversight of decisions taken by Boards of Examiners in the implementation of the assessment regulations to ensure consistency and fairness.

2.57 As outlined in section A3.2 (paragraph 1.25), the University has implemented changes to the assessment approach with the standardisation of a 'categorical approach' to marking and a 'preponderance' method for determining final degree classification. The Working Group on Regulations and Conventions and Working Group on Classifications Methodology have been instrumental in the design of the new approach and in monitoring implementation. The impact of these changes and feedback from external examiners has been reported and considered by the LTB and the University has undertaken detailed analyses on degree classifications compared with previous years and in comparison with degree classifications across the higher education sector and has plans to continue to monitor the implementation of this new approach carefully (see affirmation in paragraph 1.25).

2.58 The University operates a clear process for the accreditation of prior learning encompassing the consideration of claims for certificated and experiential learning, known as APECL, as mentioned in paragraph 2.49. The review team was assured that while the level of APECL activity is low, effective quality mechanisms exist through interaction of admissions and the academic schools.

2.59 Overall, the review team considers that the University operates processes which enable students to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the learning outcomes. These processes currently allow considerable scope for variability in practice and plans to encourage greater consistency are affirmed by the team although the need for greater oversight of implementation in some areas means that there is a moderate risk to processes being equitably applied. The team therefore concludes that the expectation is met and the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining

Findings

2.60 The University processes and procedures for use of external examiners are set out in the internal Code of Practice for taught programmes. These were reviewed in 2012 to coincide with the publication of the new UK Quality Code for Higher Education (Quality Code) and revised to respond to a recommendation from the previous QAA Collaborative Provision Audit regarding potential conflicts of interest. Guidance on the process for nomination and appointment of external examiners is outlined in its Code and all nominations are considered by the Faculty Dean and approved by the Pro Vice-Chancellor Learning and Teaching and Students. External examiner reports are considered at Learning and Teaching Committees or Graduate Studies Committees at school level with summaries of issues arising from reports being submitted to the faculty and institutional level boards. Processes and procedures for the use of external examiners for research degrees are outlined in the Code of Practice for Research Programmes and are discussed in section B11.

2.61 The review team considered the effectiveness of the University approach through analysis of policies, procedures, committee meetings, external examiner reports and through meetings with staff and student representatives from across campuses and partner institutions.

2.62 The roles and responsibilities of external examiners are clearly set out in the Code of Practice and there is comprehensive induction and support for external examiners. This support includes an External Examiners' Handbook; annual training sessions held at both Kent and Medway campuses; specific and detailed web pages for external examiners and an annually updated guidance document which includes information on assessment regulations.

2.63 The processes for involving external examiners in the moderation of student work, Boards of Examiners and for the submission, consideration and response to the reports of external examiners are clear and applied consistently. Award classification outcomes are reached in consultation with, and are subject to the agreement of, the relevant external examiners, who confirm the accuracy of these outcomes at the Board of Examiners meeting and subsequently in their annual reports.

2.64 The comments of external examiners on student performance in modules are taken into account as part of the annual monitoring process and considered at school Learning and Teaching Committees or Graduate Studies Committees and submitted in full to the Staff-Student Liaison committees. Institutional oversight of external examiner reports, and assurance of responses to external examiners, occurs through the University LTB or GSB through summary reports from faculties. A recent example of key issues raised in external examiner reports include external examiner feedback on the impact of categorical marking and the new methodology for degree classification.

2.65 Responses to external examiners on their reports are provided through the online EERSS. This enhances oversight of the issues and responses to external examiners and allows for an online formal response to the external examiner to take place alongside direct communications from programme teams.

2.66 The University makes external examiners' annual reports available to all students via a dedicated webpage on the intranet and Schools and partners are required to advise students of the location and include the weblink in student handbooks. Students at validated institutions do not have access to this website and such partner institutions therefore employ alternative approaches to provide students access to external examiner reports. Campus-based students the review team met demonstrated a low level of awareness regarding access to external examiner reports or the external examiner role which contrasted with the high level of awareness expressed by students from a validated partner institution. The review team noted the continuing actions being taken by the University to promote student awareness of external examiners reports

2.67 The review team considers that the processes for the appointment, support and use of external examiners are effective and that the University takes a thorough and considered approach to receiving and responding to reports. The team therefore concludes that the expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review

Findings

2.68 The processes for annual monitoring and periodic review are described in section A3.2 (see paragraphs 1.29 and 1.30) and are outlined in the internal Codes of Practice. These processes apply to all programmes regardless of the location of delivery, although specific policies and procedures for the monitoring of collaborative partnerships are outlined in Part 2 of the Collaborative Provision: Policies and Procedures document.

2.69 The review team explored the effectiveness of approach by analysing the internal Codes of Practice, annual module and programme monitoring reports submitted by schools and partner organisations, reports of periodic review and evidence of consideration through various committees. The understanding gathered through documentation was further verified by the team through meetings with staff and students during the review.

2.70 Annual Monitoring Review reports for programmes are compiled annually for each programme and draw on evidence from annual module review reports (where applicable), end of module evaluations, internal and external student surveys, student-staff liaison committees and external examiner reports. Reports on individual modules are only required in certain circumstances as outlined in the Code of Practice, such as modules that are new, have received adverse student or external examiner comments or where student performance and attainment falls below specified levels. The School Director of Teaching and Learning/Director of Graduate Studies identifies modules which require review, and consideration of these module reports are incorporated in the school annual programme review, together with the identification of outstanding module annual reviews and follow-up action. The programme reports are reviewed through the School Learning and Teaching Committee or Graduate Studies Committee as appropriate to the level of study. This review also involves consideration of annual reports received on programmes delivered in partnership with others, such as validated institutions and partner colleges. Following consideration at school committees, the school produces a summary report covering all programmes, delivered at Kent or through partners for consideration by Faculty Learning and Teaching Committee or Graduate Studies Committee. Outcomes of the annual monitoring process are reported from faculty to the University LTB or GSB. The review team saw evidence that the reports were considered and approved by the relevant committees and boards and resulting recommendations referred back to schools or to groups for action where necessary.

2.71 Templates are provided for module, programme and school annual reports, together with guidance on expected report length, which facilitates consistency of reports and comparison of issues. The Code of Practice explicitly states that the annual reports are principally aimed at quality assurance rather than enhancement, although the template requires a statement of how the schools disseminate good practice. The identification of good practice, as well as issues of concern and planned curative action was evident in the reports reviewed by the team.

2.72 Substantive changes to existing programmes following annual review go through the same process as for original approval with the University providing clear guidance on the level of change which would require such review. The Code of Practice for module approval outlines a risk-based approach to modifications whereby minor changes to modules may be

approved at school level, provided that a revised module specification is supplied to the Faculties Office, and that substantial changes to the module (such as changes to module learning outcomes or methods of assessment and delivery) are referred to the relevant faculty committee for approval. The team was informed that any change to core module learning outcomes would trigger a review of the programme and that the effect of the module change on the programme learning outcomes would be assessed. However, the team was unable to find evidence of a robust mechanism for reviewing the mapping of module learning outcomes to programme learning outcomes when such a change occurs, or monitoring the effect of an accumulation of relatively minor changes to individual modules on the mapping of outcomes or the integrity of the programme structure and content. The mapping documents are used at Boards of Examiners to determine whether programme learning outcomes are met in cases of compensation and condonement which further adds to the importance of ensuring this is kept up to date in the light of cumulative changes. The review team therefore **recommends** that the University develop and implement a mechanism to enable oversight of the cumulative effect of incremental modular changes to programmes.

2.73 PPRs are undertaken every six years, although the cycle may be adjusted if necessary to meet PSRB requirements. These reviews are normally two-day engagements and cover all taught and research programmes within a school or centre, including programmes offered through partnership arrangements (except validated institutions). Review panels are convened by the relevant Faculty Dean and comprise two external experts in addition to the two internal members of academic staff and a student representative. PPRs for validated institutions follow a similar procedure but are undertaken separately from the review of their host school at the University. These partners tend to be private providers of specialist provision, either of a vocational or professional nature, and the partnerships are frequently longstanding in nature. PPR reports reviewed by the team demonstrate that PPR panels have confidence in the University's provision and recommendations for action by school, faculty and University level are clearly outlined in a standardised format. School and partner organisations provide detailed response to the recommendations and the faculty committees/University boards demonstrate appropriate oversight of the process.

2.74 The University has a process in place for the termination of programmes, the need for which is usually identified through the annual planning process. Evidence available to the review team demonstrates that this process is handled sensitively and allows registered students to complete their programme of study without interruption.

2.75 Overall, the review team considers that the University operates effective, regular and systematic processes for the monitoring and review of programmes although a more robust approach to the tracking of incremental changes is required. The team therefore concludes that the expectation is met and the associated 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

2.76 The University's procedures for handling academic appeals are articulated in the Credit Framework for taught programmes and in the Standing Orders for research degrees. Appeals are not permitted against academic judgements, and this is made clear in the published procedures. Students are encouraged to seek informal resolution before invoking formal procedures. Appeals against Boards of Examiners' decisions are initially considered at faculty level whereby the Dean determines whether an appeal has merit and conducts a review of the case. If the Dean considers that the appeal warrants further investigation, a Faculty Review Panel is established. The Dean or Faculty Review Panel may refer appeals to a Board of Examiners for action. Further consideration of the appeal may be undertaken at University level through the Senate Academic Review Committee (SARC), after which students are advised that they have the right to submit a grievance to the University's Council. On completion of the grievance procedure, students are advised of the process for appealing to the Office of Independent Adjudicator (OIA). All students are subject to the same appeals process regardless of the location of study.

2.77 Complaint resolution is outlined in the Complaints Procedure for Students. Complaints are submitted to a central office for review and are then sent to the relevant School to address. Complaints can be escalated for review by the Dean of Faculty and, ultimately, to the University's Council. Complaints may be raised by groups, or anonymously, although the University recognises that it may not be possible to fully investigate anonymous complaints. Procedures for handling student complaints are also available on the University website. For students studying at partnerships, complaints are initially addressed through local procedures with referral to the University if the complainant is unsatisfied with the outcomes.

2.78 The review team explored the approach by considering the relevant policies, codes of practice, student guidance, the submission forms used for appeals/complaints and the monitoring reports of appeal outcomes. The team met staff during the review and views of the student body were explored through consideration of the Student Submission and meetings with students.

2.79 The procedures under which an appeal may be made are clearly and regularly indicated to the student body during their period for study: in their handbook, in preparation for Boards of Examiners' consideration via a Dean's Bulletin, and in the event that the Board has determined student failure. The Kent Union's Student Advice Centre also provide information to students. Although this information is provided at relevant times the team noted that the terms 'appeal' and 'complaint' did not appear with other 'quick-links' on the University and Kent Union websites which was at variance with the ease of access provided for other types of information for students. Nevertheless, the relevant web pages are obtainable through the website search engine. Students met during the review did not demonstrate awareness of the appeal or complaints procedures, but understood how to find the necessary information should the need arise.

2.80 The complaints process is currently a three-stage process although, following an attempt at informal resolution, the University wishes to move to a two-stage process. Although the University complaints procedure allows for anonymous complaints, at the time

of the review, no such complaints had been submitted. A new complaints procedure has been drafted to address the process for anonymous complaints which is due for approval in June 2015. In response to an OIA recommendation, the University undertook a review of its appeals and complaints procedures in 2012-13 to simplify the approach and allow for more central coordination. Revised procedures were introduced to the complaints procedures in 2013-14 and are being subject to further minor changes in liaison with student representatives. The University continues to review the wording of the material published to make it more user friendly.

2.81 The Student Submission expressed concerns over the timeliness of the University's response to appeals and complaints and the communication of outcomes. The University aims to communicate the outcome of appeals to students within 21 days and formal complaints within three months. The appeals report that was considered by the LTB in June 2013 showed that this target was met in 71 per cent of cases considered; this report highlighted that the delays are usually as a result of more complex cases which need further referral, but also made viable suggestions for improving the efficiency of existing procedures.

2.82 The University scrupulously monitors the effectiveness of its procedures by means of annual reports from the faculties to the LTB and from the SARC to Senate. These reports provide comprehensive statistical information on the number of cases, outcomes and breakdown of appellants by various criteria. The University Council also receives a summary report of cases that have been reviewed by OIA. Under the new procedure, the University also publishes summary information on appeals and complaints, including indicative outcomes, on its website. The annual report on cases referred to OIA demonstrates that the University appeals and complaints procedure is effective in that the cases both referred to, and deemed justified by, OIA are less than the median for the OIA band in which the University is placed.

2.83 The team considers that the University operates appropriate, fair and timely procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints about the quality of learning opportunities. The team therefore 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

2.84 The University enters into partnerships that enables it to meet its strategic objectives and to fulfil its vision, particularly in the areas of widening participation and internationalisation. The University has two categories of partnerships: partner providers, and non-award bearing partners, within which there are a variety of partner types. Types of partnership arrangements considered under the category of 'partner providers' include dual awards, joint awards, validated institutions, partner colleges, academic centres and articulation arrangements. Types of partnership considered under the category of non-award bearing partners include Erasmus and non-Erasmus exchanges, placements and arrangements for study abroad and progression. The typologies for all partner activities are published on the Quality Assurance Office website and details of the University's partner providers are also published through the Collaborative Provision Register.

2.85 The internal Codes of Practice for taught and research programmes, and national and international credit frameworks, are applied to all partnership provision. These documents outline the processes for programme approval, annual monitoring, periodic review and assessment. The Code of Practice is supplemented for partner providers by the Collaborative Provision: Policies and Procedures (CPPP), which is a two-part document setting out the arrangements for the pre-approval and management of such partnerships. Arrangements for non-award bearing partners are generally covered by the code of practices with specific information, such as that for student placements, being provided through annexes. The University has ultimate responsibility for the academic standards and quality of learning opportunities for all partner arrangements which is exercised through the same governance arrangements at school, faculty and university level as are used for campus-based provision. A notable addition to the standard quality processes is the appointment of a School Liaison Officer (SLO) for partner provider arrangements (such as those with local further education colleges) to provide regular academic support and oversight.

2.86 The review team explored the University's processes for partnership arrangements through the consideration of relevant quality assurance policies and procedures, minutes of meetings, external examiner reports, programme and module documentation. In addition, the review team met staff and students from across different partnership arrangements, including dual awards, validated institutions and partner colleges and with experiences of exchanges, industry placements and study abroad arrangements.

2.87 The University has maintained its regulatory approach to the quality management of partnerships since the previous review in 2010 and carried out a thorough evaluation of its partnerships approach through an internal thematic audit in 2012-13 to measure whether its arrangements for the management of higher education with others were consistent with *Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others* of the Quality Code. A summary of actions, outcomes and recommendations from this review was considered by the University Academic Audit Committee in May 2014.

2.88 The University policies, regulations and guidance that apply to the approval, management, monitoring and review of partner provision are comprehensively detailed in the University's Code of Practice, Credit Framework and CPPP document. Due diligence

of new and ongoing partner provision is undertaken by the University, with approval of new partner provision taken by the University Executive Group. There are clear guidelines on the establishment of partnership links and the review team saw evidence of strategic oversight of the due diligence process. A number of templates outlining key responsibilities underpin the agreement process. Evidence reviewed by the team confirms that memoranda of agreements with partner providers are effectively maintained and are approved in line with the authorised signatories of agreements policy. The University has effectively codified its principles, regulations and procedures for approving, monitoring and reviewing academic standards.

2.89 All partnerships are subject to the internal Codes of Practice covering programme and module approval as described in section A3.1 of this report (see also paragraph 2.1). Faculty approval panels are normally required for specific types of partner provider arrangements to inform the Programmes Approval Subcommittee and additional approval requirements may also be required in some circumstances. The review team saw evidence of the internal Code of Practice and Credit Framework for partner provision operating as intended with oversight exercised through the LTB.

2.90 The University applies the same annual monitoring to all its provision wherever delivered with the exception of joint awards which follow the requirements of the primary administering unit. All partner providers are required to submit annual programme monitoring reports through the standard channels used for campus provision. Non-award bearing partnerships, such as study abroad and industry placements, are monitored as part of the programmes within which these arrangements sit. Where an SLO is appointed to a partnership (as is the case for partner colleges with local further education colleges) or an external Programme Adviser (as for some validated institutions), the annual programme monitoring report submitted by the partner will be accompanied by reports from the SLO or Programme Adviser. A further difference in annual reporting is that a recent review of the internal Code of Practice requires annual monitoring reports to incorporate an assessment of risk, although the annual reports available to the review team pre-dated this change. The review team scrutinised evidence of dual awards, joint awards, validated institutions and partner colleges and looked at the quality assurance monitoring by the University and generally found this to be effective.

2.91 External examiner arrangements for partners also mirror those for campus-based provision. The review team scrutinised external examiners' reports for dual provision and was assured that external examiners exercise appropriate oversight of awards. The team found evidence of external examiner coverage of partnership programmes with evidence of detailed moderation and scrutiny in the external examining process. The review team was presented with a range of evidence for partner award certificates and transcripts and found these to be fit for purpose and appropriately defined.

2.92 The strategic approach to placements is outlined in the LTE strategy and operational details for setting up and maintaining placements are included in the internal code of practice. The Placement Development and Employability Team and faculty-based employability advisers provide effective arrangements for preparing and supporting students. The approval of placement partners and monitoring of the experience is undertaken at school level with the assistance of a good practice guide and using standard templates and checklists for establishing agreements with placement providers. The review team found evidence in meetings with staff and students that student placements are monitored and appropriately managed, with evidence of student satisfaction.

2.93 All partnerships are subject to periodic review through the standard PPR process described in section A3.3 of this report. Most types of partnership provision are considered through the host school PPR alongside campus programmes with the exception of validated

institutions and academic centres which are subject to separate PPRs. Examples of PPR reports for validated institutions provide evidence of the effectiveness of arrangements in ensuring the maintenance of academic standards and the ongoing quality assurance of these arrangements. However, the review team analysed an example of a PPR for a validated institution which produced several essential recommendations relating to the operation of ongoing quality assurance processes and the need to improve the effectiveness of these arrangements. Further, the University identified a potential concern with the level of detail afforded to partner college provision through a school PPR. These issues have been considered through the internal audit, which reported in June 2014 and action is currently being taken to improve the effectiveness of these processes demonstrating a commitment to the improvement of its processes of periodic review.

2.94 Oversight of partnerships is principally undertaken through schools using the same monitoring processes for campus-based provision, with the exception of a School Liaison Officer appointed in some cases, and the review team explored the level of oversight. The responsibility for making admissions decisions is devolved to partners based on criteria set by the University. The review team heard that partners are subject to the same admissions protocols as schools and, while no routine checks are undertaken on compliance, any issues pertaining to admissions should be reported through the annual monitoring process at the end of the year. It was also noted that oversight of assessment varies between partners and is more limited for validated provision, particularly as School Liaison Officers are not required. University oversight outside the annual monitoring processes is therefore only exercised through the Chair of the Board of Examiners and external examiners and through communication with the Quality Assurance Office. Furthermore, the appointment of partner staff to teach on programmes at partnerships is devolved to the partner and, although details of appointed staff are required by the University as part of the Board of Examiners process, this occurs at the end of the academic year and no oversight of the appropriateness of appointments prior to teaching is required. In addition, the University was not able to demonstrate how it takes a collective view on a partner institution that works with more than one school.

2.95 The University publishes a typology for partner providers and non-award bearing partners on its website which indicates the quality assurance arrangements applied in each case. A significant number of partnerships are regarded either as validated institutions arrangements or partner college arrangements, the latter of which is characterised as all programmes delivered by local further education colleges. Partner college provision is further subdivided into 'franchise', 'validated plus' and 'validated' with the difference being articulated in the extent to which programmes are designed by the University or the partner. In discussions with the staff, the review team identified that in practice the three types of provision at partner colleges are defined by the funding arrangements rather than the origins of programme design outlined in the typology. The review team therefore found inconsistency in the language used to define such partnerships and there was evidence in meetings of some misunderstanding of the exact responsibilities inherent in each arrangement.

2.96 The variance between the stated definitions and the actual basis for defining types of partnerships is significant due to the differences in quality assurance arrangements that apply in each case. Arrangements for institutional oversight of franchise and validated provision differ and, as outlined in paragraph 2.94, the review team saw examples from across both franchise and validated institutions where there was limited oversight of devolved responsibilities across both types of provision. In light of this, and the variation between the stated and actual definitions of partner typologies outlined above, the review team **recommends** that the University ensure consistency in the typology and arrangements for partner providers and establish a mechanism to ensure more effective oversight of its partner provision.

2.97 The processes for the termination of partnership agreements, including teach-out arrangements with partners are outlined in the CPPP. The review team heard and found documented evidence on the ending of arrangements, including teach-out arrangements with partners and found these to be effective.

2.98 Overall, the review team concluded that for the most part, the design and operation of the arrangements for managing standards and delivering learning opportunities with others are managed effectively. However, the review team found inconsistency in the use of partner typologies and noted areas where the arrangements for the oversight of devolved responsibilities did not always allow for timely or comprehensive monitoring for some types of partnerships. The team therefore concludes that the expectation is met and the associated level of risk is 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

2.99 A Graduate School was introduced in 2008 with a mission 'to lead and champion the strategic development of provision for graduate education and research' and with responsibility for the development of all aspects of postgraduate study working in partnership with faculties, schools and central departments. The arrangements for the quality assurance of research degrees are outlined in the Code of Practice for research programmes of study and complemented by the Academic Regulations. Graduate Studies Committees operate at both school and faculty level with the latter reporting to the University GSB, which in turn reports to Senate. Postgraduate research degrees are delivered at University campuses in Canterbury, Medway and Brussels and through joint and dual award partnerships in the UK and abroad. A centrally coordinated Directors of Graduate Studies Network and Postgraduate Administration Network provide staff members undertaking similar roles with a cross-institutional forum for discussion.

2.100 The review team explored the approach through the analysis of evidence including the relevant strategy documents, board and committee minutes, policies and regulations, student surveys and materials available online. The team also met postgraduate research students and staff based at different campuses and partnership locations.

2.101 The Code of Practice provides detailed information on programme approval, student support, supervisory team requirements, regulations, monitoring and review. School Directors of Graduate Studies chair the School Graduate Studies Committee and retain oversight of all aspects of research programmes, including advice and support to staff and students. Faculty Directors of Graduate Studies oversee research degree provision across schools within the faculty and are represented on the University-level committee. Staff and students the team met were fully familiar with arrangements as set out in this document.

2.102 The FHEQ level descriptors for level 8 are incorporated into the academic regulations for research programmes and both the level descriptors and the QAA doctoral programme characteristics are referenced in the programme specification template for research programmes. Research degrees are approved through the same process as taught programmes (as outlined in section A3.1, paragraph 1.15) and subject to the same measures to ensure that academic standards are appropriately set. Staff met by the review team demonstrated that these processes are implemented as designed and are fit for purpose. Research degrees leading to dual or joint awards have bespoke academic regulations as agreed by the partners at approval and published on the website.

2.103 The PR ,as outlined in section A3.3, includes coverage of all postgraduate research provision within a school or centre. The panel considered whether programmes are being delivered in accordance with the programme specifications, whether standards are being maintained and evaluate the appropriateness of the research environment and supervision provided by the school. The decisions are informed by their review of evidence and meetings with staff and students. Good practice and innovation is also identified in detailed PPR

reports which are submitted to faculty and university committees and formal well considered responses are provided by subject teams.

2.104 Students the review team met reported that interaction with the University during the application process was timely and helpful (see also section B2, paragraph 2.15). Students apply online and guidance on the website requests applicants to consult with an academic supervisor prior to application and some students met by the review team had received support in preparing applications. The Graduate School organises induction events which include separate faculty sessions. Students receive a detailed student handbook including academic and social information and which outlines the respective responsibilities of staff and students. Students generally reported that the induction was appropriate for their needs although those who had previously studied at the University did not find that the induction events added value.

2.105 The researcher development programme equips research students with a range of skills mapped to the National Researcher Development Framework and is designed to support personal, professional and career development. Completion of the Researcher Development Assessment workshop is compulsory prior to probation review. A review group was set up to review the format and content of the workshops in February 2014 and the format has been changed for 2014-15. Students welcomed the review of the programme as their experience was variable and some found parts of it less relevant.

2.106 Students are expected to maintain regular contact with their supervisors and where this is not maintained supervisors will actively follow up. Students submit a monthly log of their activities and oversight of student progression is maintained by the Directors of Graduate Studies. Following a benchmarking exercise that indicated comparatively lower qualification rates, a range of changes have been implemented to the processes for supporting research degrees including direct entry to PhD, more stringent monitoring processes and increased regularity of meetings. Feedback from students and staff the team met is variable on whether the new monitoring process is helpful in tracking and recording student progress, although it was too early to assess whether changes had affected completion. Overall, a high percentage of students on research degrees confirm satisfaction with the supervision arrangements.

2.107 Support for supervisors is provided through a mentorship model and a credited module. The Graduate School provides a series of good supervision sessions bringing together broad internal and external expertise and providing opportunities to share experiences and discuss challenges. Staff were positive about the range of activities that supported sharing of practice across the University and its campuses. Support for research students who undertake teaching is set out in the Code of Practice. All are required to attend an introduction to university teaching session provided by the Graduate School, following which many proceed to take the ATAP course. Access to ATAP is currently delayed for some due to oversubscription. Research students who teach are supported by School Directors of Graduate Studies and through the Graduate Teaching Assistant Network. The review team heard of some challenges in balancing teaching load and research activities and was assured that the Head of School monitors teaching responsibilities in liaison with module convenors.

2.108 The University publishes clear instruction documents for both research degree examiners and for candidates setting out the assessment process and criteria. Additional Viva Guidance for PhD candidates sets out details of the process and ensures consistency of practice in the conduct of assessment. The review team found that staff and students were familiar with assessment requirements as outlined in these documents.

2.109 Mechanisms for obtaining feedback from students include annual postgraduate surveys, staff-student liaison committees and elected postgraduate student representatives who sit on Graduate Studies committees or boards at school, faculty and University level. The results of biannual Postgraduate Research Experience Survey, and the institutional equivalent deployed in the intervening years, are analysed by the Planning and Business Information Office and collated into institutional-level summaries available online.

2.110 Information services provide postgraduate researchers with access to a range of resources, specialist collection/archives and support from a dedicated Academic Liaison Librarian. There is an Academic Liaison Team for each of the three faculties to whom students can go for specific advice or support. Access to other facilities varies across schools and concerns have been raised by students at an institutional level regarding a perceived lack of dedicated resources including office space and study rooms which are being addressed by the institution (see affirmation in section B3, paragraph 2.28).

2.111 Despite this, there is evidence of a positive research environment created through formal and informal interdisciplinary arrangements where students and staff benefit from social interaction and the exchange of ideas. In particular, the Graduate School offers a range of student-facing activities through coordination of the Researcher Development Programme, monthly research cafés, the annual postgraduate research festival, the GradPost newsletter and the Postgraduate Experience Awards through which students can apply for funding to run an interdisciplinary event aimed at enhancing the postgraduate experience. Weekly research seminars are also provided where students can present their findings and latest chapters and receive feedback from peers and staff. Visiting researchers are also invited to present at these sessions. Students also receive regular sessions on preparing and submitting papers. The students met by the review team had derived considerable benefit from their interaction with others through the broad range of opportunities for disseminating research. Furthermore, the University has considerable success in achieving European funding for joint doctoral programmes providing a range of scholarships, doctoral training grants and fully funded PhDs. Students on these programmes study in at least two centres across Europe and those met reported on the value added by the range of joint awards offered by the University and the richness that this brought to their experience. The informal and formal opportunities provided to postgraduate research students create a vibrant interdisciplinary academic community and are considered by the review team to be **good practice**.

2.112 Overall, the review team considers that the University has clear and fully implemented processes and procedures in place for managing research degrees and providing supervision and support to students. Students have a broad range of developmental opportunities with good practice noted in this area. The team therefore concludes that the expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.113 In determining its judgement on the quality of student learning opportunities at the University of Kent, the review team considered the findings against the criteria as outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All expectations in this area are met and the level of risk is considered low in all cases with the exception of Expectations B6 and B10, where the review team considers there is a moderate risk to the quality of learning opportunities.

2.114 The University has an appropriate framework for managing the quality of student learning opportunities which is articulated through strategic documents and through the policies and procedures outlined in the codes of practice. Implementation of the strategies and policies are monitored and overseen through the annual planning process, annual programme monitoring and periodic review activities and through selected internal audits. Of particular note is the approach to admissions where the team considers that the arrangements for supporting prospective students is a feature of good practice. The strategic approach has also brought notable benefits to the learning environment for students, particularly with regard to creating an internationalised environment within which both taught and research students can develop their academic, personal and professional potential and also for creating a vibrant interdisciplinary academic community for postgraduate research students.

2.115 While the overall approach is generally effective, the review team recommends that changes are made to ensure more effective oversight of the implementation of policies and procedures. Greater oversight is particularly required in the areas of assessment to ensure that the implementation of assessment regulations operate as intended and in ensuring a more robust approach to the oversight of programme modifications. The review team also noted some weaknesses, and insufficient emphasis, in the oversight arrangements that apply to partnership provision and therefore recommends that the University ensure that more effective and timely institutional oversight is undertaken for partnerships, particularly in the case of partner providers and validated provision.

2.116 The review team therefore concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the University of Kent **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 is committed to ensuring the quality of information provided about learning opportunities and sets out principles and processes in a Corporate Standards for Data Quality policy. A member of the Executive Group has overall responsibility although individual members of staff are responsible for specific aspects of published information and the quality of data, including sign-off prior to publication.

3.2 A considerable amount of information is publically available online including key facts, governance arrangements, policies, codes of practice and strategy documents.

3.3 Prospective students are able to access information regarding application online, including policies and procedures, and prospectus information is available on the website and in hard copy. Current students can access programme information through student handbooks and other printed materials provided during induction, or more detailed information such as policies and regulations through the University website or the student intranet. Upon graduation, students are provided with a degree transcript and certificate, accompanied by a Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR) detailing non-curricular activity. Data quality arrangements are internally audited on an annual basis to provide assurance and enable oversight of process in this area.

3.4 The review team explored the approach by considering a range of documentation available to internal and external stakeholders such as prospectuses, students guides, handbooks, quality assurance policies and regulations. The review team met students and staff from across the institution to assess the reliability and awareness of this process.

3.5 The University's commitment to allowing access to relevant information is clear through the evidence submitted and the experiences of staff and students. The Code of Practice for taught programmes sets out the minimum information that students should receive with respect to learning opportunities and support. Schools determine how this information is provided and the quality of this information is reviewed through the PPR process. Students the team met confirmed that information provided, both before and during their studies, is helpful and accurately reflects the reality of their experience. As previously highlighted in section B2 the responsiveness and timeliness of information through the admission process was highly praised by students.

3.6 The respective responsibilities for production of information to prospective students, programme specifications and online information are broadly understood by University staff. Those met by the team were confident in the requirements for ensuring information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy, although not consistently aware of the allocation of overall responsibility. Internal auditing reports allow for clear oversight of the quality of information sent to national bodies such as the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE).

3.7 The online Programme and Monitoring Approval System is used by staff to ensure the appropriateness and currency of information to students. The website information on

programmes draws directly from the approved programme specifications through an online tool and, similarly, module information available through the online module catalogue is drawn from approved module specifications. Module and programme specifications are updated by the Faculties Support Office annually in the light of approvals to changes made through the relevant committees. However, only core information is subject to update and other information, such as indicators of quality and lists of approved research supervisory chairs, remain unchanged from the initial approval documentation. The team noted that more recently produced programme specifications did not include a list of supervisory staff, but rather provided a link to an online staff list that was more regularly maintained. Programme specifications are published online according to a cohort's academic year of entry, which is effective in allowing ease of access and version control.

3.8 The review team noted that procedural documentation, specifications and templates are not consistent in the terminology used to describe the academic levels of the FHEQ, with some including alpha references and some recording both alpha and numeric terms for academic levels. Notably, transcripts of study use alpha terminology whereas the HEAR refers to the numerical terms of the FHEQ. While there is comprehensive evidence that module and programme learning outcomes are pitched at the appropriate level, the review team considers that this naming convention inhibits the transparency of information on academic levels, particularly for students who may be familiar with national and European frameworks. The review team therefore **recommends** that the University ensure transparency for all stakeholders through a consistent description of academic levels across all programmes as outlined in the FHEQ.

3.9 The online Student Guide provides a single website for learning and teaching-related information, where all students can access their timetable, the VLE, information on marks and deadlines, and access to key resources. This includes practical information about living and studying at the University to reinforce the range of learning opportunities available to students both in and outside their programme of study. The use of the online student portal as a 'one stop shop' for general information is valued by both undergraduate and postgraduate students, although the timeliness of timetable release was reported by some students to detract from the overall experience. During induction, a significant amount of information is provided to students, and while on the whole this was reported as beneficial, students on other UK-based campuses commented that more could be done to supply campus-specific information about the student experience. Conversely, students studying at Brussels commended the helpful information provided to assist study in a different country. There is a certain degree of duplication of information, for instance across programme documentation, the VLE and the online Student Guide, however, students the team met view this as enabling freer access to information. The team found the student portal to be accessible and easily navigated and students used it extensively.

3.10 Staff responsible for maintaining standards and quality are able to access most policies, procedures and key documents through the University website. Other information such as agreements with partner colleges are held within the Academic Registry, or Quality Assurance Office for other partnerships. The University website is regarded as the central repository for all key information and students, staff, employers and those working in partnerships can access specific, targeted information. Students are confident in the accuracy of information, and there is a common awareness among staff of the importance of accurate information which is supported by appropriate internal processes. The review team therefore considers that the accessibility of University-level information available on the website to stakeholders is a feature of **good practice**.

3.11 Overall, the review team considers that the University produces information on the quality of learning opportunities that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. While a minor adjustment to the terminology for academic levels would improve transparency, the

approach to the provision of information is generally thorough, with some good practice in the accessibility of information. The team therefore 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

3.12 In determining its judgement on the quality of information about learning opportunities the review team considered the findings against the criteria outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is considered low.

3.13 The review team considers that the University has appropriate processes for ensuring that information provided to stakeholders is fit for purpose, trustworthy and accessible and that staff and students have confidence in the information provided. While the information available at school level varies, key information that applies to all students and staff is published online in an accessible format and the review team considers this to be a feature of good practice. The review team recommends that the University revisit the current naming conventions for academic levels to ensure consistency and greater transparency for stakeholders.

3.14 The review team concludes that the quality of information about learning opportunities produced by the University of Kent **meets** UK expectations.

4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1 The University's stated approach to enhancement is one of 'continuous improvement by building on the outcomes of Kent's quality assurance processes and monitoring achievement against areas targeted for improvement'. The key reference point for enhancement of the student learning experience is the Learning and Teaching Enhancement (LTE) Strategy 2012-15 which seeks to promote a shared understanding of the priorities for teaching, learning and assessment in the context of institutional needs and national agendas. The five strategic aims in the LTE Strategy are embedded within the Institutional Strategic Plan 2012-15. Progress against the LTE strategy is reviewed through the annual monitoring and planning reports submitted by schools, faculties and central services and is overseen by the University LTB. The University Student Experience Committee also promotes these strategic objectives and priorities. The infrastructure for supporting central and locally driven enhancement initiatives is facilitated principally through faculties and the Unit for Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (UELТ).

4.2 The review team explored the effectiveness and impact of the University approach to enhancement through the analysis of policies, procedures, committee meetings and through discussion with academic, support staff and student representatives from across campuses and partner institutions.

4.3 The LTE Strategy emphasises that strategies are implemented locally and progress is monitored institutionally through the integration of related strategies, use of the annual monitoring and planning cycle and through the use of staff networks to disseminate good practice. The alignment of the LTE Strategy with the Institutional Plan arose as a response to the 2008 QAA audit and the University considers that this has allowed greater local ownership of the enhancement agenda at school level by staff and students. Enhancement activity is undertaken locally by schools drawing on the support of UELТ and other central support services including Student Services, Information Services and the Estate Department. These central support services operate a service-level agreement approach in order to tailor support for enhancement activity to the needs of the individual schools. Enhancement activity is embedded within the strategic aims and operational plans of the School and Faculty Development plans.

4.4 UELТ provides a comprehensive range of services and online resources to support enhancement processes, projects and activities both at school level and throughout the institution. In particular, development opportunities are available to staff related to the use of technology-enhanced learning in line with the LTE Strategy and E-Learning Strategy. Examples of such enhancement activity reviewed by the team include; improving the effectiveness of use of the VLE to enhance student learning; use of lecture capture technology; and enhancement of the online student guide.

4.5 A range of staff networks support enhancement by providing opportunities for staff to disseminate good practice. These include institutional networks such as the Learning and Teaching Network, Personal Academic Support System network and Quality Management and Enhancement network which are supplemented by Faculty Learning and Teaching Forums. An annual Partnerships Forum is held to promote development and enhancement opportunities with, and for, staff in partner institutions. An employability week initiative

provides an illustrative example of an enhancement activity linked to the Employability Strategy, that was initiated in one school and then promoted and supported by the Careers and Employability Service to become adopted as a University-wide event.

4.6 An example of an institutionally-driven initiative is the promotion of the Personal Academic Support System (PASS) to students, arising from a recommendation from the QAA 2008 Institutional Audit. The University adopted a consultative approach to developing, promoting and supporting the implementation of the new academic support system which has involved working in partnership with students through the Kent Union. The latter acknowledged the value of this partnership approach and, during team meetings with students, positive feedback was provided on the effectiveness and value of the PASS system.

4.7 A particular focus for current university-led enhancement activity is assessment and feedback in response to continuing student feedback highlighting inconsistency in assessment practice within and across schools. The current University Assessment Framework document acts as guidance to schools although this is being redrafted as a policy document through the Assessment and Feedback Steering Group. The University expects this new policy to provide a consistent set of expectations to be followed by all schools. A related current enhancement activity is the piloting of feedback to students on exam performance, implemented following an Exam Feedback Steering Group.

4.8 The University has participated in Higher Education Academy programmes to engage students as partners in enhancing learning. The Student Charter sets out the expectations for student learning across the University acting as a baseline for enhancement activity and incorporating a commitment to excellence. Student enhancement activity is informed by annual monitoring processes including analysis of student feedback from University surveys such as module evaluation, the undergraduate survey, surveys and focus groups conducted by central support services, and through national external surveys. Students the team met were generally positive about the responsiveness of University staff in taking actions to enhance learning in response to student feedback.

4.9 The review team considers that the University takes deliberate steps to improve the quality of student learning opportunities through a combination of institutional-led initiatives and locally devised activities that are supported, evaluated and appropriately disseminated. The team therefore concludes that the expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.10 In determining its judgement on the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the University of Kent, the review team considered the findings against the criteria as outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is considered low.

4.11 The University takes deliberate steps to enhance the student learning opportunities across all levels through the development and implementation of a range of related strategy documents pertaining to the student experience. Delivery on these strategies is undertaken through a combination of centrally-led initiatives and through the support for local developments within schools and centres. Mechanisms are in place to oversee and measure progress on enhancement activity and to share good practice within the institution.

4.12 The review team therefore concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the University of Kent **meets** UK expectations.

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1 The University takes a strategic approach to student employability, outlined in its Employability Strategy and implemented through a cycle of annual action planning. Student employability activity is overseen and coordinated at institutional level by an Employability and Skills Subcommittee (ESS) which reports into University Senate via the Student Experience Committee and through an annual report on activity. Each faculty has an employability group comprising school representatives and since 2013-14 these have reported to the ESS, although not in a standardised format. At school level, employability is focused on student involvement in curriculum development, engagement with employers, awareness raising and promotion of the Careers and Employability Service. Committees focus on an annually set cycle of activity including communications, data issues, and employability-related action tracking. Staff employability forums offer opportunities to share good practice across schools, professional services and the Kent Union.

5.2 The Careers and Employability Service is freely available to all students across Canterbury and Medway campuses with information on the service accessible online. Enhancement to this service is evident following an internally commissioned careers education, information, advice and guidance review, leading to service-level agreements with schools and service improvements. Through this service, schools are supported in using the DLHE data and in the development and implementation of the schools' own employability agendas.

5.3 The DLHE data is used internally by all schools to inform key performance indicators at programme level. Proactively, the data is used to help students consider their own potential graduate destinations. The DLHE data indicates that graduates from the University are highly employable, with 94.1 per cent (2012-13) in work or further study: 8.4 per cent better than the sector average and 0.8 per cent above the provider's designate competitors.

5.4 The University offers a wide variety of ways for students to engage with employability activity. Employability Week is one such case, which includes a Careers Fair that is well attended by prospective employers. Graduate employment vacancies are searchable by students online through a database. The Employability Points Scheme allows students to record their mentoring activity, attendance at workshops, part-time work and volunteering to build up an employability folio. Another opportunity is the Kent Student Certificate for Volunteering, for which students who complete 100 hours of volunteering and a reflective portfolio are able to achieve a credit-bearing award. Undergraduate and postgraduate students are able to undertake volunteering opportunities, and were found to enjoy and value this activity. The Online Employability Award is completed through the online learning platform and is composed of exercises and assignments designed to improve career planning, job hunting and making career choices. The Alumni network online provides mentoring opportunities and there are plans to involve alumni in University-wide initiatives as well as school-specific activities.

5.5 Bespoke opportunities exist for widening participation, such as bursaries for work experience, targeted skills sessions and long-term tracking. Some schools run Academic Peer Mentoring Schemes to improve performance and retention. The peer mentors are student volunteers, identified on the basis of their academic ability and quality of communication. Typically 'hard to reach' groups are also given attention. Master's level students can participate in the Global Skills Award to enhance global awareness and employability and 322 students have currently achieved this multidisciplinary award. Currently only postgraduate taught students are eligible to receive the formal award but

research students are able to attend the Global Skills Award lectures. . Initiatives such as this and the Global Skills programme are evaluated by students in order to enhance planning for following years.

5.6 Students are not always aware of the opportunities that exist for them and have requested better communication regarding developmental opportunities and more programme-focused support. This is juxtaposed to recent efforts to advertise opportunities, increased communication through social media, a move towards paperless operations, online careers tools and lecture-captured sessions, and accessible audio-visual content aimed at part-time, distance-learning and work-based students. However, undergraduate students are satisfied that their career prospects had improved when canvassed for their views.

5.7 There is a central list of employers with whom the University works, and schools are informed when employers are working with the University or simply on campus. Feedback from employer engagement informs curriculum delivery and design. Employer links are monitored through engagement with careers service events and provision of placements. The involvement of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies also informs the industrial currency of programmes. Students' work experience is captured within the Higher Education Achievement Record. The awareness of options for undertaking placements or studying abroad was varied during meetings with students, although students who had undertaken these activities noted the benefits. Students expressed concerns that less industrially focused programmes would offer fewer opportunities for undertaking placements. A new placements' management system is currently under development to offer more opportunities, improve communication, and allow for a more central approach to placements. Furthermore, the internationality of provision in Brussels and Paris is specifically designed to add academically appropriate cultural enhancement to the curriculum, as well as the opportunity to use relevant, discipline-specific resources such as specialist libraries and relevancy of location.

5.8 Undergraduate and postgraduate taught students generally have access to similar services. Postgraduate research students are able to access specific careers advisers, who have specific disciplinary expertise. Research students also have access to a development programme organised by the Graduate School which includes workshops, training, and online support to develop as researchers. Further employability development is available through becoming a Graduate Teaching Assistant, and full support in teaching activity and running demonstrations is expected from staff to help students in these positions. Graduate Teaching Assistants must attend a two-day introductory session and can also access Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education modules.

5.9 The extent to which students regarded employability as embedded within their degree programmes varied, with some positive examples including integration of employability into a module online resources , as well as an employability skills used to map transferable skills to module activities.

5.10 The University demonstrates a strong commitment to employability and cross-institutional support of the agenda is evident at multiple levels. Students are not aware of the full extent of opportunities available to them although positive steps are being taken to consolidate efforts and broaden access to what is a healthy range of student-centred, proactive opportunities to become globally employable graduates.

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 29-32 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

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

Academic standards

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

Award

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

Blended learning

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

Credit(s)

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

Degree-awarding body

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

Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

Dual award or double award

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

e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning

Enhancement

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

Expectations

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

Flexible and distributed learning

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

See also **distance learning**.

Framework

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

Framework for higher education qualifications

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