



# Higher Education Review of Lancaster University

November 2015

## Contents

<b>About this review .....</b>	<b>1</b>
QAA's judgements about Lancaster University .....	2
Good practice .....	2
Recommendations .....	2
Affirmation of action being taken .....	3
Theme: Student Employability.....	3
<b>About Lancaster University.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Explanation of the findings about Lancaster University .....</b>	<b>6</b>
1 Judgement: The setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards.....	7
2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities.....	23
3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities .....	55
4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities .....	58
5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability.....	62
<b>Glossary.....</b>	<b>64</b>

## About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Lancaster University. The review took place from 2 to 6 November 2015 and was conducted by a team of six reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Paul Brunt
- Dr Patsy Campbell
- Dr Jackie Gresham
- Emeritus Professor Ann Holmes
- Ms Christine Willmore
- Mr Craig Best (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

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

In reviewing Lancaster University the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland. The [themes](#) for the academic year 2015-16 are Student Employability and Digital Literacy,<sup>2</sup> and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

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

---

<sup>1</sup> The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code).

<sup>2</sup> Higher Education Review themes: [www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2859](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2859).

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

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

This review did not consider all aspects of the provision of Lancaster University during the visit. An aspect of collaborative provision not covered by this report was considered under QAA's Concerns Scheme in December and the issue has now been closed.

## QAA's judgements about Lancaster University

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

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

## Good practice

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

- The effective resourcing of new taught curriculum areas (Expectation B4).
- The distinctive culture of partnership, and environment of engagement, developed through the collegiate system (Expectation B5).
- The significant level of support and guidance for partners provided by University staff, which contributes to the quality of learning opportunities (Expectation B10).
- Innovative postgraduate provision developed from excellent international research collaboration (Expectation B11).
- The accessibility of comprehensive quality assurance and standards information provided by the Manual for Academic Regulations and Procedures (Expectation C).

## Recommendations

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

By April 2016:

- ensure timely induction for all research students irrespective of when they enrol (Expectation B11).

By June 2016:

- put in place explicit institutional guidance for the approval of placements to ensure that all such arrangements are implemented securely (Expectation B10)
- strengthen the due diligence process for assessing the appropriateness of different partners to ensure that it clearly determines the calibration of risk (Expectation B10).

By September 2016:

- articulate how learning outcomes are met in cases where condonement is permitted (Expectation A3.2)
- develop further the process of action planning, timely implementation and monitoring in relation to learning and teaching practices (Expectation B4 and Enhancement)

- ensure that the mechanisms to identify high-level themes arising from quality assurance and enhancement are systematically considered, implemented and monitored (Enhancement).

By December 2016:

- systematically monitor and evaluate at institutional level the scope and effectiveness of student engagement mechanisms in order to achieve effective partnership with students (Expectation B5).

## **Affirmation of action being taken**

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

- The steps being taken to strengthen the strategic oversight and articulation of learning and teaching through the creation of an Education Committee and associated structures (Expectation B3).
- The steps being taken to develop student representation and the involvement of the wider student body in institutional structures and processes (Expectation B5).
- The steps being taken to make external examiner reports readily accessible to students on the website (Expectations B7 and C).
- The improvements being made to the provision and systematic use of data to review and enhance the quality of learning opportunities, especially at postgraduate level (Expectations B11 and B4).
- The steps being taken to ensure that postgraduate research students have comparable opportunities and support across disciplines (Expectation B11).
- The steps being taken to improve the accessibility of information to students to ensure a single source of accessible information for current students (Expectation C).
- The establishment of a committee to provide a formal platform for strengthening enhancement across the University (Enhancement).

## **Theme: Student Employability**

Lancaster University has invested significantly to increase and diversify the range of opportunities to develop student employability. There are many degrees that lead to professional qualifications or accreditation with a recognised professional body. In addition, a number of programmes provide opportunities for work-based delivery and placement opportunities; more widely, programmes routinely emphasise employability skills.

The Lancaster University Management School has a scheme that prepares students for a full-year paid placement in the penultimate year of study, and also facilitates projects and summer placements with external organisations, providing opportunities for those who do not take up a curriculum-based placement. The University's Regional Teaching Partnerships run several programmes, in which employers are closely involved in the design and running, providing an understanding of how theories and models support the working practices with industry-relevant issues.

The Lancaster Award provides recognition for students who have undertaken extracurricular activities that have developed them personally or contributed to the University or community. Those achieving the award are eligible for the Lancaster Excellence Scheme, which provides placements with sponsoring employers. Additionally, all such activities can be recorded on the Higher Education Achievement Report, available to all students.

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

## About Lancaster University

Lancaster University (the University) was established in 1964 and occupies a greenfield site on the southern edge of Lancaster city. Organised into eight undergraduate, and one postgraduate, colleges, and four academic faculties, as of December 2014 there were 12,848 students based on the Lancaster campus; an additional 2,579 students in colleges in the North West of England through Regional Teaching Partnerships; and 5,632 studying overseas for Lancaster University degrees through International Teaching Partnerships. The University also has significant access, articulation and Study Abroad programmes, together with many regional and worldwide collaborative arrangements. Eighty-nine per cent of students are full-time and 28 per cent are postgraduate. Of more than 2,860 employees, 42 per cent are teaching and research staff, over half of whom were recruited in the last five years.

The University's strategy is to be 'globally significant'. It aims to engage locally, nationally and internationally in important issues and debates, and to provide the 'highest quality research and teaching' that 'informs and changes practice worldwide'. Specifically, its strategic aims include achieving a stable top 10 UK ranking and increasing the number of well-qualified undergraduate applicants without compromising its widening participation achievements. Currently, 26 per cent of students are drawn from social class groups four to seven. The University regards itself as 'research-led and student focused'. It aims to be in the top 10 National Student Survey placings. In the most recent Research Excellence Framework, 83 per cent of its research was deemed internationally excellent and 35 per cent world-leading.

Since the last QAA review there have been refreshments of the existing Strategic Plan, as well as a new plan that takes the University to 2020. The current Vice-Chancellor took up post in 2012; changes have also been made to the senior management structure, including the roles of Provost for Student Experience, Colleges and Library; Director of Quality Assurance and Enhancement; and a new post of Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education). The leadership of professional services was also restructured. In 2013 a new integrated planning process was introduced, and governance has been strengthened, with reviews of Council and Senate effectiveness and revised terms of reference for deliberative and executive committees. Thematic reviews of a range of service departments were introduced in 2014, together with a review of postgraduate taught provision in 2014-15.

Altogether, £450 million was invested between 2003 and 2013 on capital projects, including a new Student Learning Zone, Management School building and virtual learning environment. A new faculty of Health and Medicine was established, and the General Medical Council granted degree awarding powers on a rolling basis from 2012. A new chemistry department has been re-established and three new research institutes set up. Between 2014 and 2017, £135 million will be spent on capital projects, with a strong focus on environmentally sustainable buildings.

There has been significant development in the University's international partnerships, adding to the existing campus at Sunway University in Malaysia. G.D. Goenka Educational Trust was established in New Delhi, India, delivering Lancaster University degrees, and COMSATS Institute in Lahore, Pakistan, now delivers Lancaster University-validated degree programmes. At Accra in Ghana, a campus has been developed to deliver Lancaster University degrees.

The key challenges facing Lancaster University include those it sees as common to the sector, such as the generally volatile political and economic environment, market expectations, UK immigration policy and the search for growth without compromise to quality. More particularly, the University seeks to develop critical mass in its academic departments; to review its international portfolio to ensure consistency of quality and standards across all Lancaster University awards; to help the University Students' Union to address its weakened financial position; and to mitigate the potential disadvantage of the University's physical distance from intensive labour markets and industries.

The University's provision at Sunway has been reviewed by QAA through the audit of collaborative provision in Malaysia, as have its collaborations in China. Regional college partners at Blackpool, Blackburn and Furness have been reviewed through Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review and/or Higher Education Review, and the embedded college managed by the Bellerbys group was subject to an Embedded College Review for Educational Oversight in 2012. Other external body reviews include the Association of MBAs's review of the Management School; the General Medical Council review of the Medical School; and, since the last QAA review, 12 accrediting visits from professional bodies.

The University has addressed in full the advisory recommendations from the previous QAA review to integrate quality assurance arrangements for collaborative provision with those for standard provision, and to ensure that external examiners for overseas provision are competent to make comparisons with UK provision. It has taken action to respond to the desirable recommendations that there should be an element of formal external input in the approval process for academic provision. In providing a range of data to departments, it has gone some way towards responding to the recommendation that the use of analytical data in annual and periodic review should be strengthened.

## Explanation of the findings about Lancaster University

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Findings

1.1 The University secures threshold academic standards through its course design, approval and review processes; these policies and processes can be found in the Manual for Academic Regulations and Procedures (MARP), which is updated annually. Within these processes the University uses *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) to position its qualifications at an appropriate level. The approval and review processes are also used to ensure that programme and module learning outcomes are aligned with the relevant qualification descriptors in the FHEQ. The MARP requires all awards and programmes offered by the University to be aligned with the FHEQ and the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF). Programme specifications produced as part of the programme approval process demonstrate this alignment.

1.2 The University uses a credit framework and modular structure for its undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes. The University awards credit in accordance with the QCF.

1.3 Subject Benchmark Statements are used at the programme approval stage. They are also considered as part of the Annual Teaching Review (ATR), as programme leaders are expected to reference any revision to programmes and modules as a result of Subject Benchmark Statements in their ATRs, and also as part of the Periodic Quality Review process. The University also makes use of the *Foundation Degree Qualifications*



*Benchmark* in the design of foundation degrees, and provides guidance on their design and the design of honours top-up years.

1.4 The University's academic framework and its course approval and review policies and procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.5 The review team considered a range of documentation, including the MARP, as well as programme approval and review documentation for on-campus and collaborative provision. The team met senior staff, staff who had been involved in the design, approval and review of programmes, and staff at partner institutions.

1.6 All academic qualifications, degrees, diplomas, certificates, and other credit-bearing awards to which programmes of study lead, must be approved by Senate. All programmes leading to awards of the University are expected to comply with the criteria agreed by Senate in terms of the level of study, duration of programmes, number of modules, student learning hours and credit framework.

1.7 The programme and module specifications seen by the review team demonstrate alignment with the appropriate levels of the FHEQ; they also reflect relevant Subject Benchmark Statements.

1.8 Although College partners are permitted to have their own templates for programme and module specifications, the Academic Standards and Quality Unit provides guidance on the information that must be included in the specification.

1.9 The University recognises that, from its recent review of its postgraduate taught provision, it needs to ensure that there are positively defined learning outcomes for the intermediate/exit awards of its postgraduate certificates and diplomas. The review team noted the work being undertaken by the University to ensure that intended learning outcomes for intermediate and exit postgraduate qualifications are positively defined in programme specifications. It also noted that there were no exit or intermediate awards for undergraduate programmes.

1.10 Guidance on the titling of awards is contained in the MARP. Requests for new award titles are made by the appropriate faculty teaching committees for approval by Senate.

1.11 As part of the assessment process, external examiners are asked to confirm that programmes meet the requirements of the FHEQ and other external reference points. They also confirm that the programme and module learning outcomes have been achieved, as well as commenting on the comparability of standards with other providers. External examiners' reports seen by the review team demonstrate that this has occurred.

1.12 The review team heard that the Academic Standards and Quality Unit circulates revised Subject Benchmark Statements to departments. Departments are expected to report on alignment through the ATR process. The University also aligns many of its programmes with the requirements of professional bodies. Where programmes are validated overseas they may also be aligned with the requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) in the country concerned.

1.13 The review team noted that the University's programme approval and validation process tests alignment with relevant external reference points to ensure that programmes are positioned at the appropriate level. The review team was informed that the University is redesigning its online approval tool (CAIT) to strengthen engagement with the FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements and other external reference points when designing

programmes and modules. Members of staff whom the review team met demonstrated awareness of the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements.

1.14 The review team found that, based on the evidence provided and from meetings with staff, due account is taken of the national qualification and credit frameworks in setting and maintaining academic standards, and that there are policies and processes in place that ensure that appropriate alignment occurs. The review team 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**

1.15 The University has comprehensive regulations in place for its undergraduate, postgraduate taught and postgraduate research provision. These are revised annually and published prior to the start of each new academic year. Briefing notes are issued on major changes to the regulations. Some variation to the regulations may be permitted, subject to approval.

1.16 Study Abroad grade conversions have been reviewed and are included in the assessment regulations. There are also standard grade descriptors, which can be contextualised by module. Guidance on assessment grading and criteria is provided in module handbooks.

1.17 The Manual for Academic Regulations and Procedures provides details of the academic framework, including the quality assurance policies and procedures, for on-campus and collaborative provision. Academic responsibilities are devolved to faculties and departments. Although Deans have overall responsibility for quality assurance in their faculty, operational responsibility rests, in practice, with the Associate Deans for undergraduate and postgraduate teaching.

1.18 The University has a governance and management structure for the quality assurance of its provision. This provides details of key committees, including terms of reference and membership. Authority and responsibility for academic governance rests with Senate, which delegates specific functions and authority to a number of committees and subcommittees. Operational oversight for governance and securing of academic standards and quality rests with the Secretariat and the Academic Standards and Quality Unit respectively.

1.19 The University has a comprehensive set of procedures and academic regulations in place that would allow the Expectation to be met. It also has a committee structure that provides oversight of quality and standards for both its on-campus and its partner provision.

1.20 The review team considered a range of documents relating to the academic framework and regulations, as well as minutes of the relevant committees, in particular, those assigned responsibility for ensuring implementation of policies and practice. The review team tested its findings through discussions with staff and students.

1.21 The committee structure underpins and supports the delivery of, and engagement with, the procedures and regulations. Senate has overarching responsibility for quality and standards, but gives authorised delegation to the Academic Standards and Quality Committee (ASQC) and a number of other committees, including the Collaborative Provision Oversight Committee (CPOC), Collaborative Provision Teaching Committee, and Research Committee. There is a flow chart illustrating Senate's standing committees and governance structure.

1.22 The Secretariat has responsibility for, and maintains oversight of, the committee structure and the effectiveness of its operation. There are explicit terms of reference and

details of membership for Senate and its subcommittees, as well as key faculty committees. Faculty teaching committees for undergraduate and postgraduate areas provide operational oversight of quality assurance at a local level.

1.23 There are lines of delegation to faculties through the committee structure, with reports on actions taken by faculties being made to a range of senior committees, such as Senate, CPOC and ASQC. Associate Deans and Faculty Teaching Quality Support Officers have designated responsibility for quality assurance within faculties.

1.24 The governance framework, and the regulations, policies and procedures supporting it, are designed to ensure that the University can discharge its responsibility for setting and maintaining academic standards. Although programmes may request a variation from the regulations, the review team was informed that this would often relate to PSRB accreditation; such requests, following initial approval at faculty level, have to be approved by the ASQC and reported to Senate. Consideration of the minutes of Senate and other committees confirmed that responsibilities are being fulfilled.

1.25 The University programme approval and review processes serve to ensure that faculties and departments are adhering to the academic regulations.

1.26 External examiner reports also consider adherence to the academic regulations and comment on the operation of assessment, including confirmation that the regulations have been applied appropriately by those involved in assessment and at the boards. External examiners report that, generally, they are satisfied that the regulations secure standards and are being followed.

1.27 The review team noted that the condonement of failed modules for both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes is permitted. The academic regulations provide for the 'condonation' of credit by the examination board as an element either of progression or of the final classification of the award. While there are limits to the amount of credit that can be condoned, there is no explicit guidance on condonement and the achievement of programme learning outcomes. It is therefore possible for qualifications to be awarded without the entire programme learning outcomes having been met. Staff whom the review team met confirmed that this was possible, although they expected that it would be considered at validation or at examination boards; nevertheless, no protocols, guidelines or evidence of such discussions were presented to the review team. A recommendation in relation to this is made under Expectation A3.2.

1.28 Staff who met the review team were conversant with the academic regulations, the committee structure, and the framework for management and oversight of quality assurance and standards.

1.29 The review team found that the University has in place a governance framework with clearly articulated lines of delegation and responsibility. Its academic regulations are accessible, comprehensive and reviewed regularly, with changes being communicated to staff and students. The review team concludes, therefore, 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**

1.30 Programme specifications that are approved as part of the course design and approval process are the definitive course record, and are required for every award-bearing programme. Following validation, the specification becomes the principal reference point for course delivery, monitoring, review and assessment.

1.31 The information contained in the programme specifications is maintained on the course database in the University's student records system (LUSI). There are module specifications for all modules, which are also approved as part of the initial programme approval process.

1.32 Course handbooks and module handbooks can be accessed by students via LUSI, which is also used to facilitate and enable module selection and enrolment.

1.33 The University ensures that the information contained in the programme and module specifications is available on LUSI, which is its repository for such information, and which is accessible by staff and students. The academic framework and the University's policies would allow this Expectation to be met.

1.34 The review team considered a range of programme specifications, module specifications, and student and module handbooks. It also reviewed the processes for making changes to programmes and modules and how changes are documented and communicated to a range of stakeholders. The team met a number of academic staff and students, both on-campus and at partners.

1.35 The University provides guidance on the minimum content of programme and module specifications in its guidance on the programme documentation for validation and revalidation.

1.36 Programme specifications contain a range of information about the award, including aims, intended learning outcome, and alignment with the FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements and any PSRB requirements. They provide general detail about assessment, as well as learning and teaching. Partners are also expected to produce programme specifications. Module descriptors provide specific detail about the curriculum, learning outcomes and assessment, as well as level and credits. The University uses its Annual Teaching Review to ensure the currency of the programme specification.

1.37 Minor modifications to modules and programmes are permitted. Faculties and departments have authority to review and update individual modules within programmes on a regular basis, in line with University procedures. The process for such changes is outlined in the MARP, which permits minor modification to be approved by faculty teaching committees. Faculty Teaching Quality Support Officers maintain oversight of such changes at a local level, through a series of alerts. They are also responsible for keeping programme specifications up to date and for ensuring that staff involved in award approval and delivery are operating in line with University-stated procedures.

1.38 Following approval of a programme and/or modules, the specifications are made available to staff and students on LUSI. Oversight of the currency of this repository is the responsibility of the Secretariat, in particular the Academic Standards and Quality Unit.

1.39 Staff members whom the review team met demonstrated awareness and understanding of the processes for ensuring that programme and module specifications meet University requirements. They also confirmed their understanding of the minor modifications process and the importance of ensuring that any changes followed due process.

1.40 Students confirmed their general understanding of programme and module documentation and the availability of the specifications on LUSI. However, for the most part, they relied on student and module handbooks to provide them with this information.

1.41 The review team found that the University's policies and procedures provide for a definitive record of programmes and modules of its validated programmes; that there is a clear process for revision of the definitive record; and that responsibility for maintaining the currency of programme records is ensured. 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 (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**

1.42 The University's policies and procedures for programme approval are designed to ensure that the FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements and, where appropriate, PSRB requirements, are used when setting standards. The MARP, the Postgraduate Research Code of Practice and related documents set out clearly the policies and procedures, which include the setting of standards. These are updated annually.

1.43 The responsibility for designing and approving the processes is at institutional level, while the faculties are responsible for their implementation. Primary responsibility for academic standards within programmes lies with academic departments. Governance lies with Senate and its subcommittees, particularly with the Academic Standards and Quality Committee (ASQC), and with faculty committees.

1.44 The template for programme approval prompts the programme developer to make reference to the external reference points used in the development process. While externality was already included in the programme approval process through external examiners, PSRBs and employers, the University noted a recommendation in the previous review to include formal external input in the programme approval process, and from the start of 2015-16 it introduced a requirement for external advisers to be consulted on new or significantly revised programmes. Part of the external adviser's role is to comment on the alignment of standards.

1.45 For International and Regional Teaching Partnerships the University ensures alignment with the FHEQ and, where necessary, with the frameworks of international partners' countries. Additional requirements are included for programmes leading to a dual or double degree, to ensure equivalence of standards. The University's awards are aligned with the FHEQ and, where other schemes of credit are used, an alignment exercise is carried out. Guidance and support are provided for staff, both at Lancaster and in partner institutions, relating to the University's expectations. Partnership Management Groups also discuss standards, and consultants appointed to work at the major international partner organisations help to ensure that standards are aligned.

1.46 The design of the processes for approval would allow for the Expectation to be met.

1.47 The review team examined the University's quality assurance policies and procedures documents, in particular the MARP, the Postgraduate Research Code of Practice, programme approval templates and related guidance. The team also read examples of completed approval documentation, programme specifications and minutes of relevant committees, and held meetings with internal and partner staff.

1.48 Examples of completed programme specifications show that Subject Benchmark Statements and the FHEQ are consistently referenced. The examples, supported by staff comments, also show that robust steps are taken to ensure that programmes delivered by partners meet the same standards as internal programmes, the requirement for alignment being confirmed through Memoranda of Agreement and partner handbooks. Where

necessary, the frameworks of partner countries, such as the Malaysian Quality Framework in relation to the partnership with Sunway University, are also considered, to ensure alignment. This is initially done by the partner institution, with confirmation provided by the University.

1.49 Effective engagement with the FHEQ is demonstrated by the University's ongoing discussions, both internal and with other providers, on qualifications characteristics. For example, a recent decision has been taken by the ASQC to ensure that, as part of the master's programme approval process, postgraduate certificate and postgraduate diploma exit qualifications have defined learning outcomes.

1.50 The review team 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**

1.51 The University seeks to ensure that both the UK threshold standards, and its own academic standards in relation to learning outcomes, are maintained through its established governance structures, policies, regulations and procedures, which apply across the University. These are set out in the governance and management structures document.

1.52 Learning outcomes and a general indication of related assessment are agreed at approval. Assessments are designed to help students to achieve the learning objectives and to assess their success in doing so. Assessments are designed by academic staff, who understand the relevant learning outcomes, and who receive support through the Academic Standards and Quality Unit, as well as through faculties.

1.53 The University monitors academic standards through its annual monitoring process, Annual Teaching Review, where departments present commentary and evidence, including all relevant external examiner reports where confirmation is made that standards have been met and quality and currency of the programme maintained.

1.54 Examination boards have the primary responsibility for ensuring that relevant learning outcomes have been demonstrated through assessment and that standards have been met. Recommendations about the award of academic credit and qualification made to individual students are made by exam boards, and formally ratified by the appropriate Senate committee (undergraduate programmes), or by senior officers delegated by Senate (postgraduate taught and postgraduate research). External examiners have the opportunity, and are now asked explicitly, to comment on learning outcomes in the first section of their examiners' report, which is submitted on a University template.

1.55 The University operates a numerical, credit-based system of condonement, which permits a student in their pre-final or final year to fail in some elements of the required curriculum. No area of the academic material of the programme is reserved in the regulations as core to the award and necessary to be passed. For this reason, while systems for the design, monitoring, and assessment of learning outcomes in programmes are generally appropriate, the regulations as set out in the MARP do not ensure that the relevant learning outcomes will be met in every case of awarding credit or awards. Therefore, in the absence of any other definitive regulation or process, the Expectation would not be met.

1.56 The review team read documents relating to the University's process of awarding credits and qualifications, including the updated 2015-16 version of the MARP, examples of module and programme approval, validation reports, and external examiner reports. The team also met students, teaching staff, senior staff, and staff engaged in monitoring quality and standards at the University.

1.57 At the design and approval stage the relationship of intended learning outcomes and the appropriate assessment methods are addressed. New applications for programme approval are developed using CAIT, an online approval tool designed to collect all the information needed from a University-wide procedure, to enable informed consideration of programme proposals, and to secure academic standards and quality appropriate to the award in view. The review team considered this approval process to be generally robust.

1.58 Some student handbooks include explicit explanations for students about assignment design, learning outcomes and their relationship to the award. Students confirmed that, although their departmental handbooks vary in content and degree of detail on quality matters, they are generally clear about the relationship between assignments and intended learning outcomes, and that academic and College staff are accessible to discuss any related issues.

1.59 Although some external examiners have responded in a perfunctory manner to questions on learning outcomes and threshold standards (except in the case of International Teaching Partnerships, where the response has been more extensive), the format of the current examiner's response form encourages a fuller, reflective response.

1.60 The practice of condonement of failed elements of work (condonation) appears to fall short of the requirement that 'decisions to award credit or qualifications are based on robust evidence that the module learning outcomes (for the award of credit) or programme learning outcomes (for the award of a qualification) have been achieved'. Condonement in the case of failed modules for both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes is permitted, and a full explanation of the amount of credit that may be failed is set out in the 2015-16 edition of the regulations. This is expressed in entirely quantitative terms, and no requirement to pass core elements necessary to the fulfilment of the learning outcomes of the award or the academic integrity of the qualification appears in the regulations. The Lancaster University/Furness College partnership review held in July 2015 recommended that a review of the use of condonation in the BA Engineering course, in order to ensure that programmes meet professional requirements, and to make adjustments to regulations (as required), was necessary to bring professional requirements and University expectations/regulations into line. In discussion with senior staff on the relation of condonement to the achievement of learning outcomes, the review team was told that staff 'expected' that core requirements would be dealt with at the programme-validation stage, or at examination boards. However, they could not confirm that this was a University requirement.

1.61 The review team **recommends** that the University articulates how learning outcomes are met in cases where condonement is permitted.

1.62 Since there was no evidence that the University ensures that credit and awards are awarded only where the relevant learning outcomes have been met, the review team concludes that the Expectation is not met and the associated level of risk is moderate.

**Expectation: Not met**  
**Level of risk: Moderate**

**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**

1.63 The University has procedures in place for the annual and periodic review both of programmes delivered on campus and of those delivered by its partners, which include the monitoring of academic standards. There is appropriate governance of these procedures at both faculty and institutional level, as for the approval of standards.

1.64 The annual and periodic review processes include consideration of continued programme currency, making reference to the programme specification and any changes made, for example as a result of revised Subject Benchmark Statements or changes to the Quality Code, which are circulated by the Academic Standards and Quality Unit. The range of monitoring data that supports the process includes external examiners' confirmation of standards, and benchmark data. External examiners are prompted to comment specifically in their reports on comparability of standards and alignment with external reference points.

1.65 Additionally, the University undertakes wider reviews of particular categories of programmes to ensure that standards continue to be met, as exemplified by its review of foundation degrees.

1.66 These processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.67 The review team considered the policies and procedures for the review of programmes, as well as the related documentation and guidance for staff. It also read examples of completed review documentation, and met internal and partner staff and students.

1.68 Completed examples of programme review documentation show that academic standards are effectively confirmed through the annual and periodic review processes, and that any issues are identified and addressed, generally at departmental level.

1.69 External examiners comment specifically in their reports on comparability of standards and alignment with external reference points. These reports are referenced in the review processes.

1.70 The annual programme reviews for Regional Teaching Partnerships comment specifically on the alignment of standards and the use of external reference points. The annual quality reports for the faculties also confirmed that standards are aligned.

1.71 The review team found that the procedures for reviewing and monitoring standards were appropriate and managed effectively. The review team 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**

1.72 The University uses independent and external expertise at every key stage of the design, approval, assessment and monitoring of modules and programmes to advise on its setting and delivery of UK threshold academic standards, and to check that these standards are met and maintained. The Institutional Audit held in March 2009 recommended that the University should require an element of formal external academic input to programme approval. Progress towards these ends was reviewed in April 2012, and considered to be satisfactory.

1.73 The University Manual for Academic Regulations and Procedures contains fundamental underlying principles, which require staff to engage with a wide range of external reference points, including QAA codes of practice, Subject Benchmark Statements and the FHEQ. The regulation specifies knowledge of how the subject is taught in other higher education institutions; external examiners' comments; advice from subject-based learning and teaching support networks; the requirements of PSRBs; and any other credit frameworks to which the University subscribes.

1.74 In line with its regulations, the University specifies four main areas of external and independent expertise with which it engages at key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards: PSRB regulations; employers; external examiners and external assessors; and international partners.

1.75 In its approval processes the University seeks appropriate internal and external advice, and claims that this always takes place in the case of professional courses. A register of PSRBs concerned with programmes delivered by the University is kept centrally at the University to facilitate approval mechanisms. External advice is expected to be engaged in approvals of other programmes and qualifications, and external examiners always advise on the design, approval, assessment and monitoring of new modules, programmes and qualifications for home-based provision. Recent modifications to the regulations have tightened up the expectations for each requirement.

1.76 Each programme offered by the University is required to have at least one external examiner on its Board of Examiners. There are clearly defined processes embedded in the University regulations for the appointment of appropriate external examiners as well as for their participation in assessment boards, reviews, and approval of programmes. The University template for external examiners' reports has a prominent section for commentary on whether the UK threshold academic standards have been set appropriately, delivered, achieved and maintained in the academic area examined, but does not elicit a consistent or detailed response in many cases. For collaborative provision, external examiners are always specifically asked to comment on this area. The University has recently approved the appointment of external assessors to the validation and revalidation panels for its Regional Teaching Partnership programmes, from the start of 2015-16.

1.77 Summary reports, which are distilled from external examiner reports by the Heads of Departments/Units, faculty Associate Deans, and the Director of Quality Assurance and Enhancement, are considered during the University's review processes. External examiners' reports form the University's main resource for providing assurance on the ongoing maintenance of academic standards and benchmarking of comparable standards.

1.78 The design of the University's processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.79 The review team tested the University's design, approval, monitoring and assessment processes through reading documentation on all the above processes. This included external examiners' reports, supporting documentation on the selection and appointment of external examiners, and documentation demonstrating action taken after Board of Examiners' meetings on recommendations made by external examiners.

1.80 The review team found that the level of external input and scrutiny required by the University regulations throughout the processes of approval, assessment and review is effectively maintained, and is being systematically developed and increased. This applies to all undergraduate, postgraduate taught and postgraduate research programmes for which the University is responsible, including International Teaching Partnerships. Procedures are codified in the University's regulations. External and independent expertise is used at all key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards to advise on whether UK threshold academic standards are set, delivered and achieved, and whether the academic standards of the University are also appropriately set and maintained.

1.81 The review team found evidence that the University regulations are continuously monitored and updated, and welcomed recent changes made to the template for the external examiners' report, which increase the prominence of questions about the quality and standards of the provision, thus encouraging fuller, more reflective comments from the examiners. Recommendations made by external examiners are discussed by the Board of Examiners, department, faculty, and Academic Standards and Quality Committee on behalf of Senate. External examiners' recommendations form the core of the annual departmental teaching review, where action plans are drawn up and are revisited the following year to ensure that external recommendations have been implemented. Examiners comment on how far their recommendations have been addressed. At Periodic Quality Review (PQR), four years of external examiners' reports are again revisited to check that the standards and quality of the departmental provision are robust.

1.82 Employers whom the review team consulted expressed enthusiasm and readiness to be engaged in programme planning and delivery. However, the team did not discover a great deal of input to these areas of the provision. None of the employers interviewed had experience of the new employers' panels.

1.83 The review team discussed the latitude permitted to faculties and departments to make minor changes to individual programs without recourse to external examiners. Teaching staff explained that only very minor changes were permitted, and that incremental creep of accumulated changes was never permitted to alter the title, academic character or quality of the provision. Recently, the regulations have been updated to make this explicit.

1.84 The review team questioned staff on whether external examiners engaged in consultations with departments on new and modified module/programme provision might have a conflict of interest. Staff maintained that they are sufficiently aware of the risk of conflict of interest to be able to avoid problems, and expect only to employ external examiners in these approvals whose engagements as external examiners related to the courses in question have ceased. When departments undergo PQR, a high degree of external scrutiny is obtained, with two external subject reviewers, three University staff, and a student external to the department.

1.85 The review team found that the University makes good use of external advice in designing, approving, assessing and monitoring its provision, and is increasing its range and rigor, although it could make more use of employer contacts. External advice enables the University to be assured that its provision meets UK threshold academic standards, and that the academic standards of the University are appropriately set and maintained. The review team 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

1.86 In reaching its judgement about the setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.87 Of the seven expectations in this area, six are met. The review team considers the one Expectation not met (A3.2), the achievement of relevant learning outcomes, to carry a moderate degree of risk. The only recommendation made in relation to academic standards relates to this Expectation. There are no affirmations made in relation to this area.

1.88 The review team concludes that the setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards at the University **meet** UK expectations.

## 2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.1 The University has in place programme design and approval policies and procedures, underpinned by stated principles, to assure the academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. The programme approval process is overseen and monitored by the Academic Standards and Quality Unit, and the Director of Quality Assurance and Enhancement, and governance is in place through the committee structure. A process review is planned for 2015-16.

2.2 The programme approval process is set out in the MARP. Detailed procedures and written guidance are in place, and support is provided to departments by the faculty Teaching Quality Offices, and the Academic Standards and Quality Unit.

2.3 The University aims to ensure that programme development aligns with its strategic intentions, which have been recently reviewed. A two-stage process is in place to ensure that the business case for developing a new programme, and academic quality and standards, are considered separately. The University has noted the challenge of ensuring that international expansion does not compromise academic standards and quality. Where partnership is involved, the first stage includes appropriate consideration of legal and regulatory requirements, and of associated risks. Initial proposals are considered by faculty policy and resource committees or by the faculty Dean.

2.4 The academic approval process involves consideration by department-level committees, and by faculty teaching committees, against established criteria set out in the MARP. These include the credit requirements and programme length. Guidance as to other areas requiring consideration by committees, such as learning outcomes, assessment and entry requirements, is also detailed in the MARP.

2.5 Formal University-level approval is given on behalf of Senate by the Director of Quality Assurance and Enhancement. University-level committee consideration takes place where there are concerns or where good practice is to be noted for dissemination. Module approval follows a similar process, but modules are normally approved at faculty, rather than University, level unless there are issues requiring wider consideration. Once a programme is approved, a record is kept in the University's course database (LUSI).

2.6 The University aims to ensure that both internal programmes and those involving collaborative partners are embedded, if international, or clearly aligned, if regional. There are 'parallel processes' in place for collaborative programme approval, with additional stages and checks. Where external approval is required in the partner country, this is specified in the individual partnership handbook. The Collaborative Provision Teaching Committee (CPTC) and Partnership Management Groups have a role in considering programme proposals and ensuring that the agreed procedures are followed. Programme consultants also work with major partners to help maintain, and to report on, academic standards and quality.



2.7 For regional partner programme approval there is significant University oversight and input at all stages, as well as liaison with the partner. The process varies in some aspects according to the nature of the partnership. For international partners, course approval procedures for Lancaster-validated programmes delivered by its International Teaching Partnerships are approved for each partner.

2.8 The approval process and documents are reviewed regularly and changes are publicised to staff.

2.9 The design of the processes relating to the design, development and approval of programmes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.10 The review team looked at the approval procedures and related guidance, with particular reference to the MARP, and to examples of completed documentation and relevant committee minutes. The team also heard comments from internal and partner staff, student representatives and students.

2.11 There is clear evidence that thorough consideration is given to all aspects of programme design, including detailed outlines of learning outcomes and assessment strategy and methods. Examples of completed approval documentation show that effective use is made of external reference points, including PSRBs where appropriate, and that where external advice has been sought and given it has been responded to appropriately. Input is also provided by staff in other parts of the relevant faculty and by professional services staff, for example in relation to resources. Sample committee minutes showed that appropriate discussion of new programmes takes place in the faculties and at CPTC, and of the approval processes by the Academic Standards and Quality Committee.

2.12 The review team also saw an example of how an innovative dual PhD programme, which had arisen from a research collaboration, was being effectively managed, and that the necessary formal structures were being put in place by University and partner staff as the programme developed.

2.13 Students' involvement with programme development is achieved through their attendance at department-level committees and faculty teaching committees. There is also a plan to expand on a model recently used where staff and students, through the Students' Union, co-designed modules on environmental sustainability. However, the student submission to this review, and the student representatives whom the review team met, stated that students would like more involvement in programme design and development.

2.14 The review team 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 to Higher Education**

**Findings**

2.15 The University has an undergraduate admissions policy that states its commitment to accuracy, fitness for purpose, transparency and fairness. There are various overarching principles for recruitment and admissions for all student types reflected in the MARP, and in an admissions policy, which includes the procedures for complaints and appeals. The University's plans for recruitment are considered by the University Management Advisory Group, Senate and via two committees: the Targets and Tuition Fees Group, and the Widening Participation Coordination Group.

2.16 Overseeing processes for admission and recruitment are the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Chief Administrative Officer, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education), and staff from the Recruitment, Admissions and International Development Department, as well as the Communications and Marketing Department. A separate office operates for Medical School applications, but there is a sharing of practice between this and the undergraduate admissions team. Staff involved in admissions, including academic staff, have access to specific training.

2.17 Partner recruitment is broadly managed by partners, in accordance with partnership agreements. Processes exist for international agent recruitment, and all agents are accredited and trained in University procedures.

2.18 For UK recruitment there are open days, virtual open days, department visit days for applicants, and pre-arrival information. Equivalent processes exist for international recruitment activities, with overseas events and face-to-face meetings.

2.19 Information on the application processes is available online, including the entry requirements. Admissions criteria are clear, including those with specific requirements, such as portfolio reviews for art courses, and where professional bodies require interviews.

2.20 For most undergraduate programmes (except Medicine) applicants are informed of their admission decision by the central office and UCAS. Separate procedures exist and are set out for medical students. The format of rejection letters has recently been reviewed, and such applicants are informed of the appeals and complaints policy. A formalised process exists for course removal, should a course be removed during the application cycle.

2.21 A variety of pre-induction and induction activities are made available to prepare successful applicants for the transition to the University. An Applicant Engagement Tool has been created to inform prospective students more effectively, and to help prepare them for study.

2.22 The framework of policies and procedures, governance structures and key personnel would allow this Expectation to be met.

2.23 The review team investigated the policy framework, as well as committee structures associated with recruitment and admissions. Meetings with key staff and students provided further additional evidence of the work of the University in this area.

2.24 The student submission to this review notes that students are positive about the online information they received before arriving at the University. The submission was similarly positive about the accuracy of the prospectus and the admissions process. Students whom the review team met also expressed satisfaction with the way in which the University dealt with their application. This was also the case for those students studying at the teaching partners.

2.25 The University's recruitment, selection and admissions policies are informed by a robust framework set out in the MARP, which is clearly understood by applicants. University staff exhibit competence in the handling of applications, and, where necessary, in the very small number of complaints and appeals. The University reviews and monitors its policies and procedures, and makes extensive efforts to enable applicants to make informed decisions. The application process is clearly outlined, as are entry requirements, and the University has a rapid procedure of informing prospective students of any course changes. Additionally, the University undertakes extensive efforts to ensure that prospective students receive sufficient information as they transfer from applying for to commencing their study.

2.26 The review team 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**

2.27 The University has in place a Strategic Plan, with a clear and explicit commitment to 'research stimulated teaching and learning and new and alternative approaches to teaching and learning', and has articulated Learning, Teaching and Assessment Principles. Senate has strategic oversight of learning and teaching, but the University, while it looks for comparability of student experience, places a strong emphasis on providing a diverse range of programmes embedded in a strong disciplinary context.

2.28 The University oversees the quality of teaching and learning opportunities on campus, and in partner institutions, through its ATR and PQR. Strategic oversight is provided by the ASQC, which will, from 2016, be a subcommittee of a new Education Committee. The University has developed an annual thematic review process to supplement these department-based review processes, which focuses upon service areas identified by the University Management Advisory Group, for example the 2014 thematic review of learning support.

2.29 In addition to drawing on National Student Survey (NSS) data, which has informed the review of learning support, the University collects and analyses data to inform decision making. For instance, it draws on the Lancaster Student Experience Survey and a range of internal and external surveys to gather student views, and has a standardised institutional approach to annual module evaluation. Surveys are overseen by the ASQC and Senate. The University is working on strengthening its action planning process arising from these surveys.

2.30 The University has a comprehensive framework for staff learning and teaching development, and is developing higher-level staff development opportunities. Teaching quality is recognised in staff promotion. There is support for staff development in partner institutions. Organisation and Educational Development provides a range of staff development schemes at multiple levels, including the advanced programme, ATLAS, which leads to Higher Education Academy accreditation. ATLAS was piloted in 2015, with 16 academic and professional services staff, but is now available to all experienced staff; additional skills development opportunities are also offered.

2.31 Student expectations are set out in the Student Charter and students are aware of mutual expectations. At more local levels, faculties, programmes and colleges provide more detailed information about requirements and feedback opportunities. Students are consulted through a student representative structure and through regular feedback surveys. Opportunities for student engagement, especially at college level, are discussed further under Expectation B5.

2.32 The University's Learning and Teaching Framework provides for inclusivity in the curriculum, and equality issues form part of the annual and periodic review processes. Provision is made for student accessibility, both onto campus and on placement. Screening on arrival helps to ensure appropriate support and the provision of reasonable

adjustments. The University is responding to the impact of changes in disability support funding.

2.33 There is evidence of locally originated and applied innovation in relation to assessment and feedback, in line with the University's discipline-based approach, with sharing of good practice taking place through the ATR process. There has not been a full review of assessment and feedback since 2009-10, but a four-week turnaround expectation has recently been established (see also Enhancement). A four-week turnaround expectation has recently been extended to postgraduate taught programmes, and the Students' Union has worked to promote awareness of this deadline.

2.34 The framework of policies and procedures, governance structures and key personnel would all allow this Expectation to be met.

2.35 The review team investigated a range of documents relating to the policy framework, committee structures and operational activity associated with learning opportunities and teaching practice. Meetings with key staff and students provided evidence of the work of the University in this area.

2.36 The review team found that the Strategic Plan commitment reflects what is happening in terms of evidence of research-stimulated teaching, as well as innovative thinking and staff approaches to teaching and learning. Although this is not always explicitly articulated in decision making or by staff and students, there does seem to be a shared understanding of the principle. Students whom the review team met were generally positive about their learning experience.

2.37 Students are provided with a considerable amount of information about the learning opportunities and support available, both within the curriculum and in generic skills and extracurricular opportunities. Discipline-specific handbooks play a significant role in this process. These are not as consistent in terms of quality or coverage as they might be, and the University is working to enhance the consistency of information available. For example, a new framework for plagiarism has recently been implemented, but students would welcome more work to ensure universal and consistent provision of guidance on good academic practice for referencing, in addition to clear and helpful guidance on module choice and employability opportunities. However, while students expressed concern about variability, students whom the review team met indicated that they had generally been able to find the information they needed.

2.38 Senate's analysis of the 2014 NSS data led the University to conclude that, while students find the programmes intellectually stimulating, 'the delivery may be less strong in some cases'. The University draws from reviews of external examiner reports, annual and periodic review, and Partnership Management Groups to address generic staff development needs. A performance and development review process is in place for all academic staff, which can operate as an individual or group review process. Staff in need of additional training are supported. Development programmes have a good take-up: in 2014-15, there were 561 participants in courses and workshops, with just under 50 people participating in the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice, and 144 taking part in the Introduction to Teaching course. Probationary staff are required to take elements of these programmes but there is no general requirement for other staff to undertake them. Teaching plays an explicit role in promotions criteria, with an articulated approach reflecting four levels of teaching experience, including both quality and innovation. As described under Expectation B10, the review team found extensive evidence of the attention paid to staff development in the partnership oversight processes, with 57 staff participating at international partners and 19 visiting from an international partner.

2.39 The policies and procedures of the University foster a culture that allows a student to develop as an independent learner, studying their chosen discipline in depth and enhancing their capacity for analytic, critical and creative thinking. The University's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Principles set out the basis for the curriculum offer, including analytical and creative thinking, employability, and both skills and knowledge development. The review team saw examples of this being implemented in programme and module criteria, and in summative assessment outcomes, and although there is at least one example of external examiner comments about a lack of criticality, in that case this was followed up and changes were made.

2.40 The evidence considered by the review team suggests that the University has appropriate policies in place, and provides a good quality teaching and learning experience. However, the review team noted a governance gap between the strategic responsibilities of Senate and the work of the faculty tier of committees in relation to the promotion and oversight of policies around learning and teaching. The review team **affirms** the steps being taken to strengthen the strategic oversight and articulation of learning and teaching through the creation of an Education Committee and associated structures.

2.41 The review team 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**

2.42 Policies and procedures that enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential include the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Principles, which articulate curriculum expectations, the Annual Teaching Review (ATR), NSS consideration and resulting action plans, and an Estates Strategy, which seeks to improve the student experience through learning resources, teaching accommodation and extracurricular opportunities. The Collaborative Provision Oversight Committee (CPOC) provides an integrated overview of the student experience in partnerships. However, the University also places considerable responsibility for student development on academic departments supported by Colleges.

2.43 During 2015-16 the University has put in place an Education Committee to strengthen systematic oversight and monitoring, and to enhance the link between strategic and operational drivers. A new system of senior educational leadership was introduced in 2014. These roles are underpinned by a considerable number of academic and academic support positions with departments, and time is provided in workload models for academic support. These roles have been subject to a recent review.

2.44 The University collects and monitors both qualitative and quantitative data on student experience, progression and development, through specific surveys, annual feedback surveys, external examiner reports, and external surveys such as the NSS and Postgraduate Research Experience Survey. That data is used to inform areas of work; for example, recent thematic reviews on learning support and employability have stemmed from concerns identified during data analysis. Data are used in the ATR process, and at the Academic Standards and Quality Committee, to inform decision making.

2.45 Students are provided with learning support through colleges, faculties and support services, and the University has carried out a thematic review of learning support. Skills education is coordinated through faculty student learning advisers, who oversee the provision and coordination of a network of skills provision, and provide both academic skills workshops and bespoke sessions. They assess learning needs and aim to provide a flexible approach to learning support, for example in relation to international students. Students are provided with library support through specialist librarians and online resources for campus and partner students. There is considerable support for students during the transition to University, using a range of communication vehicles to inform students of opportunities, while a Student Journey Project is aiming to tackle continuing transitions within their university experience.

2.46 There is a strategic approach to the provision of physical resources and a rolling investment plan. The University has re-established a chemistry degree programme and is in the final stages of General Medical Council accreditation to take ownership of its medical programme. Regional and international partners are responsible for their own resources, monitored through annual and periodic review processes.

2.47 The Digital Lancaster strategy, developed in partnership with students, promises 'Learning without Borders', working across a global network of campuses as it is progressively implemented. The iLancaster and Digital Lancaster initiatives seek to ensure consistent access to resources.

2.48 Students are provided with a range of opportunities to develop their personal and professional potential through clubs, societies and volunteering. The opportunities are communicated through websites, handbooks and Students' Union information channels. The particular role of the college systems is discussed under Expectation B5. Following a review of the college system in 2015, the University is strengthening the relationship with several avenues of support, including college advisers, academic tutoring, specialist services, and a system of faculty-student learning advisers.

2.49 The University provides programmes with skills development appropriate to the intended learning outcomes, and offers opportunities within and beyond the curriculum to further develop skills. The University is enhancing its digital literacies and skills development through its Digital Lancaster project, which includes Learning without Borders and Digital Services. The University offers a network of discipline-based placement opportunities, which is particularly strong in the University Management School, although the University is aware of opportunities to strengthen institutional oversight and to extend provision in some disciplines.

2.50 The University's Equality and Diversity Committee has established a programme of work, which is drawing together data and developing action plans in relation to equalities, and the University is working on mapping student retention (see Expectation B3). While the policy is that teaching and learning should be inclusive by design the University also makes reasonable adjustments, and intends to enhance equality monitoring further, in order to identify and resolve any potential issues in retention, progression and access.

2.51 The institutional framework of policies and procedures would allow this Expectation to be met.

2.52 Through its scrutiny of a range of documents, the review team investigated the policy framework and structures. Meetings with key staff, students and employers provided additional evidence of the University's work in this area.

2.53 There is evidence of integration, coherence and internal cooperation to deliver a holistic student experience, both on campus and at partner institutions. The University has initiated a number of major projects, which have the potential to deliver significant impacts in terms of enhancing student development and achievement. For instance, thematic reviews include learning support, employability and the student journey. The University has embraced themes that cross subject boundaries, for example innovation in education for sustainability and ethical engagement in the wider community. The review team also saw evidence of the provision of a wide range of extracurricular, health, well-being and fitness opportunities. Nevertheless, students expressed concern about the variability of provision in relation to student development and achievement, including, specifically, employability support, academic integrity and the levels of in-session English language support available. However, the University has action plans to address these issues, mostly in projects currently under way.

2.54 In relation to skills development, the review team saw evidence of the faculty-student learning advisers providing a flexible range of workshops and other support that addresses individual and group needs. For example, in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, the faculty student learning adviser runs a writing mentor scheme, which employs trained postgraduate mentors to provide one-to-one meetings with students, a service that is reaching more than 200 students a year from across the faculty. Academic digital and transferrable skills are developed through a combination of integration into disciplinary study and additional skills development opportunities. For example, the Management School has a developed digital learning vision, the implementation of which is affecting pedagogy and skills development across existing modules and through the development of new modules.



2.55 In relation to employability, the review team met a range of employers with different interactions with the University, including summer internships, placements and curriculum development. The employers were complimentary about the students and the University, and think that there is scope for them to interact beyond the specific faculty links that characterise their relationships. The provision of placements is particularly strongly articulated in the University Management School, but is developing in other areas. The University values placements and has reconsidered the management mechanisms for placements as part of its thematic review on employability. The provision of employability-related opportunities is supplemented by a range of extracurricular opportunities, including an award-winning European Regional Development Fund project. The University also took part in a Higher Education Academy project to develop and test a 'shell' work-based learning module to facilitate wider use of work-based learning and to provide guidance on how to support students, and is now considering the next steps in this process.

2.56 Students also benefit from a strong international perspective: from the varied cultures of international students studying at Lancaster, the provision of extensive Study Abroad options, visits by students from international partner institutions, and curriculum interventions. The University has reviewed the opportunities for further globalisation at Lancaster, and colleges, faculties, services and the Students' Union are taking forward actions.

2.57 The strategic approach to resource provision reflects the University's commitment to student achievement. The University is working to ensure staffing levels keep pace with growth. The library has a strategic and responsive approach to discipline needs from campus and partner institutions. Resource provision is responsive to strategic priorities. For instance, in relation to the new chemistry degree and the medical programme, both requiring specific and costly resources, the process has been managed so as to supply the required facilities and material resources in a timely manner. The review team considers the effective resourcing of new taught curriculum areas at the University to be **good practice**.

2.58 The University Equality and Diversity Committee is responsible for the Equality and Diversity Priority Objectives, which include student equalities themes, with an annual report on progress. Priorities include developing physical and virtual services; recruitment; student experience; teaching, learning and assessment; and student careers and employability. The work plan includes a pre-registration programme for students on the autism spectrum and planning for changes to Disabled Students' Allowances. The terms of reference of this committee covers all University equality and diversity matters. It includes a Students' Union representative and is chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education). The University is developing data-gathering and monitoring processes to underpin work on the priority areas identified in the Equality and Diversity Priority Objectives and to enable it to show the impact of this developing strategic approach to inclusion.

2.59 The University acknowledges that in some areas the use of data would benefit from more work, for example in relation to student retention. There is evidence of quality review processes being followed through to monitor implementation, but this could be strengthened to ensure systematic action planning and monitoring of implementation in a timely manner. An affirmation is made in relation to this under Expectation B11. The review team **recommends** that the University develops further the process of action planning, timely implementation and monitoring in relation to learning and teaching practices.

2.60 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is moderate.

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

**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**

2.61 The University Strategic Plan commits itself to developing closer and more interactive relationships with students, ensuring that the student voice is not only heard, but that students play a central role in decision making through the formal representative structures and the Students' Union. The University Learning, Teaching and Assessment Principles and the Student Charter set out what the University expects from its students, and what they can expect from the University and the Students' Union.

2.62 The University is committed to student engagement through a two-pronged approach of formal selective representation and universal feedback through informal networks, as well as formal student feedback in comments, surveys and student involvement in various quality processes.

2.63 The approach taken to engage students in the University's Regional and International Teaching Partnerships (R/ITPs) depends on the local context, which is monitored through ATRs, and included in the Annual and Periodic Quality Reports, which feed into Partnership Management Groups, the Collaborative Provision Teaching Committee, and the Collaborative Provision Oversight Committee.

2.64 Formal student engagement at the Lancaster campus is carried out at departmental, faculty and University level, and set out in the Principles and Guidelines for Student Academic Representation approved in March 2015. The student academic representation system is coordinated by the Students' Union and the accreditation scheme for student academic representatives, which will be officially recorded on a student's degree transcript. There is an elected student representative on departmental staff-student committees, faculty teaching committees, and a number of University-level committees through Students' Union representation, which includes the Student Experience Committee, the planned Education Committee, Senate, and the University and Students' Union joint committee.

2.65 The University's college system provides students with an opportunity to represent their views on a range of non-academic campus-based areas, and additional opportunities to be involved in University governance. The collegiate model provides, through junior common room officers, an opportunity to serve on the colleges' syndicates, which report to Senate. The college Student Experience Committee is chaired by the Provost for Student Experience, Colleges and Library, and provides a cross-University platform for matters relating to student experience.

2.66 The University and Students' Union joint committee is responsible for reviewing annually the approach to student experience, and acts as a forum to consider and monitor joint activities being undertaken by the Students' Union and the University.

2.67 The University provides a number of opportunities for students to engage in surveys, as well as ad hoc working groups, focus groups, issues carousels, and the recent innovation hub, which seeks ideas from students and works with student developers to create new tools and applications aiming to improve the student experience. An example of this is the representation of the campus in a video game, which will enhance both virtual

access to the University for prospective applicants and student involvement in iLancaster. The University conducts end-of-module feedback, which feeds into ATR.

2.68 The student experience survey also covers non-academic areas of the University, including the social and welfare support to students. Conducted every two years, it has recently including a focus on the awareness of the student representative system.

2.69 Students have opportunities to engage in the quality assurance processes through formal representation structures, the opportunity to be members of Periodic Quality Review (PQR) panels, and thematic reviews. Students are not currently members of programme design, development or approval, but the Students' Union has had ad hoc involvement in the co-design of programmes relating to embedding sustainability in the curriculum, an initiative that has received funding from the Higher Education Academy and an outstanding grade in the National Union of Students Green Awards.

2.70 The University recognises the Students' Union as the student representative body, with elected representatives of the Students' Union on key University-level committees, including the University Court, Council, Senate, Student Experience Committee, the University and Students' Union joint committee, subcommittees of Senate, and the University Management Advisory Group.

2.71 The student academic representation system is jointly owned, supported and administered by both departments and the Students' Union. The Students' Union oversees the student representative system through training, support and working with them to ensure that they know how to access the views of the broader student population.

2.72 The Principles and Guidelines for Student Academic Representation set out a defined focus on postgraduate representation, with the introduction of three student representatives at faculty level for undergraduate, postgraduate taught and postgraduate research, as opposed to the previous model of one representative for all students. The policy and framework also includes clarity around meetings, introduction of annual student faculty reports, a defined role description, proposed formation of a University Academic Representation Advisory Group to monitor the effectiveness of the student representation system, and recognition of student engagement to be recorded on students' transcripts.

2.73 The Students' Union is responsible for centrally coordinating training for academic representatives, and provides a development scheme that gives opportunities for a student academic representative to support them to be more proactive in seeking opinion and feedback.

2.74 The contribution made by students who undertake formal roles within the student academic representation structure is valued through recognition in their student transcripts. In addition, each representative has the opportunity to engage in a University development programme, offering training in a number of transferable skills.

2.75 The Student Experience Committee and the joint committee between the Students' Union and the University continuously seek to improve student engagement. There do not appear to be set key performance indicators or systematic review as a holistic model. Currently, it is monitored at departmental and faculty level through ATR and PQRs; ITPs and RTPs are expected to discuss this within their ATR and annual quality reports. The introduction of the new policy and framework for student academic representation appears to involve an annual review through an advisory group.

2.76 The Student Academic Representative System underwent a review during the 2014-15 academic year. The consultation report noted that there was no consistent approach to the election of representatives, and that each department had developed its

own local-level methods of using the system. In response, the University, in partnership with the Students' Union, revised the Principles and Guidelines for Student Academic Representation, which set out a clearer representation structure and the introduction of the advisory group. RTPs have their own systems for student representation, as well as their own student union, and do not have formal representation beyond the Students' Union, although the University effectively uses established processes to ensure student engagement.

2.77 The student experience survey predominately focuses on non-academic areas of the University. It does, however, provide an additional opportunity for students to raise concerns and give feedback. Recent results suggest that there is a strong awareness of the student representative system, satisfaction with the learning resources provided, and a community feel at the University, in particular within each college. The Students' Union seems positive in the relationship it has with the University through the current governance structure, although engagement with postgraduate research students remains an ongoing activity.

2.78 This approach would allow the Expectation to be met, although evidence is limited due to the recent revisions to the formal student representation structure that took place in May 2015.

2.79 The review team reviewed the documentation made available, including the University's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Principles, Student Charter, policy papers, committee minutes, and student feedback surveys. The team also met senior staff, student officers, students, faculty and departmental staff, and major collaborative partners.

2.80 Students whom the review team met said that they are aware of their student department representative system, and the recent additional question to the student experience survey will ensure annual monitoring of the system. The Students' Union is positive about the Student Academic Representation System and confident that students understand their roles and their representatives.

2.81 The University accepts that postgraduate research students' specific requirements need additional consideration. It strives to resolve issues both informally and formally through the current committee structure; however, the Students' Union acknowledges that departmental representation requires development, and encourages the University to explore alternative mechanisms for engagement.

2.82 The Principles and Guidelines for Student Academic Representation set out the proposed formation of a University Academic Representation Advisory Group, chaired by the Students' Union Vice-President (Education). The University, however, does not currently make explicit review of all student engagement activity, and the reliance is placed upon the Students' Union and Provost. Terms of reference to both the Student Experience Committee and joint committee between the University and Students' Union allude to annual evaluation. The review team **recommends** that the University systematically monitors and evaluates at institutional level the scope and effectiveness of student engagement mechanisms in order to achieve effective partnership with students.

2.83 The review team found that the University takes deliberate steps to engage all students, both individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. The review team **affirms** the steps being taken to develop student representation and the involvement of the wider student body in institutional structures and processes.

2.84 The review team considers the distinctive culture of partnership, and environment of engagement developed through the collegiate system, to be **good practice**.

2.85 The review team 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**

2.86 The University MARP lays out the regulating framework governing assessment of all taught undergraduate, postgraduate taught and postgraduate research programmes, including those for partnerships. These are updated annually.

2.87 The aim of the University policies and procedures is to support equitable, valid and reliable assessments that maintain standards, and to provide all students with opportunities to show how they have met the intended learning outcomes of their modules and programmes. Procedures outline requirements for the whole assessment process, from design of assignments, and their approval by the faculty teaching committee, to the publishing of external examiners' reports, and publishing and recording results in the secure LUSI database.

2.88 Every department designates a member of the academic staff to oversee all assessment processes and to work closely with the Head of Department. The University develops assessment literacy in staff in all departments by training teaching staff in assessment.

2.89 The University has recently instituted a new formal policy on the recognition of prior learning and published it on the website.

2.90 The University operates a policy of anonymous marking for examinations, and of second-marking or moderation. Within this broad outline, University guidelines allow some variation between departments. Care is taken in translating grades and marks from work undertaken at other institutions, or in other languages as part of a degree programme, onto the University grade scheme.

2.91 The MARP gives full guidance on the conduct of examination boards, and external examiners are asked to comment on their organisation. Mitigating circumstances are considered by a special committee. There is a policy of anonymous discussion of candidates, and University policy and procedures relating to plagiarism and malpractice have recently been updated, and its framework revised. Registry checks progression and awards.

2.92 Student handbooks on modules and programmes explain the nature of assessment, and staff, such as student learning advisers or those involved in Organisation and Educational Development, provide supplementary advice as necessary. The jump in standards required between part one and part two of undergraduate degree courses is recognised as a difficult transition for many students, and the University intends to address this.

2.93 Partners are now bound by the same regulations as home-based University provision for the designing, conducting, marking and moderation of assessment, although variation is possible in some assessed programmes.

2.94 The University has a robust set of policies and procedures that would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.95 The review team analysed documentation, including initial programme approvals, ATR documents and action plans, assessment marking and moderation processes, student achievement, progression and retention data, and external examiner reports. It also met with students and staff.

2.96 The review team confirmed that assessment policies, regulations and processes are explicit, transparent and accessible to all intended audiences. Assessment is carried out securely, and records of decisions of boards of examiners and assessment panels are recorded carefully. Processes for preventing, identifying, investigating and responding to unacceptable academic practice are robust, with a recently implemented plagiarism policy, which is understood by students; departmental processes for considering mitigating circumstances have recently been enhanced. The University regularly and systematically evaluates and enhances its assessment policies, regulations and processes through Senate's delegated committee, the ASQC, some of the duties of which are to be assumed by the future Education Committee.

2.97 The University's new accreditation of prior learning system is now in operation, and details of Centre for Education, Training and Development accreditation and guidance towards application are available to prospective students online, ensuring that those who might be eligible are made aware of the opportunities available.

2.98 The review team confirmed that the University ensures that everyone involved in the assessment process is competent to undertake their roles and responsibility. Each department has a designated member of staff to oversee implementation of assessment policies and procedures, and ensures that teaching staff are kept up to date with changing assessment practices. Staff assessment literacy was also demonstrated by staff on International Teaching Partnerships (ITP) programmes, who are encouraged to move from assessing rote learning to developing and assessing independent learning in their students. Students appreciated the availability of staff for discussion of their assignments.

2.99 The University uses a wide range of assessment and feedback practices, which are carefully considered at the design, approval and validation stage of programme development, and which are monitored during the University review processes. Students and staff agree that the assessment criteria for each module and programme are set out in relevant handbooks, and that assignments are appropriate to the intended learning outcomes, from on-the-spot criticisms in the studio (Fine Art) and classroom (Creative Writing), to online feedback for science and computing subjects. These varied methods are used to provide students with opportunities to develop their reflective, innovative, technical and subject-related skills.

2.100 Assessment arrangements and criteria for each module and programme are set out in the relevant student handbooks. Students, including ITP undergraduates, are usually well informed about assessment criteria, and understand what they have to do in order to achieve a high grade. They are also well briefed about the nature of plagiarism and are now coming to terms with the new grading system.

2.101 Students whom the review team met appreciated the University's efforts to stagger the submission dates of assignments, but still experienced a certain amount of bunching of due dates for assessed work. Anonymous marking is now universally in place for examinations, but is not a requirement for coursework. A range of types of double-marking and moderation of marks is employed across the University, and permitted variants are now listed in the MARP. A four-week turnaround period for assessed work is now in place at all

levels and has recently been publicised by an awareness campaign. Students appreciated that the University has recently responded to a Students' Union-led initiative to establish a maximum four-week turnaround of all summative assessment. ITP assessment arrangements are rigorous. External examiners report that there is some delay caused by the home University in returning moderated marks for ITP student assignments; however, this observation was not confirmed by the review team's meeting with University staff.

2.102 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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



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

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

#### **Findings**

2.103 The detailed role of the external examiner at Lancaster University is codified in the University regulations. It includes the requirement to provide the University and its partner institutions with impartial and independent advice, and informed comment on the University's standards, student achievement, and the maintenance of its standard of awards in relation to UK benchmarks and professional requirements. External examiners are guided in their reporting by specific prompts in the report template.

2.104 The University has a process to identify and appoint suitably qualified external examiners, to brief them about their role through induction and mentoring, to provide them with materials and information throughout the examination process, and to respond to recommendations in their reports. Appointments are normally for four years. External examiners are normally recommended to faculties by departments. At this stage prospective examiners are asked to declare any area of possible conflict of interest or reciprocity. Faculties then apply for ratification to the University Senate via the ASQC. All proposals for external examiners go from faculty teaching committees to the Director of Quality Assurance and Enhancement, and then to Senate for scrutiny, approval and ratification. Regulations on who may be appointed are aligned with the Quality Code and are listed in the MARP.

2.105 Newly appointed external examiners are provided with a documentary briefing pack containing full details of the duties of external examiners; information about the conduct of exam boards; the use of mitigating circumstances boards; and specific practices at the University, such as the system of grading marks and scaling processes. Significant updates are provided to existing examiners. Since July, departments have been asked to put in place further support for both new and inexperienced external examiners, including arrangements for a preliminary visit to the University in order to meet staff, see work in progress, and familiarise themselves with programmes (see also Expectation B10).

2.106 Each external examiner must comply with the duties outlined in the contract with the University, and the responsibilities listed in the MARP. They are required to submit the completed template of the report form and may report separately and confidentially to the Vice-Chancellor should the need arise. Reports are received by the Head of Department, who summarises the content and replies to the examiner(s). Summaries are discussed by the department, the faculty teaching committee, the ASQC and the Director of Quality Assurance and Enhancement, and are then received in summary form by Senate. Reports form an essential component of the University's annual quality monitoring process and procedures, and of its periodic review of programmes. External examiners' reports are considered by the department at the ATR and forwarded for faculty consideration, and the Director of Quality Assurance and Enhancement presents a summary to the Academic Standards and Quality Committee. External examiners are also asked to comment on issues such as University regulations and areas of good practice, and such systemic institutional issues arising from external examiners' reports can be considered at periodic review.

2.107 Details of all external examiners and their reports are now published on the VLE, although students whom the review team met were almost universally unaware of this, as the student submission for this review suggested.

2.108 External examiners may, in addition, be asked to comment on new and modified course provision. As far as is possible, external examiners with previous experience of

examining University programmes are appointed for its International Teaching Partnerships (ITPs) provision. The MARP also sets out detailed regulations for the appointment of external examiners for its taught and research postgraduate programmes. Arrangements for the early termination of an external examiner's contract are set out in the MARP.

2.109 The processes relating to external examining would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.110 The review team tested the processes through reading a range of documents, including examples of external examiners' reports, appointment templates, induction information packs and minutes of board meetings; summaries of reports at departmental, faculty, Director of Quality Assurance and Enhancement, and Senate levels; action plans; and ATR and PQR reports. The team also met a range of staff and students both on campus and from partner institutions.

2.111 The University takes great care to make scrupulous use of its external examiners and has put in place explicit policies, regulations and procedures to ensure that its system of appointing, defining the role, and using its external examiners and their reports is sound. Processes work well and are being regularly updated and improved. Regulations for reappointment, restrictions on appointment, and termination of an appointment are also comprehensive.

2.112 The University monitors its own provision continuously. Changes agreed by the ASQC and Senate during the year are consolidated each summer, incorporated in the MARP, and circulated to all staff with an alerting cover note. Many of the University's templates for gathering information have been recently developed and standardised to ensure that UK standards and quality requirements are met. Amendments and major additions have been made to the MARP, partly in response to recommendations in the last audit of 2009. Some of the most recent changes, approved by the ASQC in July 2015, directly concern external examiner procedures, guidance and information.

2.113 Discussion of the appointment of an appropriate external examiner is part of the University's approval process, and an appointee is sought before the provision is delivered. The scrutiny of the qualifications of prospective external examiners is thorough and standardised by the use of a template proposal form for appointing an external examiner to undergraduate and postgraduate taught courses, including ITP and Regional Teaching Partnerships (RTP) provision. The appointment process includes nomination by the Head of Department or equivalent, recommendation by the relevant faculty teaching committee, and approval by Senate, affording appropriate oversight.

2.114 The induction system and information provided to external examiners by the University at the beginning of their contract is in the process of development, and external examiners comment favourably on the clarity of the information they receive about their duties before, during and after the meeting of the boards of examiners, on which they sit.

2.115 External examiners' reports seen by the review team were generally very favourable. All external examiners comment on all sections, although some give only a perfunctory 'Yes', or a tick, to some sections. Only one external examiner's report seen by the team noted that a confidential report had been sent to the Vice-Chancellor.

2.116 Heads of Department respond to external examiner reports, acknowledge points raised, and usually promise to act on the recommendations through the review processes, which contain an action plan. The 2012-13 report form for postgraduate courses in ecology includes a Head of Department's response to a very rigorous report from the two external examiners.

2.117 The review team found that, although the University is committed to transparency and therefore wishes students to have access to external examiners' reports, it was clear through the student submission to this review, and at meetings with students, that an effective method of making them aware of this resource has yet to be found. Therefore, the review team **affirms** the steps being taken to make external examiner reports readily accessible to students on the website.

2.118 The Secretariat and Academic Standards and Quality Unit compile annual summaries of the main themes and issues raised by external examiners in their reports as a focus for institutional discussion. They identify 'issues for institutional consideration' and examples of good and innovative practice, for undergraduate, postgraduate, RTP and ITP provision.

2.119 Recommendations in external examiner reports are considered an essential part of the next year's action plan for all departments. The Director of Quality Assurance and Enhancement has oversight of the process, which considers a range of data, student feedback on modules, and the external examiners' reports. The department is required to report on the key issues raised by external examiners in its written reports. All departments address the recommendations of external examiners reflectively, and the Associate Deans summarise departmental submissions and report on issues raised by external examiners.

2.120 Periodic review engages external examiners other than the current departmental external examiners on its team, and works with a small panel on assessing the whole provision of the department, including quality management. PQR assessors are asked to report whether there is evidence that comments from external examiners and student feedback have been taken into account within annual monitoring.

2.121 The review team 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**

2.122 The principles underpinning the University's programme monitoring and review processes are clearly stated, and aim to ensure the maintenance and enhancement of academic standards and quality, and an excellent student experience. Systems and procedures to support these principles are in place to ensure that programmes delivered by the University and by partners are regularly monitored and reviewed. In particular, an annual process and a periodic process for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes are clearly delineated and are supported by guidance, as well as by specialist staff.

2.123 Institutional oversight of the processes lies with the ASQC, which reports to Senate. As with other aspects of academic standards and quality, responsibility for implementation of the processes is delegated to departments and faculties. ATRs and PQRs are considered at faculty teaching committees and by the Associate Dean. PQR reports, and summary faculty ATR reports, are considered by the ASQC, where any University-level actions are agreed.

2.124 The procedures to be followed for programme review, and for the approval of major and minor programme changes, are set out in the Manual for Academic Regulations and Procedures, supported by additional guidance and templates. All departments are required to participate in the annual and periodic review processes to ensure consistency of quality and standards. Appropriate external involvement is included in the processes. The processes allow for the refreshing of programmes in line with external and internal drivers, including student feedback. The University reviews the processes regularly, making use of participant feedback as well as considering new external requirements.

2.125 To aid consistency further, procedures for Study Abroad programmes and programmes delivered by partners are generally the same as those for internal programmes, but the University has approved two of its major Regional Teaching Partnerships' own annual and periodic review processes, and major International Teaching Partnerships are also being supported to carry out their own PQRs. Some additional checks are in place for the oversight of partner provision, through external examiner report prompts, Partnership Management Groups and the CPTC. Partnership reviews are also used to discuss any issues of quality.

2.126 Confirmation of academic standards and quality, and the continued currency of the programme, is supported in the annual and periodic processes through a data set provided by the Planning Support Unit, covering a range of outcomes, from admissions to employment, and by consideration of external examiners' reports and, where applicable, PSRB visits or reports. The PQR process also considers programme validity, in addition to programme quality and students' academic experience, using a range of qualitative and quantitative data that includes external information and commentary.

2.127 The planning of actions in response to outcomes and the monitoring of progress against action plans at faculty and departmental level are also reported through the review procedures. Good practice and commendations are also noted in both ATR and PQR reports.

2.128 The University's thematic reviews and wider reviews also contribute to programme quality. A review of undergraduate programmes at Levels 4 and 5 (part one) is planned.

2.129 The design of the processes for annual monitoring and review of programmes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.130 The review team looked at the manuals, guidance and templates provided for the review procedures, as well as samples of completed annual and periodic review documentation. The team also read other review reports and relevant committee minutes, and held meetings with University and partner staff.

2.131 The examples of completed review documentation for internal and collaborative programmes showed critical and honest examination of programme quality and student achievement and satisfaction, although the review team noted variability in terms of thoroughness and reflective commentary. Actions arising from annual reviews are carefully monitored. Where external or University policies have required changes to be made departments have responded effectively.

2.132 Departmental and faculty committees, and the ASQC, give appropriate consideration to proposals for changes to programmes, including continued alignment with the University's requirements in relation to academic standards and quality.

2.133 Positive and deliberate action arises from the review procedures. In addition to action plans, there is evidence of action taken when standards at a partner institution were not met, resulting in the University suspending recruitment and taking over responsibility for the programme teach-out.

2.134 The University's wider review procedures also successfully identify areas for further consideration and action, such as the review of postgraduate taught provision, which recommended revision of postgraduate taught programmes in relation to employability, distance learning and the student experience.

2.135 Student feedback is included in the data considered as part of annual and periodic review. Students are also represented in the review procedures, for example as panel members for PQR events, and as committee members. However, the Students' Union considers that policies and procedures are not easily accessible on the website, and students on internal programmes whom the review team met were unclear about how representation in the procedures was achieved.

2.136 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of 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**

2.137 The University's complaints and appeals processes were recently updated and approved, and are set out in the MARP. The approach taken is to use local/informal resolution wherever possible, supported by subsequent appropriate formal procedures.

2.138 The University's academic appeals and complaints procedures apply to all students, including research students. The University claims that it has robust mechanisms for reaching decisions, supported by sound policies, procedures and documentation that are equitable and transparent. The procedures have been explicitly mapped to the Quality Code.

2.139 The two-stage appeal procedure is explained in detail in the MARP, and is accessible to students on the University website. This includes the formal regulations and a full explanation of the practicalities of making an appeal. There are statements about the Office of the Independent Adjudicator, an explanation of its role and a link to its website. The process is overseen by the Head of Student Registry. If there is a case to answer, a resolution in conjunction with the chair of the relevant examination board is attempted, or else the case is referred to an academic appeals panel, which comprises three staff, and is a formal hearing at which the student may be present and/or be represented. If the student is dissatisfied with the outcome, this may trigger a second stage, considered by the Head of Student Registry. A further hearing is organised, and if the appellant remains dissatisfied, reference to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator is available once internal processes have been exhausted.

2.140 A three-stage process exists for student complaints that meet appropriate criteria. The annual review of appeals shows that the majority of appeals are resolved at the informal stage. If informal resolution is not possible as a first stage, referral to the University complaints coordinator follows. Further investigations are presented to a complaints panel (consisting of three staff) and the complainant receives a written outcome. A review stage is invoked if the complaint remains unresolved and there are appropriate reasons for further consideration. Once internal processes have been exhausted, complainants are directed to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator. In 2014, seven complaints reached this level; one was upheld, one was partially upheld, and five were deemed not justified.

2.141 This approach would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.142 The review team tested the arrangements through discussions with academic and administrative staff and students, and analysing documentation.

2.143 The review team found that the University has a transparent, well understood, robust and comprehensive system in place to deal with student appeals and complaints, and that it makes regular and systematic efforts to ensure that it is monitored and reviewed. The student submission to this report makes no evaluative comment in this context. The review team heard comments to suggest that students, including those from partner institutions, understand the distinction between appeals and complaints, and that the available documentation (including online documentation) provides sufficient access to accurate information.

2.144 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

**Findings**

2.145 The University's Strategic Plan emphasises growth in partnerships as part of its plans to be a global university. It has developed a range of partnerships, both in the UK and overseas, with the focus on validation and Study Abroad arrangements. The University also has a number of access and articulation agreements.

2.146 The University has a defined typology for its collaborative arrangements, and maintains a register of live arrangements for validation, Study Abroad and exchange. Partnership arrangements can involve different types of degree awards, including single, dual, double or joint degrees, and degrees offered as part of a consortium. The University acknowledges that its typology may have to be reviewed in the light of the QAA characteristics statement: *Qualifications Involving More Than One Degree-Awarding Body*. Access, articulation, Study Abroad and exchange arrangements are considered to be low risk; small scale external delivery or validation partnerships involving one or two programmes, medium risk; and large scale external delivery, high risk, which leads to greater oversight at University level.

2.147 Partner approval procedures reflect the differing degrees of complexity and risk, as well as partner-specific differences. While the University distinguishes between major external delivery and smaller scale (minor) arrangements within its operational structure, it assumes ultimate responsibility and oversight through its management and committee structure. There are distinct stages within the formal procedures for establishing a new partner as part of the approval process, which separates the business case from the academic proposal. All arrangements are reflected in either a Memorandum of Agreement or a Memorandum of Understanding, the latter being used for arrangements where there is no University award or grant of credit, and no legal or financial liability.

2.148 The University provides access to staff development in learning and teaching for International Teaching Partnership (ITP) staff, either through its iCAP programme (which has recently been piloted at Sunway University) or delivered by Organisation and Educational Development staff or visiting academic staff. Regional Teaching Partnerships (RTPs) have their own staff development arrangements, which are reported through annual programme reports.

2.149 Responsibility for resources is devolved to RTPs and monitored through validation and APR reports received by University committees. The minimum thresholds for ITPs are set out in the Memoranda of Agreement, and monitored at the point of programme validation. They are scrutinised by Partnership Management Groups, and through the Annual Teaching Review (ATR) and Periodic Quality Report process.

2.150 Academic regulations are agreed with each partner. Any differences between the University regulations and the partner have to be approved by the University. The University is represented on all award boards. There are also additional requirements for ITPs relating to moderation. The University has responsibility for the appointment of external examiners for RTPs and ITPs, although RTPs may nominate external examiners. Criteria for appointment have been clarified to ensure that external examiners have experience of UK



higher education. RTP staff respond directly to external examiners, and from 2015 will include their responses with their APR. An annual summary of themes and issues arising from external examiner reports is produced by the Academic Standards and Quality Unit for consideration by the ASQC/ CPOC. External examiners at ITPs have additional responsibilities, including providing a judgement on the comparability of quality and standards across awards and relevant locations.

2.151 Major ITPs undertake a separate ATR of their programmes; these reports are considered initially by faculty teaching committees, as part of their ATR process. A summary of issues emerging from ITPs is considered by the ASQC and CPOC. RTPs conduct their own APR; the APR summary is considered by the CPTC. The annual review of minor external delivery partners, access and articulation is included in department reports.

2.152 RTPs undertake their own PQR using a comparable process to that of the University. Review of ITP activities has been considered alongside in-house provision. However, the University is encouraging its ITPs to undertake their own PQR, which has been piloted with one partner. Major partnerships are reviewed every five to six years; a specific partnership review template facilitates the testing of evidence and recording of outcomes. Degree certificates and records of study are produced by the University. Transcripts may be produced by the partner with the approval of the University; arrangements are reflected in the Memorandum of Understanding.

2.153 The University has a number of articulation arrangements with institutions who have their own degree awarding powers. In a number of cases these lead to the award of more than one degree (referred to in some University documentation as a double degree). However, students only receive a degree from the University if they progress to the designated award at the University. Such arrangements may require one, two or three years' study at the University, depending on the arrangement. Such arrangements are supported by a Memorandum of Agreement. Articulation agreements are formally approved and renewed by the CPOC.

2.154 Study Abroad partners are approved by departments and the CPOC. Curriculum matching is undertaken by the departmental Study Abroad adviser as part of the approval process, with input from the International Office. Continuing alignment of the curriculum is reviewed as part of the ATR and PQR processes. Performance of students is monitored as part of ATR. Translation of grades from exchange programmes is published in the MARP. Study Abroad/exchange arrangements are supported by a Memorandum of Understanding and recorded in the partnership register. Oversight of Study Abroad arrangements is undertaken by the International Office.

2.155 Arrangements for the approval, support and review of placements are devolved to faculties and departments. The nature of the faculty support is determined by the amount of placement provision in the faculty.

2.156 The University distinguishes between major and minor external delivery, and has clear procedures for the development of partnerships, and the ongoing oversight of partners, based on risk. It also has in place procedures for annual teaching and/or quality review, reflecting the type of partner. The process for the approval of placements is less clear. The policies and processes outlined would allow for the Expectation to be met.

2.157 The review team examined a range of policies and procedures relating to partner and course approval. It considered partner and course approval documentation, ATR or APRs, external examiner reports, and the minutes of a number of key committees with responsibility for collaborative provision. The review team tested its findings through meetings with University managers, academic and support staff, partner staff, and students and employers.

2.158 The University does not have a separate international strategy, but its strategic intent for growth in international partners can be found in its Strategic Plan.

2.159 The governance and management arrangements are laid down in the MARP. There are a number of committees that maintain oversight of partnerships on behalf of Senate. However, Senate receives reports from the CPOC, and updates on its partners from the Pro Vice-Chancellor (International) and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, supported by the Academic Standards and Quality Unit. These include the CPOC, which has oversight of all collaborative teaching provision except for two RTPs; and the CPTC, which has responsibility for the two major RTPs. All major partners (ITP and RTP) have a Partner Management Group that maintains operational oversight and reports to either the CPOC or CPTC respectively. Faculty teaching committees for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes also have an operational and management remit. The University has recently established an International Strategy Implementation Group. Its role is to coordinate the University's international partners, and monitor the implementation of policy and progress against a range of activities and key performance indicators.

2.160 Partner approval is managed at University level in line with the requirements laid down in the MARP. This involves consideration of the rationale for the proposed partnership and its strategic alignment with the University's Strategic Plan. The first stage considers, through the due diligence process, the partner's legal and financial status, its legal ability and its suitability for delivering programmes awarded by the University. The second stage looks at staffing, resources, course administration and quality assurance. Although significant emphasis is placed on the assessment of risk within the process, and there is an initial evaluation checklist, the review team found that requirements for the determination and calibration of risk are not clearly articulated in the pre-approval stage. The review team **recommends** that the University strengthens the due diligence process for assessing the appropriateness of different partners to ensure that it clearly determines the calibration of risk.

2.161 Initial approval at faculty level is provided by the faculty policy and resources committee and faculty teaching committees; this is then subject to CPOC approval on behalf of Senate.

2.162 Partnership review of major ITPs and RTPs takes place every five to six years. This is a two-stage approach. The partnership review process also separates the consideration of the strategic alignment, and financial and business considerations, from the review of quality assurance and enhancement.

2.163 Following the practice in place for its major RTPs, the University has recently introduced operational checklists for its major ITPs. These clearly identify where responsibilities lie for all aspects of the relationship, including quality assurance arrangements. They are also reflected in partnership handbooks.

2.164 Each partnership is supported by a Memorandum, with different templates for access, articulation and study abroad arrangements. The documents provide details of the expectations of the parties, including, where appropriate, quality assurance, staffing and resources, exit arrangements and financial arrangements. Templates are available from the Academic Standards and Quality Unit, which maintains a repository of agreements.

2.165 The partner approval stage is followed by programme approval, although it is possible for these stages to run concurrently for Study Abroad, exchange and access, and articulation. New programmes or modules at ITPs and minor external delivery are approved through the committee structure, with approval by faculty teaching committees and the CPOC, and involve faculty ITP directors, link tutors or consultants. For RTPs, programmes are approved by Partnership Management Groups, before following the

College's own procedures. PSRB accreditation is sought where appropriate. The University has recently introduced risk registers for each of its major ITPs.

2.166 In distinguishing between major and minor partners, major ITPs are required to produce their own ATR, supported by an action plan, which is considered through the partnership committee structure, with final consideration by the CPOC. RTPs undertake an APR process. The annual monitoring of minor partners is managed within the departmental process and the University expects consideration of the reports to be aligned with that process. Students at partner institutions provide feedback on their modules as part of the ATR/APR process. Students at partner institutions whom the review team met feel that their voice is heard and responded to.

2.167 The University appoints all external examiners to its partners, with the initial approval of faculty teaching committees. The University has recognised the need for all external examiners appointed to its ITPs to have experience of UK higher education. External examiner reports for RTPs and ITPs are received by the University, and circulated by the Academic Standards and Quality Unit to academic heads and quality officers within partner institutions, as well as to heads at the University. External examiners' reports are required to confirm that quality and standards at partner institutions are being met and maintained. Reports feed into the ATR and APR process, and are considered by the faculty teaching committee, and then the CPOC or CPTC respectively. Themes and issues arising from ITP and RTP external examining reports are summarised by the Academic Standards and Quality Unit, and identify areas for consideration and actions, monitored by the CPTC and CPOC respectively.

2.168 The two major RTPs have implemented their own PQR processes, approved by the University. ITPs are being encouraged to introduce their own PQR. There is a separate review schedule for minor ITPs and RTPs.

2.169 All partners and programmes within partnership arrangements are linked to appropriate academic departments and assigned, from within the department, an academic consultant or link tutor to support the department's work with its partners. It is an expectation of their role that they will liaise with the partner in respect of annual monitoring, external examiners, staffing and the student experience. Consultants and tutors are expected to submit visit reports and to include these in the ATR/APR process. In addition, each faculty has a Director of International Partnerships or equivalent who maintains faculty oversight. Major ITPs also have partnership directors based at the partner but appointed by the University to ensure operational enhancement and communication.

2.170 The University uses part of the fees from the financial arrangements to support staff development for partner staff, although the University acknowledges that this arrangement is not always formalised. Staff at regional partners also have access to staff development and resources at the University. The University has also developed an online Postgraduate Certificate for its international partners. Staff from its international partners are also encouraged to visit the University. The review team heard that ITP staff visit with their students as part of the summer exchange organised by the Students' Union and funded by the University. Staff at partner institutions met by the review team confirmed their satisfaction with the support provided by the University.

2.171 The review team noted the level of partnership staff engagement with the University, with 57 UK staff involved in visits with a strong mentoring focus, and 19 visits by partner staff to the UK. The review team considers the significant level of support and guidance for partners provided by University staff, which contributes to the quality of learning outcomes, to be **good practice**.

2.172 Arrangements for the termination of partnerships and courses are contained in the Memoranda of Understanding. Faculties and departments develop appropriate exit arrangements to support students through the teach-out period.

2.173 The Memorandum of Agreement sets out the parties' responsibilities for published information. Information for publication by partners is checked and signed off by the University. The review team heard that consultants and link tutors check websites as part of their role. Students at partner institutions who spoke to the review team were satisfied with the accuracy of information provided to them before and during their studies. Certificates and transcripts seen by the review team met University requirements and included the names of both institutions and the location of study.

2.174 Placements are organised at a local level, and the range of administrative support reflects the subject demand for placements. For example, in the University management and health schools, where there are a significant number of placements, placements are supported by an in-house team, which is involved in the approval, monitoring and review of placements. The review team heard that placement advisers maintain regular contact with students on placement but may not always visit. The employers with whom the review team met felt supported by the University, and understood their role as placement or work experience providers, but felt that more opportunities could be made from placement activity. They were also unaware of any specific policies or procedures to ensure oversight of placement arrangements. The review team found that mechanisms for arranging placements varied depending on the faculty and/or the nature of the placement, and that there was no University guidance for approving, monitoring and evaluating these arrangements. The review team **recommends** that the University puts in place explicit institutional guidance for the approval of placements to ensure that all such arrangements are implemented securely.

2.175 Study Abroad arrangements are supported by a Memorandum of Agreement and listed in the partnership register. The University provides a range of information on Study Abroad and exchange opportunities. Each faculty has a Study Abroad adviser to support and advise students undertaking this activity. They also advise whether or not there is an appropriate curriculum match. The review team was informed that a risk assessment was undertaken as part of the approval process. The International Office (central or faculty) maintains oversight of Study Abroad arrangements, and produces an annual report on student Study Abroad performance for consideration by the ASQC. It is also responsible for carrying out grade translations for the majority of students who study abroad. Advisers undertake a training session provided by the International Office. New Study Abroad arrangements (non-EU) are approved by the CPOC.

2.176 Following consideration of the evidence and discussions with a range of key staff, students, partners and stakeholders, the review team found that, overall, the University has in place appropriate arrangements for the approval, monitoring and review of partners and programmes, and that oversight of its Study Abroad arrangements is secure. However, the calibration of risk within the partnership approval process should be more clearly determined. There is also a need for the provision of explicit institutional guidance to ensure that placement arrangements are implemented securely. The review team acknowledges the University's support, guidance and engagement with its partners in enhancing staff and students' learning opportunities. The review team concludes, therefore, 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**

2.177 There are more than 1,000 full-time equivalent postgraduate research students, with a small cohort at Cumbria University, and on dual-degree programmes, studying within a strong institutional research environment. Support is provided not only by supervisors but also through research seminars and participation in the disciplinary research culture, supported by a researcher development portal, which links information about the University's research training programmes and other relevant information. The University is in the process of reviewing and changing its oversight of research degrees. Strategic oversight has recently moved to being a shared responsibility between the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education) and Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research).

2.178 The University's policy, procedures and guidance are set out in the Manual for Academic Regulations and Procedures, and the postgraduate code, accessible to staff and students. This is supplemented by discipline specific-guidance. There is a clear admissions process and criteria, and students are informed of expectations and responsibilities prior to arrival. There is a robust complaints procedure and a separate admissions complaints procedure.

2.179 There are institutional expectations for supervision, although there are currently significant differences between faculties in relation to the provision and management of supervision. Student supervision is provided for in workload allocation. There are staff development opportunities for supervisors that staff are encouraged to use, and mandatory training is being developed.

2.180 The Vitae framework is used in relation to research degree training, careers and development, and resources. The University is reviewing its research student training and development provision, including training for research students who teach.

2.181 The system of monitoring and supporting students is flexible and set out in the Postgraduate Research Code of Practice, with monitoring reports on diversity and completion. Senate last considered support for postgraduate students in 2011, and encouraged departments to review provision. Changes have been made to the Annual Teaching Review process to enhance annual review of research degree support, and the University is conducting a general review of its postgraduate procedures in 2015-16.

2.182 The policies and procedures currently in place are capable of meeting the Expectation in relation to the quality of research degree provision, but there are weaknesses in the strategic oversight and the ability to assure that this is the case.

2.183 The review team investigated research degree provision through consideration of relevant documents and in discussion with key staff and research students, including students at an international partner and at Cumbria University.

2.184 The review team spoke to staff and students associated with the dual provision with the Federal University of Lavras, Brazil (UFLA). The programme originated in students

spending a year abroad during their research degree, but academics identified the opportunity to enhance support to students by providing for dual supervision throughout the degree programmes. Students from both universities now study together as an integrated group. Students spoke passionately about the way in which the programme is research-led, fully integrated into a high quality research environment, and provides them with the international experience and networking that they need for their career. The review team considers the innovative postgraduate provision developed from excellent international research collaboration to be an example of **good practice**. However, the University recognises that the level of student integration into its research culture is uneven and that not all students, especially those who are self-funded, are consistently enabled to take full advantage of the opportunities that its research-rich environment is capable of providing.

2.185 The University Postgraduate Research Code of Practice sets out expectations of supervisors and students, but the student submission for this review suggests that there is a need to improve guidance for students on what they can expect from supervisors, and how to address issues relating to supervision if they arise. The University is aware of areas that need to be strengthened in relation both to the supervisory (and other) support that students receive and to the monitoring of student progression. A review of postgraduate support has commenced and will address those issues. The review team **affirms** the steps being taken to ensure that postgraduate research students have comparable opportunities and support across disciplines.

2.186 The University accepts that postgraduate research students' specific requirements for engagement need additional consideration. The Students' Union acknowledges that departmental representation requires development beyond the current informal and formal opportunities, and encourages the University to explore alternative mechanisms for engagement.

2.187 The review team considered the University's arrangement to provide an appropriate framework to secure the standards of research awards. However, the University itself recognises weaknesses in oversight of research degree provision, including strategic monitoring of progression and support, and is working to address data gathering and use. The review team **affirms** the improvements being made to the provision and systematic use of data to review and enhance the quality of learning opportunities, especially at postgraduate level.

2.188 One aspect of support for research students' needs action in advance of the completion of this wider review. While there is support and induction for research students, and students can arrive at any stage of the year, those who arrive mid-year do not receive as much induction support as those arriving in the autumn. The review team **recommends** that the University ensures timely induction for all research students irrespective of when they enrol.

2.189 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is moderate.

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

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

2.190 In reaching its judgement about the quality of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

2.191 Of the 11 Expectations in this area all are met, although in three areas the review team considered that there was a moderate level of risk. For each of these Expectations the review team has made a recommendation; in the case of the Expectation relating to the Quality Code, *Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others*, two recommendations are made, although this Expectation has also been judged to display some good practice. There are four overall examples of good practice identified in this area.

2.192 The review team has also made five affirmations in this area, reflecting changes that the University has made in recognition of potential weaknesses in its processes. While the review team recognises the potential positive impact of these developments, it is not yet possible to identify the outcomes.

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

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

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

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

##### Findings

3.1 The University undertakes to publish comprehensive information to prospective and current students and other stakeholder groups. It has a Digital Strategy and an Information Working Group, which oversees work in this area. The University publishes core information, such as its mission and strategies, and also makes publicly available other high-level strategic documents, such as its Student Charter. The Director of Communications and Marketing is responsible for the overall provision of information, supported by a Head of Internal Communications and other key staff. The Communications and Marketing Department is responsible for top-level web pages on the University's website, and the MARP clearly sets out the broad information requirements, and is itself regularly updated. The Student Charter is accessible to all students and was jointly developed by the University and the Students' Union.

3.2 The University produces print prospectuses for its undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Programme specifications provide the definitive source of information and are published on the website. The collaborative provision agreements set out responsibilities for the management of information published by partners. The University's collaborative partners produce their own publicity information, which is then subject to approval by the University. Information on partner websites is also periodically checked for accuracy by the University. Students at collaborative partners whom the review team met report that they received an induction, and have access to useful and accurate course and module handbooks, which contain information on rules, regulations, and complaints and appeals procedures.

3.3 For prospective students the prospectuses, both printed and online, remain key, containing information that explains the process for application and admission to a programme of study. From 2015 a special prospectus is being developed for international students. Further information is produced by departments, and the website provides a range of other information for prospective students, for example on programmes and module choice. Applicants who have been offered a place have access to additional information within an application of iLancaster, the Applicant Engagement Tool. This includes accommodation details, a welcome guide and specific information for international students. Further consideration of information in partner institutions is included under Expectation B10.

3.4 Electronic information is also used for current students. iLancaster is described as a 'one-stop shop', with a range of information, including programme and module information, teaching, learning and assessment, life at Lancaster, life after Lancaster, regulations, and staff details. After completion of their studies, students receive a certificate, transcript and Higher Education Achievement Report from the University. Paper versions are sent to students, and they can also be retrieved electronically at any point. Students graduating from the University's partner provision record the location of study on these documents.

3.5 In terms of information for those with responsibility for academic standards and quality, all staff are implicated in different ways, from module leaders to administrators. Key



individuals with specific responsibilities include the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education) and the Director of Quality Assurance and Enhancement. The MARP is the strategic and operational document setting out all information requirements; the electronic LUSI database is used as the repository for core information, such as programme specifications. The Annual Teaching Review process requires departments to confirm the currency of its programme specifications so that programme information is always up to date.

3.6 The University's approach to its provision of higher education information would allow the Expectation to be met.

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

3.8 The student submission to this review acknowledges the improvements the University has made in minimising the amount of repetitive information, but raised issues relating to the difficulties students have in locating information on the website, student portal and VLE, and needing to use the search functions instead. This was evident with the issue raised in relation to Expectation B7 in this report, regarding students' awareness of external examiner reports. Moreover, the student submission also raised the issue of accuracy, format and currency of departmental course handbooks. Students whom the review team met confirmed similar findings, and steps to rectify such issues were explained to the team in meetings with staff. The University had recently established an Information Working Group, with terms of reference to consider the governance and management arrangements needed to ensure that information to various audiences is fit-for-purpose, accessible and trustworthy. This group's work includes an audit of communications to students and additional guidance to departments specifying information in their handbooks. The Information Working Group is required to report its findings to the Academic Standards and Quality Committee. Furthermore, the Web Transfer Project was, at the time of review, creating a more authoritative and accurate single source of information, as well as easier navigation mechanisms. The staff demonstrated awareness of the requirements in respect of information as well as those reported by the Competition and Marketing Authority.

3.9 The review team **affirms** the steps being taken to improve the accessibility of information to students to ensure a single source of accessible information for current students.

3.10 The review team considers the accessibility of comprehensive quality assurance and standards information provided by the Manual of Academic Regulation and Procedures to be **good practice**.

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

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

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

3.12 In reaching its judgement about the quality of the information about learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

3.13 The review team judges that the one Expectation is met with a low degree of risk.

3.14 There are no recommendations attached to the Expectation and, although the review team makes an affirmation relating to recent work on the accessibility of information for students, it also found good practice in this area in relation to the Manual for Academic Regulations and Procedures.

3.15 The review team concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the University **meets** UK expectations.

## 4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

### Findings

4.1 The University Strategic Plan for 2020 sets out three key priorities: research, teaching and engagement, and four dimensions to ensure effective delivery of these priorities. The deliberate steps taken to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities are summarised by the University in two broad categories: dissemination and encouragement of effective practice, and institutional strategic initiatives.

4.2 One avenue for the dissemination and encouragement of effective practice is instigated by the thematic review process of the University's professional support services. The University Management Advisory Group, chaired by the Vice-Chancellor, establishes the themes to be addressed each academic year, providing strategic direction in these areas.

4.3 Additional reviews are undertaken throughout the academic year to ensure continuous improvement of the learning opportunities made available to students, in particular the recent postgraduate student provision review.

4.4 The current University-wide quality assurance processes provide opportunities for the identification of good practice and opportunities for enhancement. The production of ATRs by each faculty, and annual quality reports by Regional/International Teaching Partnerships (R/ITPs), draws together external examiners' reports, student feedback and student data. Reports are tabled at faculty teaching committees, the Academic Standards and Quality Committee, and the Collaborative Provision Oversight Committee.

4.5 The University has established a number of enhancement initiatives, which are being implemented in a systematic and planned manner. This includes the University digital vision, known as Digital Lancaster, which includes the Learning without Borders and Digital Services initiatives. Further initiatives include the approach to ethical responsibility and sustainability, which includes embedding sustainability into the curriculum, working in partnership with the Students' Union, and opportunities with local school engagement.

4.6 iLancaster, the University mobile application, leads in providing information to students and provides an extensive range of further applications. The development of the applications has had a high level of student input, and the majority of the development team are students. It has now been introduced as a tool with which to engage prospective students.

4.7 The innovation hub provides a designated team to support and seek the ideas of students to create tools and applications, aiming to improve the student experience. The hub has provided innovative approaches to virtual access to the University for prospective students, campaigns for improvements to learning spaces, and the use of gaming technology and badges within teaching and learning.

4.8 Internationalisation is essential to the University, and continued work is undertaken to support a strong international outlook. The establishment of an International Strategy Implementation Group, combined with the opportunities for international visits and, in particular, the Students' Union-led summer trips, was a recent step taken to improve the student experience.

4.9 The University does not currently have a platform for the systematic review or development of enhancement initiatives, relying on the activity of central departments such as Organisation and Educational Development, and the Management Advisory Group. There are also informal mechanisms and a reliance on senior management to review activity and advise developments.

4.10 Organisation and Educational Development facilitates a range of events aimed at disseminating good practice, creating networks among University staff and Students' Union representatives, and encouraging collaborative practice. Organisation and Educational Development takes a proactive approach in capturing good practice and provides a hands-on supportive function.

4.11 Information is generated by students, external examiners and stakeholders as part of the routine quality assurance procedures, enabling feedback to be used as part of the enhancement of the provision. Information is considered at faculty and University level as part of the oversight for each award, through ATR and PQR. RTPs feed into the process through annual quality reports. It is unclear how this feeds into Organisation and Educational Development events and sharing of good practice.

4.12 The evidence provided to the review team demonstrates that the design of enhancement processes has some limitations in the explicit identification of good practice, but does demonstrate discussion of areas requiring development and improvement, which would allow the Expectation to be met.

4.13 The review team examined documentation, including the University Strategic Plan, major University-wide quality assurance processes and enhancement initiatives, policy documentation and student information, and met senior staff, academic staff, professional services staff, collaborative partners, and students.

4.14 The University has taken clear deliberate steps at provider level to improve the quality of the student learning opportunities, setting out enhancement activities under two broad approaches. It is clear from the evidence, and from meeting staff and students, that large scale initiatives are driven from the Management Advisory Group through thematic review, and are aimed at strengthening the enhancement of the student experience, although actions and outcomes were not always clearly evidenced. The University also initiated Digital Lancaster, which draws together already developing practice into one central team, which includes the innovation hub and iLancaster. However, the review team found limited current evidence of a systematic approach to the evaluation of good practice arising from quality assurance processes, although it acknowledges the work carried out by Organisation and Educational Development in providing academic support and development.

4.15 The University's framework of structures, processes and procedures has continued to be reviewed since the appointment of the new management team in 2014: the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education); a Provost for Student Experience, Colleges and Library; and a Director of Quality Assurance and Enhancement, who have also strengthened the oversight of the educational provision. However, forums and mechanisms for how it considers learning and teaching matters continued to be under review. The review team **affirms** the establishment of a committee to provide a formal platform for strengthening enhancement across the University. This platform will also develop a new education strategy, which the University considers will identify priorities to enhance educational provision and the student experience, and to support planned growth.

4.16 However, the review team further **recommends** that the University ensures that the mechanisms to identify high-level themes arising from quality assurance and enhancement are systematically considered, implemented and monitored.

4.17 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is moderate.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

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

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

4.19 The review team judges that the one Expectation is met but with a moderate degree of risk, with one recommendation and one affirmation specified.

4.20 The review team found that the University has a system of thematic reviews designed to identify opportunities for enhancement, particularly in service areas, together with working parties reviewing the effectiveness of different aspects of the University's activities, such as the provision of information. The team also found some evidence of the identification and exchange of good practice at different levels of the University.

4.21 However, the review team does not consider that such enhancement activities are clearly articulated at University level, or that governance structures are currently in place to enable strategic priorities in relation to student learning opportunities to be identified, actioned in a timely fashion, and monitored effectively. Hence the affirmation relating to the recent establishment of a high-level committee that could provide a platform for such enhancement oversight, together with the recommendation about the consideration, implementation and monitoring of high-level enhancement themes.

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

## 5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

### Findings

5.1 Student employability is a focus and measure of success in the University Strategic Plan.

5.2 There are activities and support at all levels of the University, within and outside of the curriculum. Employability and enterprise within the curriculum focus on degree programmes leading to accreditation with a recognised professional body, and curricula are influenced at design by PSRBs and employers. In addition, a number of programmes provide opportunities for work-based delivery and placement opportunities; recently, bespoke programmes have been provided to ensure development opportunities for students.

5.3 The University Management School runs a placement scheme, which runs through all four years of an academic programme. Preparation modules are provided during the first two years, prior to a full-year paid placement. Many students use the placement scheme as preparation for their final-year project/dissertation, which requires an independent research element.

5.4 The University Management School also facilitates projects. Summer placements with external organisations provide opportunities for those who do not take up a curriculum-based placement to gain industrial experience by undertaking a project, either through the Knowledge Business Centre or through the Design Academy for Engineering Students.

5.5 A key example of student-relevant employability is undertaken at the University's Regional Teaching Partnerships, which have several programmes in which employers are closely involved in the design and running. They provide a practical application and understanding of how theories and models support working practices, with industry-relevant problems sourced from employers and the wider sector.

5.6 Careers support is provided at the majority of the University's teaching partners, and initiatives are fed through the quality assurance monitoring processes. This enables the University to gather and identify examples from its teaching partners of good practice in collaborating with employers. In particular, recent initiatives include long-term relationships with employers in the chemical industries, and internship opportunities at Sunway University; competitions and workshops can only strengthen the opportunities and focus of the University partners towards student employability.

5.7 The University has invested in providing enterprise beyond the curriculum, and has an established University Entrepreneurs Society, founded in 2002. The University has continued its focus on entrepreneurship by investing over £500,000 of its Higher Education Innovation Funding to secure resources from the European Regional Development Fund for a four-year student start-up support project, working with more than 500 University students to develop their entrepreneurial capabilities.

5.8 The Lancaster Award provides recognition for those who undertake extracurricular activity during their time at the University that develops them personally and/or contributes to the University or to wider society. Students who are successful in winning the award can apply for the Lancaster Excellence Scheme, gaining valuable experience with a sponsoring employer organisation.

5.9 The use of employment data is central to the University, and specific focus is given to the results of the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey; the Careers Service provides University and faculty reports, which inform annual teaching and reviews. It is noted, however, that more can be done in relation to the use and benefit of the Careers Service, with plans in place to strengthen the cooperation between academic departments and the Service, with joint reviews of the careers registration data, DLHE survey results and student engagement.

5.10 The University has invested in improving the opportunities and employability of its students, ensuring that the mechanisms in place are suitable and are reviewed appropriately. There is a clear commitment both within and outside the curriculum to ensuring that opportunities are available to meet the needs of the diverse student cohort, and to providing continued support to those who may require it.



## 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 30-33 of the [Higher Education Review Handbook](#).

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

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

### Academic standards

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

### Award

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

### Blended learning

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

### Credit(s)

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

### Degree-awarding body

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

### Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

### Dual award or double award

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

### e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

### **Enhancement**

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

### **Expectations**

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

### **Flexible and distributed learning**

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

See also **distance learning**.

### **Framework**

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

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

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

### **Good practice**

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

### **Learning opportunities**

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

### **Learning outcomes**

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

### **Multiple awards**

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

### **Operational definition**

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

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

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

### **Programme specifications**

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

## **QAA1464 - R4572 - Feb 16**

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2016  
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB  
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel: 01452 557 050  
Website: [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)