



# Higher Education Review of University of Hertfordshire

December 2015

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## About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at the University of Hertfordshire. The review took place from 30 November to 2 December 2015 and was conducted by a team of six reviewers, as follows:

- Dr D Houlston
- Dr I Giles
- Dr C Johnson
- Mr P Taylor
- Dr C Vielba
- Ms G Burton (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by the University of Hertfordshire 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 5.

In reviewing the University of Hertfordshire 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.

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<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).

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about the University of Hertfordshire

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at the University of Hertfordshire:

- 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 the University of Hertfordshire.

- The University takes an inclusive, developmental and enhancement-oriented approach to its engagement with its extensive and complex range of collaborative partner institutions (Expectation B10).
- The University promotes a strong cohort identity among its research degree students, within a stimulating and supportive learning environment (Expectation B11).

### Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The University is taking action to improve the quality and utility of marker feedback on assessed work, to meet the needs of all students (Expectation B6).

### Theme: Student Employability

The University aspires to become the UK's leading business-facing University, and is taking a strategic approach towards achieving this goal. This includes identifying specific graduate attributes and working to ensure they are fulfilled; developing links with employers and employer bodies; and closely monitoring employability activity. While students have reported a small number of placement-related organisational and support problems, the University is addressing these, and students who have undertaken placements have found them, overall, a positive experience contributing to their self-confidence and employability.

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

## About the University of Hertfordshire

The University of Hertfordshire (the University), the origins of which date back to 1952, was established in Hatfield in 1992. The University currently has over 25,000 registered students both on and off-campus, and over 2,500 staff in 10 academic schools on two local campuses. With an annual turnover of around £239 million, it is one of the largest employers in the area. It has a wide range of collaborative partners, both locally with four further education consortium colleges and internationally: over a quarter of students are reading for their degree at a partner institution.

The University's vision is to be the UK's leading business-facing University by 2020. This is integral to its Strategic Plan commitment to be 'internationally renowned for research-rich education that produces creative, professional and enterprising graduates'. This commitment informs the University's major focus on achieving a more integrated and coordinated approach to the student experience by active partnership between staff and students.

Since the University's last review in 2009, a new Vice-Chancellor and Deputy Vice-Chancellor have assumed office; a major restructuring has taken place, with the establishment of 10 schools with greater devolved responsibilities than their predecessor bodies; the Doctoral College, the Collaborative Partnerships Unit, the Centre for Academic Quality Assurance and the Learning and Teaching Innovation Centre have been established at institutional level, either de novo or by amalgamation; School-level deliberative structures have been strengthened to ensure their capacity to undertake additional devolved responsibilities; the newly created role of Associate Director of Academic Quality Assurance is designed to help ensure consistent cross-School quality management; the titles, terms of reference, reporting lines and membership of major committees have been revised; on both campuses significant investment has been made in the estate; and strategic changes have been made to both assessment weighting and the academic calendar.

The QAA Institutional Audit of 2009 made four recommendations, all of them technical rather than fundamental: two of these involved adjustments to aspects of short courses contributing to University awards; the third involved adjusting generic grading criteria and ensuring they were used by staff and understood by students; the fourth involved strengthening the institutional oversight of academic standards on higher-risk off-campus programmes. These recommendations have been addressed in full.

The University's collaborative partnership in Trinidad was subject to QAA review in 2014: the outcome was positive and the University has acknowledged and taken steps to address the two consequential recommendations concerning course representation for online programmes and response rates in module-level feedback questionnaires.

## Explanation of the findings about the University of Hertfordshire

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's commitment to safeguarding the standards of its awards by ensuring that qualifications meet all relevant external requirements and expectations is specified in its Student Experience Strategy and overseen by its Academic Development Committee, the minutes of which confirm that this is undertaken appropriately. Procedures are in place to assure the standards of credit awarded to incoming students and those completing short courses; programme specifications require reference to be made to *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and Subject Benchmark Statements; and reference to levels and Subject Benchmarks appears in programme documentation. The same approach applies to partner institutions, and, where the University works with other institutions to offer dual or joint awards, additional procedures are in place to map national expectations for academic standards against the FHEQ and its European equivalent.

1.2 Alignment with external requirements and expectations is assured in programme approval, re-approval and annual monitoring by panels being required to confirm that programmes and modules are at the correct academic level and that external reference points have been used appropriately. A similar obligation is visited upon external examiner reports.

1.3 The review team noted that while commentary on aspects of standards is made by exception in annual monitoring reports, it is included in all external examiner reports. Only a

small minority of such reports indicate any dissatisfaction with levels and standards achieved, and the University has robust systems to ensure that remedial action is taken.

1.4 The review team confirms, from documentary study and meetings with staff responsible for the oversight of standards on a range of provision, that institutional systems, policies, processes and procedures make appropriate use of all relevant reference points. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.5 The University describes its academic quality framework as promoting simplicity, flexibility and responsiveness to change, and assuring standards without over-burdening staff. Policies and regulations, which cover all provision, both on and off-campus, are maintained and reviewed by a Standing Working Party, amended annually by the Academic Board, widely available both online and in hard copy, and supplemented by varied forms of operational guidance knowledge of which is in some cases mandatory. Staff and students who met the review team commented on the accessibility and utility of policies and regulations.

1.6 The University's devolved structure means that responsibility for the consistent application of policies and regulations is widely distributed. Nevertheless, the Academic Board, supported as appropriate by the Senior Management Team, deans, associate deans and the Academic Registry, has institutional responsibility for academic standards, its discharge of this responsibility being, like other University practices, subject to audit by the Academic Standards and Audit Committee and the Board of Governors. The review team found these audits an effective means of assuring the appropriateness and effectiveness of policy and the consistency and compliance of practice.

1.7 The University began a major reorganisation of its academic structures in 2012. That process is now complete. As a result of these changes the Academic Standards and Audit Committee now reports directly to the Academic Board in recognition of its delegated responsibility for academic standards. Structures have also been strengthened at School level through the creation of school academic committees with operational responsibilities for the standards of the School's provision, including that delivered with partners.

1.8 The review team found, on the basis of documentary study and meetings with staff and students, that the University has transparent and comprehensive frameworks and regulations and appropriately designed systems, policies, processes and procedures of governance for the award of credit and qualifications. Institutional academic frameworks and regulations to govern the award of academic credit and qualifications are both transparent and comprehensive. The Expectation is met and the 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**

1.9 Module information is recorded on a Definitive Module Document which serves as a comprehensive source document linked to the website, the student record system and the virtual learning environment. Programme specifications, prepared for all taught programmes, are approved at validation and revalidation, reviewed annually and available online. Currently schools are responsible for ensuring they are up-to-date: a responsibility that will in future be complemented by a central programme specification database. Programme specification equivalents are provided for both research degrees and credit-bearing short courses. In collaborative provision, where programme specifications are provided in handbooks, a recent internal audit found them generally accessible, but reminded link tutors of their duty to review both handbooks and programme specifications regularly. On leaving the University, all students receive a detailed transcript.

1.10 The review team reviewed the effectiveness of institutional arrangements through documentary study and meetings with relevant staff and students, and confirms that the University's systems, policies, processes and procedures ensure the maintenance of definitive records for all programmes and qualifications. Students who met the team confirmed that the information available is comprehensive and helpful. The Expectation is met and the 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**

1.11 Programme approval procedures, both prior and subsequent to the event itself, are described in the Academic Regulations and the Validation Handbook. Modules are normally approved at programme validation and periodic review, and procedures exist for the associate dean to approve additional or substitute modules within existing programmes. Credit-bearing short courses are approved at School level, using the Short Course Descriptor. In the case of new programmes to be delivered by the colleges within the Hertfordshire Higher Education Consortium, proposals are considered by the Consortium Management Committee reporting to the Academic Development Committee. Proposals for new research degrees are initiated by the heads of research institutes and submitted to the Research Degrees Board for consideration, and thence to the Academic Development Committee for approval.

1.12 The review team examined the procedures by detailed documentary study and discussion with members of relevant committees and staff responsible for programme development, scrutiny and approval for both taught and research programmes. The review team found the procedures appropriate and robust in ensuring that academic standards are established in accordance with internal and external frameworks, and in operating consistently across the institution. The Expectation is met and the 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**

1.13 The University's regulatory framework is aligned with all relevant external expectations, complemented by a flexible approach to change, and effectively and appropriately communicated. Programme development, approval, assessment and review procedures confirm the significance of outcome-based assessment; learning outcomes are central to programme and module design; and module guides provide detailed information on how the achievement of learning outcomes is assessed.

1.14 An institution-wide grading system is supported by School, discipline and programme-based grading criteria, and both developmental activities for academic staff and scrutiny by external examiners ensure the integrity and sufficiency of the institutional approach to assessment. External examiners commended the effectiveness of the two-tier system of module and programme boards of examiners, administered locally but competently monitored by the institutional-level Centre for Academic Quality Assurance.

1.15 Students referred to inconsistency in the provision of assessment criteria in module guides and the virtual learning environment (VLE), and it was clear from discussion with students that they were only variably aware of the initiatives introduced by the University to enhance their understanding. The University accepts that this is a longstanding issue, but has put in place a number of measures designed to ameliorate the problem. In particular the Assessment-for-Learning Principles and developmental training opportunities provide guidance for academic staff in engaging students with the utility of grading and assessment criteria; and the University has made progress in developing a consistent approach to the deployment and interpretation of grading criteria and marking schemes across schools.

1.16 The review team examined, in detailed documentary study and discussion with relevant staff and students, the approaches the University is taking to assure itself of the security of its procedures designed to protect the integrity of its qualifications and credit. The team confirms the security of the University's procedures for ensuring that credit and qualifications are appropriately awarded. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.17 Each programme committee is required to prepare an annual programme (and in some cases also a subject) monitoring and evaluation report using a standard template, a task for which relevant staff receive training and support. Draft reports are subject to detailed School-level review prior to being signed off by the Dean, who may request a programme review if academic standards are considered at risk. Schools are required to submit an annual report on academic standards and the student experience, summarising the main strengths and weaknesses. Those aspects of the report relating to academic standards are considered by the Academic Standards and Audit Committee, while student experience matters are considered by the Student Educational Experience Committee. These arrangements appear fit for purpose.

1.18 The annual programme monitoring template is completed initially by the programme tutor and approved by the Programme Committee prior to submission to the School Academic Committee. The template is comprehensive and contributes to the self-evaluative School annual report submitted to the Academic Standards and Audit Committee (and, in summary form, to the Academic Board). The review team found that the Academic Standards and Audit Committee maintains effective oversight of academic standards across the University.

1.19 All programmes are subject to sexennial periodic review (home provision) or revalidation (collaborative provision), either of which may be advanced where necessary. The review mirrors initial validation, but is supplemented by annual monitoring and evaluation information and addresses the programme's alignment with internal and external regulatory frameworks and expectations.

1.20 Senior committees include collaborative provision within their terms of reference, though the eponymous Consortium Management Committee initially considers proposals for new programmes to be delivered only by the colleges within the Hertfordshire Higher Education Consortium. The Research Degrees Board receives and approves reports on the periodic review of each research degree programme, and the three research institutes report annually and comprehensively to this Board, their reports informing the annual report to the Academic Board. The review team examined each of these categories of report, finding them fit for purpose.

1.21 The review team considered a wide range of documents, and met staff with varying levels of responsibility and involvement in monitoring academic standards. On the basis of this the team concludes that the University's programme monitoring and review procedures address both UK threshold academic standards and those of the institution itself. The Expectation is met and the 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**

1.22 The University seeks advice and guidance from external experts as part of its approval and review procedures. In the many programmes subject to professional, statutory or regulatory body approval, involvement by the relevant body is encouraged at programme development, and validation panels require external membership. The review team confirms that the University engages with appropriate external and independent expertise in the planning and review of its programmes.

1.23 External examiners are appropriately deployed at all levels. Their reports inform annual monitoring within each School, and programme committees produce and track appropriate responses to them. External examiner reports and responses are also analysed at institutional level, where a shortcoming in the submission of assessment items for external examiner approval prior to being issued to students was recently identified. The review team examined the nature and extent of this shortcoming and confirms that the appropriate assessment items were routinely forwarded to external examiners for scrutiny prior to submission to students at the University or within its partnership arrangements.

1.24 The review team confirms that the University makes appropriate use of external and independent expertise in setting and maintaining academic standards. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

1.25 The University is assiduous in ensuring the alignment of its procedures for setting and maintaining the academic standards of its awards with all relevant external requirements and expectations. As an institution that devolves considerable operational responsibilities to its 10 schools, its centrally managed procedures ensure that these responsibilities are discharged responsibly and in a manner aligned with University policy.

1.26 This part of the report contains no identified good practice, affirmations or recommendations, but draws attention to an affirmation later to appear: the University acknowledges and is addressing an inconsistency in the quality and timeliness of feedback given to students on their assessed work. For the most part, arrangements are satisfactory but in a minority of cases remedial action is required, and such action is currently underway.

1.27 Overall the University has a sophisticated set of institutional mechanisms and procedures, enabling it to assure itself that the academic standards it sets for its credit and awards are secure both for students on-campus and for those studying in a partner college locally or overseas (over a quarter of its students are in this position). The team therefore 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 Programme development is based on wide-ranging consultations, normally involving external examiners and consultants; professional, statutory or regulatory bodies where appropriate; and staff and students from cognate areas. Developers receive detailed central guidance on the requirements to which they are subject and how to meet them. Programme design involves a careful risk analysis, and takes full account of the University's approach to learning and teaching, external reference points and institutional strategic aims.

2.2 Taught programme approval (validation) is devolved to the Academic Standards and Audit Committee and involves a four-stage process of strategic approval; a planning meeting with internal stakeholders; academic scrutiny by internal and external peers; and final approval. External representation is appropriate, and care is taken to ensure its independence; students are involved both as internal stakeholders and as panel members. These arrangements are well designed and fit for purpose.

2.3 The requirements visited upon validation panels are detailed and rigorous. Training is provided for chairs and clerks, and students due to meet the panel are encouraged to avail themselves of an advance meeting to optimise their understanding and contribution. Where conditional approval is given, conditions must be met prior to the grant of formal approval; and where recommendations are made, they are followed up after one year's operation.

2.4 The review team reviewed these procedures by documentary study of arrangements and discussion with staff involved. It found that the roles and responsibilities of those involved at each stage in the process are clearly specified; that detailed templates and guidance are provided; that engagement with appropriately qualified external advisers is central to the process; that professional, statutory and regulatory bodies are involved where relevant; and that staff who met the team spoke positively about the clarity and security of the process.

2.5 The review team found that the University has effective procedures for programme design, development and validation. The Expectation is met and the 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**

2.6 The University's strategic approach to entry requirements involves the Chief Executive's Group making the final decision on entry tariffs, supported by information and advice from significant internal stakeholder groups. The approach is supported by clear policy statements for research students, taught postgraduate students and undergraduate students. In collaborative provision the principles of admissions are specified individually in formal agreements and in the Collaborative Partnerships Handbook. In common with other aspects of the University's partnership arrangements, this is realised in practice by the close working relationship between the partner and the University link tutor.

2.7 The University has clear and systematic admissions procedures, including entry requirements at all levels; provision for applicants with additional needs; readily accessible pre-application information for potential applicants; resources to help prospective students make a successful transition to study; procedures for complaints and appeals; planned changes to programmes; and an integrated approach to induction which involves the University's Student Centre, schools and student mentors. The process as a whole, which is kept under review, was examined by the review team and found to be fit for purpose.

2.8 Operational responsibility rests primarily with programme admissions tutors, whose role is defined and supported by a handbook and networking opportunities with their counterparts in other schools, with the aim of facilitating the sharing of experiences and ensuring familiarity with institutional requirements.

2.9 The review team confirms that the University operates effective processes for all aspects of admissions. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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



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

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

#### **Findings**

2.10 The University's strategic approach to learning and teaching is articulated in its Student Experience Strategy, which aligns with the newly developed Strategic Plan and is a mechanism for delivering the Learning and Teaching Policy and Graduate Attributes. At institutional level the Strategy is operationalised by the Student Educational Experience Committee with the support of the Learning and Teaching Innovation Centre; at programme level it is addressed at validation and review, and features in guidance available to curriculum developers. The review team examined these arrangements and found them fit for purpose.

2.11 The Student Experience Strategy, which was developed with student support and involvement and will be informed by the education strand of the Strategic Plan currently under development, establishes a clear direction for the University's approach to learning opportunities in the next quinquennium: the Centre for Academic Quality Assurance is central to ensuring it is addressed at validation and review. Graduate attributes are also well embedded in these procedures, and at programme and module level: students are aware of them and see their value. Work-based learning, too, which the University, with the support of the Careers, Employment and Enterprise Service, aims to provide for all students, for expanding employment opportunities, is an area that has seen significant development.

2.12 Partnership with students is integral to the University's approach. Students were aware of and appreciated the mentoring support available to them from their peers in higher years of study, and peer mentors in turn (the nomenclature varies across schools) appreciated the support they receive from programme teams and central services to help them carry out the role effectively.

2.13 Central to the Student Experience Strategy is an inclusive approach to teaching. In this connection the University stated that it has made progress in closing the attainment gap between white and black and minority ethnic students - a sector-wide challenge. The proactive monitoring of performance data by the Student Performance Monitoring Group led the University to set an equality objective in April 2012 to reduce the differential attainment gap by 10 per cent. The review team heard that this gap has thus far been reduced by 7 per cent, by innovations which include the wider introduction of anonymous marking, and staff development activities focusing on unconscious bias. This work is still in progress: the University is working with other providers tackling similar issues, continuing to develop its mentoring schemes, and working with local employers to help inspire students and provide role models in its efforts to continue reducing the differential.

2.14 The work of the former Blended Learning Unit has encouraged the University to describe itself as sector-leading in the use of technology-enhanced learning. The review team confirms that this work has enabled technology-enhanced learning to be integrated into much of standard practice, and that the VLE is central to learning and teaching, to the delivery of flexible learning opportunities and for assignment submission. Students and staff value the VLE as a source of information, support and communication.

2.15 The University aims to ensure that academic staff are appropriately qualified, initially through selection and continuing through induction, mentoring and staff development: the review team learned from such staff that this aim is achieved. The University supports and encourages staff to gain teaching recognition in line with the UK Professional Standards Framework, and has supported both its own staff and those of partner institutions to work towards Higher Education Academy fellowships.

2.16 The review team gave consideration to the range and systematisation of staff development arrangements in particular, and confirms that procedures are in place to ensure the learning environment is fit for the purpose of delivering a high-quality learning experience. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.17 The University aims to support its diverse student population and enable all students to achieve their potential. This particularly relates to employability, in respect of which the University works to strengthen partnerships, develop placement opportunities and ensure that its students are aware of and equipped to fulfil employer expectations. This approach has implications both for the curriculum and for learning and pastoral support.

2.18 In this context, the Student Educational Experience Committee's responsibility for overseeing student development and achievement extends beyond the academic into the wider student experience through its reporting relationship with the Campus Life Group. This Group aims to provide an integrated student support system between schools and central services. Information about services available to students is widely available: a dedicated information manager is assigned to each School to help students obtain maximum benefit from the information sources available, and School engagement teams bring together specialist staff to help provide a spectrum of support tailored to each School and its students. These arrangements are robust and fit for purpose.

2.19 Students found the pre-induction materials available helped them begin preparing for their courses, and induction helped them settle into higher education more generally. New international students had encountered some minor issues, but said they had been dealt with quickly and efficiently.

2.20 Support staff confirmed that a tailored approach to student support is in place. Several services have been co-located into a Hub, and student engagement teams are working directly and beneficially with programme teams. All support services are available to students in partner organisations, and increasingly the Careers, Employment and Enterprise Service offers them online support.

2.21 Support is provided to students to help them find placements. Students who had not had a placement confirmed that they felt well prepared for placement work, while those currently on placement confirmed that appropriate support is in place for them, including regular contact with academic staff. Academic staff also found the support they received from the Careers, Employment and Enterprise Service invaluable, and confirmed the importance of regular contact with students on placement.

2.22 The review team confirms that the University operates effective procedures designed to enable students to develop to their full potential. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.23 The University's commitment to working with students and student representatives is stated in its Student Charter. Oversight of student engagement is achieved primarily through the Academic Standards and Audit Committee and the Student Educational Experience Committee. The review team found these arrangements appropriately designed and effectively operated.

2.24 Student opinion is expressed individually in module and other questionnaires, and collectively both in meetings of the Vice-Chancellor and Students' Union Group and through the representation system. Both senior managers and Union representatives spoke positively of the former, as well as of the relationship between the University and the Students' Union more generally.

2.25 Student representatives are in place on all institutional-level quality management bodies, but not on the Chief Executive's Group (though the Vice-Chancellor told the review team that he personally would be happy for a student representative to join this Group). Both staff and students spoke positively of the representation system as a whole, and, while acknowledging that some schools had had difficulty garnering sufficient interest for elections to take place, School-based staff reported that invited representatives had been no less effective than elected ones. Students in partner institutions participate in programme committees: the Students' Union facilitates this primarily through email contact and the provision of training materials.

2.26 The University funds School Student Representative Organisers to support the representation system. Significant differences exist in the manner in which schools deploy their representatives and representative organisers: some host forums, some create online representation structures, some invite students to attend external conferences, some are described by their representative organisers as quick to respond to concerns raised, some are described as interpreting the organiser role as primarily facilitating communication with students, and some are said to prioritise maximising the response rate to the National Student Survey. In discussing the School Student Representative Organiser role with staff and students, the review team learned that, despite its differing execution, the role adds value to staff and students by optimising the student voice in a manner appropriate to each School.

2.27 The review team explored the opportunities available for students to engage with quality assurance and enhancement processes in extensive documentary study, and in meetings with staff and students. The team concludes that the University takes appropriate steps to engage with students, and, while differences at School level exist, they are a broadly appropriate constituent of devolution. The Expectation is met and the 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**

2.28 The University's statement of Assessment-for-Learning Principles informs its assessment strategies and aims to ensure that assessment is aligned with programme and module learning outcomes. The Principles are supported by documentary guidance to help academic staff develop modes of assessment which encourage student engagement; students receive information about assessment expectations through programme handbooks and specifications, definitive module documents and the VLE.

2.29 Alongside this guidance, the Student Experience Strategy and Graduate Attributes promote the deployment of assessment tasks and practices supporting the development of independent learners and transferable skills relevant to future employment. Professional development modules on assessment and feedback form part of mandatory training for new staff, while postgraduate students preparing to teach receive similar and compulsory guidance in the Doctoral College Researcher Development programme. These arrangements are fit for purpose.

2.30 The University has sought to improve what it considers its disappointing performance in the National Student and Postgraduate Taught Experience Surveys by establishing an Assessment and Feedback Working Group to focus on improving the timeliness and quality of assessment feedback and on rescheduling assessments. In terms of timeliness, the University has at times failed to meet its 20-day turnaround policy, and students also reported clustering of assessments as a recurring problem. As a consequence, assessment landscapes have been introduced to map assessment demands across the academic year, and the Learning and Teaching Innovation Centre is supporting schools in improving their assessment and feedback practices.

2.31 The University's attempts to solve these problems were the subject of detailed scrutiny by the review team. The University acknowledges inconsistent practice in the application of penalties for late submission of coursework and in the alignment of grading criteria and assessment outcomes, but the review team accepts that the scheduling of assessment demands and the timeliness of feedback have generally improved.

2.32 In terms of the quality and utility of feedback on assessed work, however, meetings with students and summary analysis of external examiner reports identified considerable variability; the full impact of recently introduced remedial actions has yet to be evaluated; and discussion with students confirmed the existence of continuing disparity in the quality of feedback provision. The review team, accepting that the University has identified and is addressing these issues, **affirms** the actions being taken to improve the quality and utility of marker feedback on assessed work, to meet the needs of all students.

2.33 Collaborative partners are required to adhere to University policies and procedures regarding assessments and examination boards, and annual activity agreements are designed to ensure that link tutors provide such staff with appropriate development and support. The operation of annual activity agreements and the effectiveness of link tutors

contribute significantly to the University's inclusive approach to partnership development (see also paragraph 2.52).

2.34 Student assessment in partnership provision is moderated by the University as well as by external examiners: the University encourages cross-moderation where a programme is delivered by more than one partner institution. The review team examined assessment arrangements across the partnership portfolio, drawing on previous reports, documentary study and discussion with staff of a partner institution, and confirms the security of assessment arrangements and the robustness of moderation.

2.35 In the case of academic misconduct, appropriate academic and disciplinary penalties are applied. Some students report disparity in the application of anti-plagiarism software: the review team, having discussed this with staff and students, found that institutional policy guides but does not decree the manner in which schools deploy this software, and that some local flexibility in usage is permitted.

2.36 The review team confirms that, while specific areas for improvement were identified, the University's approach to assessment is overall equitable, valid and reliable. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.37 Within the University's two-tier examination board system, programme external examiners are responsible for confirming the standard of student achievement. The detailed scrutiny of student work, including progression between levels of study, is undertaken by module external examiners.

2.38 Thorough and clearly defined procedures are in place for the appointment of external examiners, normally for a four-year term. Those new to the University are required to attend an induction workshop and are further supported by a bespoke Handbook for institutional-level information, School-based documentation and access to relevant parts of the VLE. The review team explored the working of partnership arrangements for external examiners, and found consistency with University procedures and expectations: external examiners visit partner institutions to attend examination boards and meet staff and students annually.

2.39 The University has detailed procedures for receiving, studying, analysing and responding to external examiner reports at all institutional levels. Emerging themes are identified by senior officers, and a summary report is submitted to the Academic Standards and Audit Committee. The review team noted the University's responsiveness to critical comments by a minority of external examiners concerning the scheduling of their responsibilities, and found the enhanced use of secure intranet sources enabled more immediate and comprehensive information to be available.

2.40 Students have access to external examiner reports through the VLE, and within handbooks, programme committee minutes and annual monitoring and evaluation reports. Student representatives on programme committees are involved in developing responsive action plans.

2.41 The review team confirms that the University makes scrupulous use of external examiners. The Expectation is met and the 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**

2.42 Annual monitoring is undertaken at module, programme and School level, with school academic committees receiving annual monitoring and evaluation reports on each programme. Central oversight is exercised through the Academic Standards and Audit Committee and the Student Educational Experience Committee, and through School annual reports, risk registers and action plans, with a summary prepared for the Academic Board, highlighting items to be brought to institutional attention to inform future planning. The same procedure, with appropriate adjustments, applies to collaborative provision.

2.43 Annual monitoring and evaluation reports, prepared by all programmes and short courses are designed to ensure that programme teams respond in full to the wide range of internal and external feedback received. The procedure is based on exception reporting, supported by an executive summary intended to enable senior managers to identify strengths and weaknesses. The review team examined the exception reporting system and confirms that it is used appropriately. A risk-based approach is taken to the review of these reports, with a formal meeting called for all collaborative partner reports and any campus-based reports where desk-based study detects potential problems or a lack of critical commentary, or where possible good practice is worthy of wider dissemination.

2.44 All programmes undergo periodic review (home provision) or revalidation (collaborative provision) at least every six years. The four-stage process involved takes the form of an initial analysis, planning meeting, final development stage and approval stage. The review team examined these elements of the process in documentary study and discussion with those involved, and found them well designed and understood, and operationally effective. Procedures for programme withdrawal or suspension are in place and designed to protect the interests of current students and accepted applicants: the review team confirms their adequacy.

2.45 The review team concludes that the procedures for annual monitoring and review are appropriate, and that policies are in place to ensure effective implementation. The Expectation is met and the 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**

2.46 The Student Procedures Unit is responsible for managing complaints and appeals by students and applicants in a manner the University described as coordinated, consistent and fair, and which aims to ensure that students understand the grounds permitted, the distinction between them and how to proceed. Appropriate training is provided for any staff involved in dealing with complaints. The review team found the procedures fit for purpose.

2.47 The Complaints Policy, which embraces both students and applicants, was internally audited in 2013, using the Quality Code as its reference point, and is widely available on the VLE. While some students described the process as lengthy and complicated, the review team noted that the Students' Union provides support to complainants, user-friendly advice and support are available, and opportunities exist for speedy informal resolution. The team particularly noted that a helpful document, Student Complaints: Frequently Asked Questions, is available on the VLE, and confirms that the process is both clear and fit for the purpose of dealing with a potentially wide range of grounds for complaint.

2.48 An annual review of complaints is prepared for the Vice-Chancellor, and a report of numbers and trends is submitted annually to the Academic Board and biannually to the Board of Governors.

2.49 The review team confirms that the University's complaints and appeals procedures are fair, accessible and timely. The Expectation is met and the 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**

2.50 The University invests heavily in a large and complex collaborative provision portfolio delivered in the UK and overseas, which involves over a quarter of its students. Its partnership arrangements include a consortium with four local further education colleges with bespoke governance arrangements; an embedded college; franchised, validated and supported distance learning programmes; articulation agreements; accreditation of externally provided short courses; off-site delivery arrangements; dual and joint degrees; study abroad arrangements; and work-based placements. The development of collaboration is central to the Strategic Plan, and further expansion of student numbers is anticipated, possibly in the form of a smaller number of large partnerships. All partnerships have a secure legal basis, with up-to-date agreements and clear procedures for programme and partnership termination which protect student interests. The University has mapped its collaborative working against the Quality Code and undertaken audits of specific aspects of collaborative provision, in each case finding practice aligned with relevant Expectations but in some instances recommending ameliorative modification.

2.51 Responsibility for partnerships is embedded in the work of the Academic Board and its committees, and in the responsibilities of senior managers and their departments. The Academic Development Committee undertakes due diligence on prospective partners and approves and reapproves partners; the Collaborative Partnerships Unit deals with enrolment, assessment, student records and graduation for most partnerships; UH Global is responsible for the strategic promotion and development of international partnerships; and school academic committees discharge formal responsibilities for standards and quality.

2.52 School-level link tutors are appointed to all partnerships; where large provision is located in different schools, an institutional-level quality liaison manager is also assigned. A University tutor is employed onsite at the largest partner institution; and the Business School, which has the largest number of collaborative students, has a Head of UK and International Collaborations. Study abroad arrangements are overseen by the office of the Director of International Education, while a Placements Policy Group supports the development of School-level placements.

2.53 On the basis of extensive documentary study, a bespoke meeting with Consortium colleges and meetings with University staff responsible for a broad range of policies and procedures, the review team found institutional arrangements ensure the effective management of collaborative provision. This echoes the findings of all QAA reviews of the University's collaborative partners at home and overseas.

2.54 With specified and appropriate exceptions (for example, collaborative provision annual monitoring always involves a meeting with the relevant school academic committee), standards are secured by the same procedures as for campus provision. The review team examined examples of these procedures, and confirms the soundness of their design and their operational effectiveness.

2.55 With the exception of Consortium applicants, who are admitted directly by the University, admissions decisions are delegated to partner institutions, with compliance with

relevant criteria monitored by the link tutor. Assessment setting and marking are also delegated, subject to internal and external moderation; limited adaptation of assessment schemes and tasks to reflect local circumstances is permitted. Examination boards meet at least annually at the partner's premises to allow external examiners to meet staff and students; complaint and appeal procedures are delegated, but students have the right to a final hearing by the University; and the Student Performance Monitoring Group undertakes and reports on cross-partner comparisons in this and other areas.

2.56 Partner staff are approved to teach at validation, and additions are scrutinised by link tutors. Students have access to the VLE (where a customised version of the University's A-Z Guide is available to them), and, as feasible, to campus-based support services. Partners are required to collect student feedback, which is included in their annual monitoring report, and the University is currently addressing the problem of variable levels of student engagement among partners.

2.57 The University's 50 or so link tutors are formally selected, trained and supported. Their work is critical to the maintenance of quality and standards, and adjustments to their training and support recommended by a recent internal review are currently under development.

2.58 The University takes a proactive approach to the development of partner staff, extending its approach to enhancement to its collaborative partners, and encouraging the sharing of good practice and innovation. The review team saw a number of examples of this policy in action, and identified as **good practice** the fact that the University takes an inclusive, developmental and enhancement-oriented approach to its engagement with its extensive and complex range of collaborative partner institutions. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

### **Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees***

#### **Findings**

2.59 The Research Degrees Board has overall responsibility for research degrees, including approving regulations and the Student and Supervisor Handbook, both of which are reviewed annually. The University offers 12 professional doctoral degrees, subject to quinquennial review and with numbers accounting for almost half of the doctoral student population of around 750. Administration, quality assurance, networking events, examinations, supervisor training and the Researcher Development Programme are managed by the Doctoral College, established in 2012 to facilitate a significant expansion of student numbers.

2.60 All research degree students are assigned to one of three research institutes, the heads of which report to the Director of the Doctoral College and sit on the Research Degrees Board. Research institutes handle academic administration, including registration, progression, extensions and suspensions, as well as supervision and support. All relevant arrangements have been mapped against the Quality Code and are fit for purpose.

2.61 Students and their supervisory team are monitored annually, and an annual report is completed by the heads of research degrees for consideration by the Research Degrees Board. The University takes part in the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey and disseminates the results internally.

2.62 The critical role of the Doctoral College in overseeing the research degree student experience was confirmed by staff and students. It trains staff for doctoral degree supervision; it encourages them to become external examiners to support their supervisory role and aid them in preparing students for their viva voce examination; it supports staff research aspirations; it works with schools to identify areas of potential research student supervision; and it prepares students for their teaching responsibilities, following which they receive continuing oversight, advice, support and encouragement from discipline-based staff.

2.63 Students who met the review team valued these training events, explaining that they had prepared them for their own studies as well as providing extracurricular opportunities to advance their personal and professional development. They were similarly positive about the information provided in the Doctoral College Handbook, finding it both accessible and reliable, and about the research environment within which they were working. They were aware of the potential isolation of doctoral students, and appreciated the College's efforts to integrate PhD students and the 12 streams of professional doctorate students, providing several examples of opportunities for networking and sharing experiences and ideas deriving from them. The team identified as **good practice** the University's achievement of a strong cohort identity among its research degree students, within a stimulating and supportive learning environment.

2.64 The review team confirms that the research environment for the University's doctoral students is academically secure, personally supportive and designed to enable

them to achieve outcomes appropriate to their academic potential. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

2.65 The University is assiduous in meeting its formal responsibilities; its student-facing activities (in particular learning advice, pastoral support and careers advice) are professionally and sensitively undertaken; the intellectual basis of its teaching is supportive and inclusive, but also challenging; and the professional dimension of its approach is central to an institutional aspiration to become the country's leading business-facing university by 2020.

2.66 This section of the report contains two features of good practice (in connection with its collaborative arrangements and its research degree students) and one affirmation of the progress being made in improving the quality and utility of marker feedback on assessed work: this is an attempt to solve a longstanding internal problem, albeit one affecting only a minority of students.

2.67 One distinctive feature of the University's educational portfolio is the fact that over a quarter of its students are reading for their degree (or part of their degree) in a partner institution, either locally or internationally. The University's support for these arrangements is undertaken in a professional manner, and imbued with an integrative ethos which contributes to the development of the partner institutions as well as assuring the quality of learning experienced by its off-campus students.

2.68 The University has a research degree student population of around 750, reading either for a PhD or for one of a suite of 12 professional doctoral awards. Both student numbers and the professional doctoral portfolio have increased significantly in recent years, and the Doctoral College's response to the demands presented by these changes, involving creating and sustaining a suitably supportive, integrative and intellectually enriching environment, is also identified as good practice.

2.69 The Expectations in this section are met, and in all cases the risk level is low. The team therefore concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the University **meets** UK expectations.

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

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

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

##### **Findings**

3.1 The University's website provides straightforward information for a public audience, prospective applicants and their families, and students. The information provided ranges from mission, values, strategy, governance, policies and regulations to the academic environment, prospectuses, how to apply and the entry requirements in place. The review team undertook spot checks on this information and found it clear, accurate and trustworthy.

3.2 The primary information source for current students is the VLE, which, in addition to constituting a portal for information relevant to all students (collaborative as well as campus-based), is tailored to each student's programme of study, providing information on modules and assessments and a programme handbook. Students, while generally positive about this provision, commented that the structure of information provided is somewhat variable, but not that it falls below the level of acceptability.

3.3 Clear lines of accountability for ensuring the accuracy and trustworthiness of information are in place, with corporate material falling within the remit of the Director of Marketing and Communications; School-level academic information in the hands of centrally managed School marketing and recruitment managers; and information for those with responsibility for academic standards and quality provided by the Centre for Academic Quality Assurance. The records system provides specific information about students, programmes and modules.

3.4 The University is responsible for establishing the accuracy of all information published by partner institutions, and makes regular checks on partner websites. It reviews the Collaborative Provision register monthly to ensure accuracy; it maintains a central register of legal and exchange agreements; and (with one agreed exception) it issues all certificates and transcripts using information recorded on the student record system. The review team confirms that the name and location of the partner institution were stated on the transcript seen, and noted that transcripts are printed on stationery containing contextual information about the UK and university systems of credit award and degree classifications.

3.5 The review team confirms that the information the University provides is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

3.6 The University has robust procedures in place for ensuring the accuracy and trustworthiness of the information it publishes. This includes online information for the public and potential applicants and internal information on the virtual environment for students, as well as hard copy. The information itself is of interest and value both generally and to actual and potential students, and the students who met the review team spoke positively of it.

3.7 The University monitors the websites of its partner institutions and is responsible for many associated and significant documents, including the Collaborative Provision Register and partnership agreements. It discharges this responsibility in a competent manner. The review team therefore concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the University **meets** UK expectations.



## 4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

### Findings

4.1 The University links its approach to quality enhancement to its Strategic Plan, relevant activities either being explicitly mentioned in it or aligned to it. Enhancement is also a central feature of the Student Experience Strategy, while the Student Engagement Development Programme Board, chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, was established in academic year 2014-15 to give strategic direction to, and coordinate, major information technology development projects impacting directly on enhancing student learning.

4.2 The Strategic Plan 2015-2020 provides the direction for enhancement. The review team found that the University uses its committee structure to oversee the enhancement of students' learning opportunities at an institutional level, while the oversight of enhancement is formally owned by the Student Educational Experience Committee and complemented by the Academic Standards and Audit Committee. Enhancement is monitored at School level through annual School reports in a manner that constitutes a deliberate, strategic attempt to improve the quality of student learning.

4.3 While students expressed some reservations as to the extent to which enhancement trickles down to programmes, the review team found that the Centre for Academic Quality Assurance and the Learning, Teaching and Innovation Centre maintain close dialogue with schools to ensure parity of student experience, that the Academic Standards and Audit Committee is an effective conduit between the central University and schools, and that the Student Educational Experience Committee, which is charged with ensuring the continuing delivery of quality enhancement, takes a systematic and evidence-based approach to selecting and generating enhancement activity: several current projects, including the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Success Project (see paragraph 2.13), derive from its work.

4.4 The review team also noted a number of significant School-level initiatives which, while they do not meet the definition of provider-level enhancement, can nonetheless be reasonably described as deriving from the University's enhancement-oriented ethos. Examples include a peer-assisted learning-in-practice scheme in one School, a creative arts toolkit in another and a small-scale innovation award on enhancement in a third.

4.5 The review team concludes that the University takes deliberate steps at an institutional level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

4.6 The University takes a systematic and strategic approach to the enhancement of students' learning opportunities. Enhancement features in its Strategic Plan and Student Experience Strategy; it is driven at senior level by the Student Educational Experience Committee; it features in the remits of two senior committees; and it is monitored and supported at School level by the Centre for Academic Quality Assurance, which encourages School-level initiatives contributing to improvements in the learning opportunities of the students concerned. The review team therefore concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the University **meets** UK expectations.

## 5 Commentary on theme: Student Employability

### Findings

5.1 The University's Strategic Plan 2010-2015 makes reference to developing graduates who are prepared to enter employment, and institutional links which will contribute to their employment prospects; the Student Charter commits the University to making each student highly employable; and annual School reports are required to report on employability activity. For example, students in one School may apply for a bursary for a financially supported year in self-employment, while those in other schools may opt for a sandwich year.

5.2 The Learning and Teaching Strategy articulates five graduate attributes, developed in conjunction with students, alumni/ae and employers, which it intends all graduates to have acquired. The programme specification template makes reference to graduate attributes while not requiring them to be acquired on every module. The review team found that students both understand the attributes and are broadly aware of their progress in acquiring them.

5.3 The University requires employer involvement at programme validation and revalidation, and a similar arrangement applies at the consortium colleges. Students are positive about the use of visiting lecturers and their contribution to student employability, and the review team concluded that the University makes sound use of employers in curriculum design and development.

5.4 In line with the objectives of the current Strategic Plan, the University rebadged its Careers Service the Careers, Employability and Enterprise Service (the Service), extending its offering by requiring the provision of localised and targeted support in preference to a one-size-fits-all approach. The Service's Employer Engagement Team is charged with taking a proactive networking approach to its responsibilities, and a Students' Union survey found that of the 60 per cent of respondents who self-reported as engaging with the Service, 92 per cent would recommend it.

5.5 Students highlighted a number of placement-related organisational and support problems which had had a detrimental impact on their experience: the University has begun to address these problems through a Placements Policy Group, the annual report of which describes the effort made to centralise and homogenise the system. In speaking to students who had undertaken placements, the team found that, overall, placements were a positive experience which contributed to their belief in their employability. The team also noted the positive impact that the Doctoral College is having on developing the employability of research degree students through the provision of training in professional and cross-disciplinary skills.

5.6 Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education data demonstrate that the University's graduate employment rate has risen significantly, and is now ahead of the national benchmark. Overall, the review team found that awareness of the importance of employability is embedded in the institutional structure and culture.

## 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 to 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.

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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)