Higher Education Review of The Open University

December 2015

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at The Open University. The review took place from 7 to 11 December 2015 and was conducted by a team of six reviewers, as follows:

- Ms Hayley Burns
- Dr Steve King
- Professor Debbie Lockton
- Ms Sarah Riches
- Professor Graham Romp
- Ms Emilia Todorova (student reviewer)

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by The Open 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)[1] setting out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and of each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 8.

In reviewing The Open 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,[2] and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

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

---

[1] The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code.
[2] Higher Education Review themes:
www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2859.
[3] QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us.
[4] Higher Education Review web pages:
www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about The Open University

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

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

Good practice

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

- The widespread and effective use made of independent external expert advisors in setting and maintaining academic standards (Expectations A3.4 and A2.1).
- The effective ongoing improvement of the Stage-Gate process to provide a comprehensive online resource for the development of modules and qualifications (Expectation B1).
- The wide range of support provided to enquirers and applicants in line with the University's commitment to open access and widening participation (Expectations B2 and B4).
- The highly effective embedding of the needs of disabled students through the design, approval and delivery of the curriculum (Expectations B4 and B1).
- The widespread commitment to student success as a focal point for enhancement activity (Enhancement).

Recommendations

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

By September 2016:

- draw together the wide range of information on admissions to provide a single comprehensive point of reference for applicants and staff (Expectation B2)
- ensure the publication of full module descriptors for all stages of a qualification to inform prospective students (Expectation C)
- implement consistently the procedures for checking validated partners' student information (Expectation C).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The ongoing review of the effectiveness of the revised academic governance structure, and the ongoing revisions to committee structures at faculty and programme levels (Expectation A2.1).

- The steps being taken to engage the wider student body, and to inform students more effectively about actions taken in response to their feedback (Expectation B5).
- The work being undertaken to increase student involvement in the design of modules and qualifications (Expectation B5).
- The steps being taken to improve the communication of assessment regulations to students (Expectations B6 and C).
- The planned arrangements to systematically make available all external examiner reports for direct provision in full to students and staff (Expectation B7).
- The work being undertaken to provide students with comprehensive contact information to support the resolution of complaints and appeals (Expectations B9 and C).
- The current review of the usability of the virtual research environment to improve its use as a learning tool (Expectation B11).

Theme: Digital Literacy

The Open University seeks to be a world leader in the design, content and delivery of supported open and distance learning. This informs its approach to developing digital literacy. Its Library Services and the Institute of Educational Technology (IET) have developed a Digital and Information Literacy Framework (DIL) providing support materials for staff and students. Qualifications and modules are designed for an online environment, using technology-enhanced learning approaches and appropriate tools to build online communities. Digital and information literacy, contextualised by discipline, are a core part of the teaching model.

The University's learning design strategy involves a collaborative approach to embedding digital literacy skills in the curriculum, with academic staff, learning developers, library staff and learning technologists working in partnership. Practical guidance for curriculum teams and tutors on integrating digital literacy in the curriculum is clearly set out. The University was recognised nationally for its work in the area of digital literacy and has received awards from Jisc and New Media Consortium.

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

About The Open University

The Open University (the University) was founded in 1969 by Royal Charter. Shortly after its foundation its headquarters were established at Walton Hall in Milton Keynes. The University has retained its mission to be 'open to people, places, methods and ideas' since its inception. It promotes educational opportunity and social justice by providing high-quality higher education to all who wish to realise their ambitions and fulfil their potential, and who might not otherwise have the opportunity to study for a degree. Through academic research, pedagogic innovation and collaborative partnership, the University seeks to be a world leader in the design, content and delivery of supported open and distance learning.

The University is unique in operating across the whole of the UK. In England, it is regulated by, and receives funding from, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). It operates as a university recognised by statute in Scotland (The Open University in Scotland) and Wales (The Open University in Wales/Y Brifysgol Agored yng Nghymru), receiving funding from the devolved governments. Since 2013, the Northern Ireland Executive has been responsible for teaching funding for The Open University in Northern Ireland.

The University also operates in a wide variety of partnerships, teaching students directly or in collaboration with other organisations, and delivering programmes to students in the UK and overseas. It is the largest university in the UK in terms of student numbers. In 2014-15 it had more than 173,000 students (approximately 68,000 full-time). This number includes more than 126,000 studying at undergraduate level and more than 10,000 following taught curricula at postgraduate level, and in excess of 35,000 studying for qualifications designed and delivered by partner organisations and validated by the University. There are almost 1,000 postgraduate research students.

Students at the University study to achieve a range of ambitions, reflecting the various segments identified in the University's UK Market Strategy. Alongside named undergraduate qualifications the University continues to offer its long-standing Open Degree and associated CertHE and DipHE within which students can choose modules from across the undergraduate curriculum, subject to credit and progression rules. In addition to the University's taught students there are also research degree students studying full or part-time on campus or through Affiliated Research Centres.

The median age of undergraduates newly registering with the University in 2014-15 was 29 years, and of those who declared an ethnic origin, eight percent identified themselves as Asian or Black. In line with the University's mission and its policy of 'open entry' for the majority of undergraduate provision, 52 per cent of new undergraduate students had entry qualifications of one A Level or less. More than 21,000 undergraduate and postgraduate students (16 per cent) declare themselves to have a disability.

The University collaborates with a large number of other organisations to provide further routes by which its mission can be fulfilled, particularly providing wider access to higher education and broadening its curriculum offer.

Key areas of change within the University include a major shift at undergraduate level from module-focused to qualification-focused provision; significant structural change to enhance student support and the introduction of student support teams; the development of a new Student Charter and a Relationship Agreement between the University and its Students Association (OUSA); changes to regulations for validated provision in order to improve consistency; and an increase in open access resources and courses.

A new Student Charter was approved and launched in 2013. The Charter was developed in consultation with an extensive list of stakeholders and is jointly owned by the Vice-Chancellor and the President of Open University Students Association (OUSA).

A new Vice-Chancellor joined the University in April 2015. The University ensured a smooth transition, with the former Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research, Scholarship and Quality) acting as Vice-Chancellor in the interim and supporting the new Vice-Chancellor in his induction period. Following the Vice-Chancellor's appointment the University restructured the Pro Vice-Chancellor (PVC) roles, introducing two new roles, PVC Research and Academic Strategy, and PVC Learning and Innovation. Membership of the Vice-Chancellor's Executive was also amended.

The University has introduced four Executive Deans on an interim basis to manage the transition from seven smaller faculties to four generally larger faculties. This process will be completed by August 2016.The creation of these roles is intended to give greater priority to the academic voice within management decision making at the highest level.

Accompanying changes to professional services in the University during 2015-16 have included the introduction of a Director, Academic Policy and Governance, leading a function

that brings together in one place the management of academic and student regulations, rules, policies, standards, processes and records, including institutional quality management. A Director, Academic Services, will deliver, on behalf of faculties, student and associate lecturer support activities, administration and processing of assessments and awards, and library services. Both of these roles will be under the leadership of the University Secretary.

The key challenges for the University currently include the decline in the part-time higher education market in the UK and the consequent ability accurately to plan and forecast student numbers. The changes and variety of student funding models across the UK mean that directly registered undergraduate students usually follow distinct registration arrangements and qualification regulations, depending on their initial registration. Undergraduate students with study prior to 2012-13 usually progress according to the University's older qualification regulations which enabled students to register on a module-by-module basis and accumulate credit before claiming a qualification. Provision under these regulations will end for undergraduates in 2017, except in the case of the University's flexible combined honours qualification. As part of the transition plan, the Open Degree will operate under the old framework until 2019, as well as being available in the new framework.

Students are still able to register for module-only study, although this is more common in the UK's Celtic nations, which provide funding for module-only study. The module registration approach is also used for taught postgraduate students. The most significant challenge that these changes have presented to the University is ensuring that students receive the right information, advice and guidance for their registration type. This was addressed through published information in the University's online prospectus for applicants and on StudentHome for registered students, as well as by ensuring that staff who provide guidance are fully informed and can access information according to the nature of the student's registration. To ensure appropriate support for their local context and registration arrangements students in Celtic nations are supported both by their subject-based Student Support Team and through specialist advice and guidance from the support team in their home nation.

The University's Strategic Plan runs from 2012-17 and is refreshed on an annual basis in the light of progress that has been made, institutional performance, changes in the external environment and the assessment of risk. The overall Plan is complemented by bespoke plans for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, as required by funding bodies, and also approved by the University Council.

The strategic planning process culminates in business plans for faculties and other units that are explicitly linked to the Strategic Plan and the annual priorities. The University's strategic intent for the period of the Plan is to secure the mission of the University by delivering a step-change in how effectively the University helps students to achieve their study goals.

The University's current curriculum plan, Curriculum Fit for the Future, is led by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Academic Strategy) and was approved in January 2015. It recognises the fundamentally different context within which the University is now delivering its curriculum and attracts and supports students. It reflects the move away from a predominantly modular-based curriculum and infrastructure to one which, at undergraduate level, focuses on pathways and routes through qualifications.

The University continues to make a contribution to the widening participation agenda and to support students from diverse backgrounds. New approaches to learning design and the processes that support production and presentation are therefore assessed for their impacts on different groups of students, particularly those at entry level.

From autumn 2015 a revised academic governance structure has been in place. The

structure is designed to reduce complexity and increase efficiency and follows recommendations of a review conducted in 2013-14. The University's Academic Governance Review Group continues to work on revising academic governance processes in faculties, including programme committees. Further exploration is taking place as part of the work to implement the overall recommendations of the governance review and the proposed new faculty structure.

The University has responded effectively to most of the recommendations from the Institutional Audit in 2009 and Collaborative Provision Audit in 2011. An update on the action plans of previous reviews was provided in the mid-cycle report in May 2012, which concluded that it was making good progress. Following the mid-cycle report further action was taken, although many actions have taken a long time to reach resolution, and some are still in progress.

The University has further developed the features of good practice identified in previous reports and is able to demonstrate that it has sought to share and develop these positive features of its provision.

Explanation of the findings about the Open 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   As a UK-wide provider the University aligns its provision with both *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) *and the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework* (SCQF), and through them the overarching framework for qualifications of the European Higher Education Area and the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning.

1.2   Direct provision by the University is required to comply with its own Qualifications Framework, which sets out the levels and credit requirements, and its Levels Framework, which specifies generic learning outcomes for access, undergraduate and postgraduate provision. These two frameworks were designed to be consistent with the FHEQ and the SQCF. Course teams are required to use these frameworks when developing both qualification and module learning outcomes and these are considered at approval and reapproval events. Programme teams are required to use relevant subject benchmarks to inform the design of new programmes. These and other external reference points are considered at approval and reapproval events and by Programme Committees within the Annual Monitoring process.

1.3   The University's Qualifications Framework also sets out titling conventions aligned with those in the FHEQ. The appropriateness of proposed qualification titles is considered by the Curriculum Development Team prior to being presented to the Qualifications and Assessment Committee.

1.4   University partners designing their own programmes of study for validation are required to align with the most appropriate UK qualifications framework, credit framework and Subject Benchmark Statements and professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) requirements. This is confirmed at validation events. All qualifications are positioned at the appropriate level (4, 5, 6, 7 and 8) of the FHEQ. The University requires that research degrees align with the Doctoral and Master's Degree Characteristics publications.

1.5   The University has clear regulations and appropriate policies and procedures which would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.6   The review team tested these processes by scrutinising the University's processes and their effectiveness through consideration of evidence provided in documented quality assurance procedures, approval and reapproval reports, and programme and module documentation. It also met staff from the University and its partners, including senior management, faculty managers, teaching staff and students.

1.7   The University's quality assurance arrangements make full use of external reference points and its procedures have been mapped against the expectations of the Quality Code. There is clear and consistent evidence that qualification and module learning outcomes are mapped effectively and align with the relevant frameworks.

1.8   The qualification and module approval and reapproval documents confirm that programme teams are required to demonstrate that the outcomes and assessment strategy of qualifications and modules effectively align with the relevant national frameworks. Qualification specifications confirm that learning outcomes for the final intended award are consistent with qualification descriptors in the FHEQ at all levels of learning. The FHEQ level of each programme and the appropriate Subject Benchmark Statements are referenced within the qualification specification. Qualification specifications set out the volume of study for each award in terms of credit and notional learning hours. Module learning hours and volumes of assessment are set out in the approved module descriptors.

1.9   External examiner reports confirm that the standards of all University awards are appropriate and take account of relevant external reference points. During annual review programme teams confirm that qualifications met any changes to subject benchmarks and professional body requirements.

1.10   Overall, the review team found evidence that Subject Benchmark Statements and the FHEQ are used and understood by staff. The University ensures that its awards are mapped against relevant national benchmarks and it implements and monitors its procedures effectively. 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 (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

1.11   The University Senate has overall authority for the maintenance of academic standards and approves the University's academic frameworks and regulations. Responsibility for particular areas of approval is delegated to Senate subcommittees and from 2015-16 the University implemented a revised, simplified committee structure.

1.12   The recently introduced Academic Quality and Governance Committee is now responsible for assuring that University quality assurance processes are established and implemented. The committee has oversight of mechanisms such as periodic review, special reviews, changes to key policies and procedures and the mapping of policy and processes to the Quality Code to fulfil this purpose. The approval of standard direct provision qualifications and regulations, and amendments to these, has been delegated from 2015-16 to the Qualifications and Assessment Committee reporting to the new Education Committee.

1.13   Oversight of quality assurance processes for validated provision has been delegated from the Education Committee to the Curriculum Partnerships Committee (CPC). For this provision CPC considers partnership and programme approval, sets the policy framework and monitors academic standards and quality. From 2014-15 a member of staff of the University has attended the final examination boards of each partner institution and provides a report to the University on the conduct of the board. Expectations of partner governance are set out in a comprehensive Handbook for Validated Awards.

1.14   The Module Results Approval and Qualifications Classification Panel (MRAQCP) has responsibility for the awards and for classification of all taught qualifications and direct provision modules. This is in line with the University's policy for both direct and validated provision.

1.15   Senate has delegated responsibility for research degrees policy, practice, regulations and strategy to the Research Committee.

1.16   The University's Qualifications Framework lists the types of taught qualifications awarded by the University and the volume and level of credit required for these qualifications. Its Levels Framework provides more detailed expectations of learning outcomes in qualifications and modules at specified levels.

1.17   The University has developed assessment regulations and policy for the award of taught and research qualifications as well as for individual modules. Prior to 2015-16 existing partners devised their own assessment regulations, which were approved by the University. It has now approved consistent assessment regulations for its validated provision and continuing partners have adopted the regulations for cohorts starting in 2015-16. The University's regulations and its governance structure would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.18   The review team scrutinised the University's processes and their effectiveness through consideration of the documented quality assurance procedures, minutes of meetings, external examiner reports and programme specifications. The team also met staff

from the University, including senior management, faculty managers, teaching staff and students.

1.19   The University's academic frameworks are systematically and consistently applied to secure academic standards. Its maintenance of academic credit is consistent with the requirements of the relevant national frameworks for higher education qualifications and credit frameworks. The University assessment regulations are systematically and rigorously applied to secure academic standards and are regularly reviewed and maintained. External academic advisers are also regularly used to provide expertise in setting and maintaining standards. This matter is also addressed under Expectation A3.4.

1.20   As a result of a review of academic governance mechanisms, changes to the University-level governance structure were implemented from the start of 2015-16. These were designed to strengthen academic quality assurance and increase the efficiency of governance processes. At the time of the review visit the effectiveness of these newly introduced arrangements was being reviewed by the University on an ongoing basis. The academic governance review also recommended that further simplification of the governance structure at faculty and programme level should be implemented. At the time of the review visit the governance structure at these levels was being considered in order to enhance academic oversight. The review team **affirms** the ongoing review of the effectiveness of the revised academic governance structure, and the ongoing revisions to committee structures at faculty and programme levels.

1.21   Overall, the review team found evidence that the University has in place robust procedures to ensure that it has comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern the award of credit and qualifications, and is working to ensure that these are consistently applied. 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 (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

1.22   The University maintains definitive records of all its qualifications and modules. These specifications are formally approved and updated to reflect agreed amendments. Its qualification specification sets aims and intended learning outcomes, and the means by which these will be achieved and demonstrated. For all new qualifications, descriptions are also included as an appendix. Module specifications denote the level and volume of credit, indicative content, module learning outcomes and assessment methodology. The University also requires the mapping of module learning outcomes and teaching and assessment strategies to qualification learning outcomes. Curriculum maps are included in the qualification specification, to a standard University template.

1.23   The University holds the definitive documents of all its validated programmes, including programme and module specifications. Validated programmes delivered in languages other than English must have a programme specification both in English and in the language of delivery. Approved generic research degree qualification descriptions are made available in the online prospectus and Research Degrees Student Handbooks. Descriptions of approved individual students' research form part of the student's record.

1.24   The University's requirements are appropriately designed and are sufficiently robust, and its processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.25   The review team scrutinised the University's processes and their effectiveness through consideration of evidence provided in documented quality assurance procedures, qualification specifications, module descriptors, student handbooks and meetings with staff and students.

1.26   Qualification specifications and module descriptors contain the definitive information required by the University. These definitive records are used as the reference point for the delivery of the programme by teaching staff and research supervisors, and for assessment processes, as well as in subsequent monitoring and review.

1.27   By reviewing sample documentation relating to the approval, reapproval and modification processes the review team saw evidence that the definitive programme documentation is rigorously scrutinised, approved and updated. The University has recently instigated the roll-out of a new curriculum management system designed to enhance tracking changes to approved specifications over time. In future, the new curriculum management system will be directly linked to the student records system to reduce data transfer requirements.

1.28   The criteria for the award of each research degree are set out in the Research Degrees Student Handbooks and in the examination guidelines. The criteria appropriately align with the Doctoral and Master's Degree Characteristics publications.

1.29   The review team found that the University has appropriate processes to ensure the maintenance of definitive records for all programmes of study and for individual student

records. 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

1.30　　All new taught and research degrees require approval from the University Council on the advice of Senate, following scrutiny by the relevant subcommittee.

1.31　　New direct taught provision qualifications and any significant amendments are subject to approval by the Qualifications and Assessment Committee. For validated provision responsibility rests with the Curriculum Partnerships Committee.

1.32　　The Stage-Gate management approval process leads to academic approval by the Qualifications and Assessment Committee following detailed approval of stages in qualification and module production. Guidance is provided by a clear process for the approval and management of modules and qualifications. New proposals are required to reference Subject Benchmark Statements and the programme committee's external qualifications adviser comments on alignment with external reference points as part of the approval process. In addition, programme committees may ask for input from an industrial advisor or the industry advisory group. Alignment with external reference points is also noted in annual quality review. For validated provision, new proposals are approved by the Curriculum Partnerships Committee. For partnership programme approvals, validation panels are set up, which include external members. There are set processes for making changes to validated qualifications, and for both major and minor amendments. Research degree arrangements are mapped against Expectation B11 of the Quality Code. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.33　　The review team scrutinised the University's processes and their effectiveness through consideration of evidence provided relating to programme approval. The effectiveness of the approach was tested by staff responsible for quality assurance and enhancement, including senior staff, teaching and professional and support staff, collaborative provision staff and representatives from the University's partner organisations.

1.34　　The University has enhanced its Stage-Gate process to take into account the significant change from a module to qualification model. For direct University provision the process starts at faculty level when a decision to amend or create a programme considers a number of issues, including the effect on other programmes or partners. Proposals are discussed at programme committees, which include student representatives. Faculties give due consideration to the business, marketing and development case. The Stage-Gate process then identifies three routes, for a new qualification, qualification amendments that would have significant impact on students, or developments with a significant business impact. There is a light touch route for amendments that do not have a significant impact on students. A fast-track route for developments where there are serious time constraints is available, but this requires permission from both Pro Vice-Chancellors. Programme specification and proposals, with the endorsement of an external adviser, require approval by the Qualifications and Assessment Committee. For fast-track route proposals, approval may be made by the committee chair. The Stage-Gate process was regarded as a feature of good practice in the previous QAA review and the effective ongoing improvement of the process is also identified as good practice under Expectation B1.

1.35   Staff are well supported through the process. There is support from the University's Institute of Educational Technology (IET) in the form of learning design tools, workshops and a website. Programme specification guidelines with defined learning outcomes provide comprehensive guidance on the policies governing the design of undergraduate qualifications. These arrangements are supported by qualification specification templates with detailed guidance on the role of the external academic adviser, the professional adviser and PSRB requirements. The programme specifications show detailed learning outcomes and assessment information, and references to the FHEQ and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. Staff are clear about the processes involved and the amount of externality needed in the process.

1.36   Overall, the review team found that the current process for the approval of taught programmes and research degrees is appropriate and robust, and operates consistently across the University to ensure academic standards are in accordance with internal and external frameworks. 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 (A3.2): 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

1.37   The University's comprehensive Qualification Framework provides explicit guidance for the award of academic credit and qualifications. Credit and qualifications are awarded on the basis of the achievement of specified learning outcomes, which match UK threshold standards through the processes for the design, approval, monitoring and review of modules and qualifications, the application of its assessment regulations, and the use made of external expertise in setting and maintaining standards.

1.38   The Qualification Framework lists the types of taught and research qualifications awarded by the University, specifying its requirements by levels and volume of credit. The Qualifications Framework is aligned to the national frameworks, including *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and the *Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework* (SCQF). The Levels Framework sets out the University's expectations for generic qualifications and the module learning outcomes to be demonstrated at different levels. The University requires the specification of learning outcomes and how they are assessed at both qualification and module level. Curriculum maps indicate where learning outcomes are taught, developed and assessed. The annual monitoring and periodic review processes incorporate an evaluation of academic standards and alignment with UK reference points.

1.39   The University's regulations make provision for the recognition of prior learning, the award of credit, progression between levels, reassessment and repeat study and the consequences of academic misconduct. The University has developed standard policies, including assessment regulations, for its validated provision. These have been implemented from 2014-15 for new partners, and with effect from 2015-16 for existing partners. Students enrolled on direct provision must pass each module to qualify for an award. In validated provision limited compensation may be applied in the event of module failure, provided learning outcomes have been achieved overall. The criteria for the award of research degrees are set out in the Research Degrees Student Handbook and examination guidelines.

1.40   The University draws on a range of external academic and professional expertise during the design, approval, monitoring and review of modules and qualifications to ensure that the academic standards of its awards are appropriately set, delivered and achieved. The University's arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.41   The review team explored how the University met the Expectation by reviewing module and qualification approval documentation, reports of external advisers, assessors and external examiners, and the output of Annual Quality Reviews (AQR) and Periodic Programme Reviews. The team also met senior, academic and professional support staff and students.

1.42   Staff engaged in curriculum development have access to a comprehensive suite of guidance materials which refer to the University's Qualification and Levels Frameworks.

Qualification and module documentation specify learning outcomes at programme and module level and set out the strategies by which achievement of the outcomes will be assessed. The roles of external assessors, advisers and examiners in the setting and maintenance of academic standards are clearly defined and are used consistently and effectively. The annual monitoring and periodic review processes incorporate consideration of whether learning outcomes are set, assessed and achieved.

1.43   The University's approach to assessment is set out in its Assessment Policy, which was compiled from a number of separate assessment-related documents in 2015. Assessment principles set out the relationship between learning outcomes and assessment and the requirement for strategies at qualification and module level. Staff involved in the design and management of assessment are supported by faculty assessment leads and by access to the Assessment Hub. The hub provides an online repository of policies, guidance and resources on assessment.

1.44   Enhancements to assessment policy and practice are facilitated by the Assessment Programme, a project located within the Learning and Teaching Centre. Markers receive detailed guidance, advice and training, and their work is monitored through moderation and standardisation exercises. Academic staff new to examination and assessment boards must undertake training and online training resources are also made available to external examiners. Examination and assessment boards currently operating at a modular level are conducted in accordance with a comprehensive handbook. The Examination and Assessment Handbook incorporates Senate guidelines, which are designed to promote consistency between boards and across presentations of a module. Examination and assessment board recommendations are considered by the Module Results Approval and Qualification and Classification Panel (MRAQCP), which is empowered to ratify the award of credit or to seek further clarification. This panel makes robust use of data to monitor results across the University at each assessment round.

1.45   Students are supported to adopt good academic practice and are made aware of the consequences of academic misconduct. In the case of end-of module assessments that are not examinations, students have to declare that the work is their own. Tutors verify the statement of authenticity based on their knowledge of the student. If the tutor can't do so an investigation is instigated. Faculty-based Academic Conduct Officers act as the disciplinary authorities and also work with teams to improve assessment design to minimise the risk of misconduct. The University uses two types of text comparison software for a majority of modules after formal submission, but accessibility concerns have prevented the adoption of a formal policy on the consistent use of plagiarism-detection software by students.

1.46   The University's arrangements for the assessment of research degrees ensures that awards are made on the basis of achievement, to ensure that they meet threshold national standards. The assessment criteria are set out in the Research Degrees Student Handbook and the examination guidelines. Research students are supervised by at least two members of staff in line with the requirements of the Research Degrees Committee. The criteria for composition of examination panels and the appointment of members ensures independent judgement and appropriate levels of externality.

1.47   Overall, the review team concludes that the University has in place robust frameworks, policies and procedures, supported by detailed guidance and training. This ensures that academic credit is awarded only where the achievement of learning outcomes is demonstrated through assessment and the University's and threshold standards are met. Therefore the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.48   The University's process for annual monitoring and periodic review includes reflection on comments from external examiners and external advisers. The Annual Quality Reviews (AQR) scrutinised by the review team provide detailed documents, which address external examiner and external advisers' comments and responses to student feedback.There is considerable guidance for staff to support the AQR process.

1.49   The periodic programme review process takes place every six years and panels include an external member, a student panel member and a member from a professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) where relevant. There are detailed terms of reference for periodic review panels, which are required to report on the management of academic standards. Guidelines are provided to aid staff. Consideration of periodic programme review reports and action plans and subsequent monitoring by the Academic Quality and Governance Committee (AQGC) is very thorough and rigorous. The Qualifications and Assessment Committee receives two annual overviews of external examiners' reports and responses dealing with academic matters and with the administration of the external examiner system. These provide detailed and evaluative commentaries.

1.50   Partner institutions undertake annual programme evaluation, which follows a similar process and, if relevant, provides employers' comments and identifies areas for enhancement. The reports are considered by the University quality and partnership managers and by a working group of the Curriculum Partnerships Committee. In addition, an annual overview report of a subject area is produced. Revalidation of partnership provision takes place every five years and includes an external panel member.

1.51   Annual monitoring of research degrees is undertaken by the Affiliated Research Centres Scrutiny Group and the Research Degrees Management Group with an oversight by the Research Degrees Committee. The process has been mapped to the relevant expectation of the Quality Code. These processes and procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.52   The team met senior staff, students, senior faculty staff, collaborative provision staff and staff in collaborative institutions, teaching staff, collaborative provision students and professional and support staff. The review team scrutinised annual quality review reports, periodic programme review reports, subject overview reports, minutes of QAEC and reports to Senate.

1.53   The AQR and evaluation reports provide detailed commentary noting progress on actions from the previous year and how effectively these had been achieved. Reports also detail actions for the future, statistics and comments on each module, external examiners' comments and responses to student feedback. The University has initiated a process for using student consultative forums, linked to Student Support Teams, to inform annual monitoring and review. However, staff acknowledged that there had been a slow start to using these forums, which are at a developmental stage. Staff assured the review team that although the annual monitoring and periodic review processes are thorough and

comprehensive the process was very useful, particularly for new staff, and that annual review fed into the periodic programme review process.

1.54   The University's collaborative partners each complete an Institutional Annual Monitoring Report along with an evaluation and review of each programme they deliver. Reports from partners are considered by University quality and partnership managers and then by a working group, which includes academic reviewers, and which reports to the Curriculum Partnerships Committee (CPC).

1.55   Periodic programme review reports are detailed and include recommendations to the programme team. The QAEC receives all periodic programme review reports and action plans and monitors their implementation. An annual report to Senate summarises the outcomes of periodic programme reviews and the action plans. In addition, the reports include PSRB commentaries and an evaluation of the quality processes. Subject overview reports are considered by the Centre for Inclusion and Collaborative Partnerships, which reports to CPC.

1.56   Overall, the review team considers that the processes for programme monitoring and review are rigorous with clear oversight and monitoring of actions arising at institutional level. Relevant University committees receive detailed reports and are able to monitor action plans effectively. This process enables Senate to have a clear view on the outcomes of the processes and action plans arising. The 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

1.57   The University makes use of independent external expertise to ensure that academic standards are appropriately set and maintained. Consultation with external stakeholders, such as professional and regulatory bodies (PSRB), employers and sector representatives, is an integral part of the process of developing new qualifications. The University's procedures require that an external assessor is appointed to provide an independent judgement on matters such as the level, learning outcomes and assessment design of a module during the development phase.

1.58   External academic advisers are appointed to each programme committee. Their role includes advising on proposals for new qualifications and reviewing the contribution of modules to the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes of the qualification. Professional external advisers may also be appointed to programme committees. External advisers submit an annual report on the validity of the degree and the maintenance of academic standards. Matters raised by external advisors relating to academic standards must be addressed in AQRs. External examiners are currently appointed for each module for direct taught provision and research degrees. The periodic programme review process includes an external reviewer as a panel member. External expertise is incorporated into governance arrangements through the presence at committees and panels of external members who have responsibility for setting and maintaining academic standards.

1.59   The approach to incorporating independent and external expertise in the University's key processes for setting and maintaining academic standards would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.60   The review team considered how external expertise is used in practice by scrutinising guidance on the roles of external advisers, assessors and examiners, documentation related to module and qualification approval, monitoring and review and a sample of reports from external advisers, assessors and examiners. The review team also discussed with University staff the use of external advice in the module and qualification approval processes.

1.61   There is sound evidence that the University consults with relevant professional bodies and employers when developing and designing new modules and qualifications and conducting periodic programme reviews. External assessor reports on modules in development are detailed and clearly address matters relating to academic standards, such as the appropriateness of the level of the module, learning outcomes and assessment strategy. The annual reports from programme committees' external advisers, and external examiners, together provide the University with extensive advice on the academic standards of its awards. The University's panels for the approval and review of partner institutions and their validated programmes include external experts, although the most recent edition of the Handbook for Validated Awards does not explicitly define the membership of panels. The widespread and effective use made of independent external expert advisers in setting and

maintaining academic standards is **good practice**. This matter is also addressed under Expectation A2.1.

1.62   Since 2014-15 the University has assumed responsibility for the appointment of external examiners for validated provision. External examiners are asked to comment explicitly on whether standards set are appropriate, by reference to benchmarks and other external reference points. The University receives annual quality evaluations for each validated programme. These evaluations include a copy of the external examiner's report and a report on action taken and planned in response. Subject-based overview reports on validated provision are informed by external examiner comments.

1.63   Overall, the review team concludes that the Expectation A3.4 is met and the associated level of risk is low. The use of external expertise is embedded in key processes for setting and maintaining academic standards, including within curriculum development, monitoring and review, and through the oversight exercised by key committees.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

1.65   All of the Expectations for this judgement are met and the associated levels of risk are low. There is good practice in the use of independent external advisors in setting and maintaining academic standards. The review team affirms the ongoing review of the effectiveness of the revised academic governance structure, and the ongoing revisions to committee structures at faculty and programme levels.

1.66   Overall, the review team concludes that the setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards at the University **meets** UK expectations.

2   Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1   Strategic oversight for programme design, development and approval lies with the two Pro Vice-Chancellors. The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Academic Strategy) has oversight of the University's overall strategy for curriculum. The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Innovation) oversees the development and implementation of learning and teaching support, the production and delivery of learning materials and resources, and the operation of associated quality assurance and enhancement processes.

2.2   Individual programme committees are responsible for the quality assurance of programmes of study, the development of modules and qualifications and assuring the quality of learning opportunities. Programme committees include teaching staff, programme managers, student representatives and representation from student support teams. The committees also include external academic and professional advisers who write an annual report to the Vice-Chancellor.

2.3   There is an online Curriculum Management Guide and proposers of new programmes and substantial amendments are supported by the Curriculum Development Team.

2.4   Proposals are considered at programme committees and are informed by institutional and faculty strategic priorities. An opportunity review process is completed, which seeks views of other departments, such as marketing, and the proposed development is incorporated into the faculty plan. All faculty plans are informed by priorities identified by members of the Vice-Chancellor's Executive. Proposals and opportunity reviews are informed by the Stage-Gate process for programme development, which has been enhanced on an ongoing basis to provide an effective programme development tool. Development of modules as part of a qualification includes external consideration, with an external assessor writing interim and final reports on suitability.

2.5   For new qualification proposals, or their substantial amendments, external consultation with employers or regulatory bodies forms part of the process. The Curriculum Management Guide makes clear the academic requirements needed for qualifications committee approval and these are included in a qualification specification template. Requirements include reference to relevant frameworks, and the University's Qualification Framework and assessment policies. The proposal must show external advice about academic standards and quality of learning opportunities.

2.6   Non-standard qualifications follow a more detailed committee scrutiny process. Additional support for staff is provided by the learning and teaching development team in the Institute of Educational Technology, and by staff from Learning and Teaching Solutions. For validated provision, recommendations for approval of validated provision are made by validation panels, including Faculty staff, to Curriculum Partnerships Committee.

2.7   Processes are kept under review by the Qualifications Development Group, which maps practice against external benchmarks and advises Qualifications Committee accordingly. The AQCG has institutional oversight of the University's quality systems and evidence from periodic reviews. A thorough process of mapping of provision to the Quality Code assures Senate of the effectiveness of the processes. The structures and processes for programme design, development and approval would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.8   The review team scrutinised the University's processes through consideration of the quality assurance procedures and documentation relating to programme design, development and approval. The effectiveness of the approach was tested by meeting senior faculty staff, those responsible for quality assurance and enhancement, collaborative provision, and students. The review team considered documents related to curriculum development, including the Curriculum Management Guide and the Stage-Gate process, and minutes of a range of committees.

2.9   Programme committee minutes show detailed discussion of new proposals, including input from external advisers. Programme specifications demonstrate appropriate learning outcomes and curriculum mapping, with references to the FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements and the Quality Code. The University's Stage-Gate process is clear and rigorous, with detailed consideration at each stage of programme development and approval. The effective ongoing improvement of the Stage-Gate process to provide a comprehensive online resource for the development of modules and qualifications is **good practice**.

2.10   The University ensures the coherence of its awards through rigorous scrutiny at faculty level where modules are considered, and through the Qualifications Committee, which looks at the overall qualification. Qualifications are based on learning outcomes, with advice from advisory boards and employers in addition to external advisers on programme committees.

2.11   Staff demonstrate a clear knowledge of the processes of programme design and approval. Tuition and assessment strategies are mapped to provide coherence across a qualification and module and programme outcomes are clearly mapped. Support staff are involved in programme development, and student support teams in the sequencing of modules. Library staff are involved in skills development across qualifications. Students are involved in programme approval as representatives on programme committees.

2.12   Overall, the evidence reviewed, and discussions with staff, confirm that programme design and approval processes are systematically and consistently applied across the University and by its partner institutions. 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

2.13   The strategic approach to recruitment, selection and admission is found in the Widening Access and Success Strategy, the Mission statement and the Strategic Plan. These strategies are driven by the mission to promote educational opportunity and social justice by 'providing high-quality university education to all who wish to realise their ambitions and fulfil their potential'. The University operates an open entry approach to undergraduate recruitment and selection. It is, therefore, not competitive and only exceptionally requires academic staff involvement in admissions decisions. The Widening Access and Success Strategy focuses on ensuring access for offender learners, disabled students, students who are carers, and those from black and minority ethnic groups and low socio-economic groups. The strategy sets targets for widening access and success, and progress against these is regularly evaluated.

2.14   As the University operates in all four UK nations, contextualised information is available to applicants depending on geographical situation, such as fees and other funding. The website requires selection of location in order to tailor the information for prospective students and the University provides training to staff around funding options in each part of the UK.

2.15   The student recruitment and fees team is responsible for providing information and advice to applicants. It is assisted in this work by student support teams, each of which has a specialist in international student support. These staff operate as a network with central coordination and support. A dedicated disabled student services team provides support to prospective students across the University's provision.

2.16   Admissions in taught collaborations, except validation, follow these arrangements. Where there are entry requirements, such as those for professional programmes, or for taught postgraduate provision, these are stated in the relevant online and printed prospectuses. For some work-based programmes delivered through collaborative arrangements, the employer or partner is asked to confirm that prospective students meet entry and professional requirements.

2.17   Validated partners are not required to follow the University's primarily open entry policy for direct undergraduate provision. Partner institutions offering University-validated provision are required to specify interview procedures and selection criteria in order to identify which students are suitable to start the programme of study. The partner institutional approval process clarifies arrangements and responsibilities for admitting and registering students to modules or programmes delivered with others.

2.18   Information needed for the recruitment and admission of research students is found in the online research degrees prospectus. Terms and conditions and the code of practice are found in the student handbooks, which are available to candidates at the point of offer. The key criteria for selection and recruitment of research students is alignment with research priorities, quality of application, availability of resources, and supervisors with the relevant expertise. Guidance for staff involved in recruitment was revised, along with associated

documentation, and annual updates ensure consistency. Although the procedures recognise the importance of discipline-specific criteria, parity is ensured by applying principles of fair selection and by requiring applicants to satisfy academic entrance requirements. Recruitment in Affiliated Research Centres (ARCs) is overseen by the University through the review visit process and by annual monitoring. These processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.19   The review team explored the University's approach to the recruitment, selection and admission of students by viewing documentation, including the Strategic Plan, Widening Access and Success Strategy, prospectuses, diagnostics tools, and guidance information on the StudentHome and other websites. The review team also considered the induction policy and the student complaints and appeals procedure. In addition, the team met a wide range of staff and students from the University and at partner institutions.

2.20   In order to meet its mission to provide education to all who wish to fulfil their potential, entry is predominantly open at undergraduate level. The University provides a variety of support to applicants to aid them in their decision making. Subject-specific diagnostic material is available for some modules and qualifications to help students decide if they are ready for a particular module, or if they require some extra preparation. Prospective students can go to OpenLearn to find examples of learning materials online.

2.21   Access provision is available along with taster modules. Advice and guidance is provided online in the prospectus and the help centre and offline by student support teams and the student recruitment and fees teams. Applicants are given comprehensive advice about where to begin in their studies. The University also runs more than 800 events each year for enquirers. Information about these events is readily available and user friendly on its 'Events near you' website. Students confirmed that that they found these resources beneficial. The wide range of support provided to enquirers and applicants in line with the University's commitment to open access and widening participation is **good practice**.

2.22   Supplementary to the University's open entry approach, there are areas of provision where entry criteria are applicable, particularly in relation to qualifications with professional body accreditation, postgraduate taught qualifications and postgraduate research programmes. Individual qualification pages in the prospectus provide comprehensive information about these requirements. The move from a predominantly module-based to a qualification-based registration means that academic requirements for progression and qualification completion differ, depending on the type of registration. Information about the differences is made available to students through the module chooser on StudentHome, and through the student support teams, although students stated that they are not always clear on their study pathway.

2.23   At a strategic level the University periodically debates how its approach to open entry is managed. This debate was informed by the move to qualification-based registration, and whether advice given to prospective students about their starting point should be more strongly emphasised. A strategy paper will be presented to Senate in April 2016. The review team saw other evidence of strategic projects aimed at enhancing the admissions process, for example, the University's marketing division twelve month review of support given to prospective students, and the Customer Experience Insight Programme, which formed part of the Enquirer Experience Programme as well as continuing evaluative work.

2.24   The University has a comprehensive induction policy and offers general induction resources through the Help Centre in StudentHome. Full-time, directly supported research students are obliged to attend both institutional and faculty inductions, and, if appropriate, sessions for international students. There are also events for part-time students, and specific

events for Doctor of Education students. For students in Affiliated Research Centres, responsibility for induction is delegated to the ARC, and monitored by the University.

2.25 Student recruitment and fees teams are responsible for decisions on admission, only exceptionally requiring academic staff involvement. An eight-week compulsory training programme is carried out for all new staff involved in recruitment. Annual refresher training for existing staff is derived from analysis of the quality monitoring results and meetings with managers. This is then shared with the Training and Development Manager. Team managers at each location undertake monthly quality monitoring exercises of individual staff. There is appropriate oversight of arrangements for training by the relevant line manager to ensure that only those individuals who have completed mandatory training can make admissions decisions. Appeals and complaints about admissions are handled through the University's standard policies for these processes. The policy clearly states that the process is open to enquirers and applicants.

2.26 A full range of information about recruitment, selection and admissions is available to students. However, information is fragmented and contained in myriad documents, or is provided orally by staff in student support teams. There is no single source which sets out, for example, the principles for all admission decisions relating to full-time on-campus research students, off-campus provision, the regulations around module and qualification based registration, information available to students about their readiness for higher education study, training for staff involved in admission decisions and how the University monitors, reviews and updates its procedures. The review team **recommends** that, by September 2016, the University should draw together the wide range of information on admissions to provide a single comprehensive point of reference for applicants and staff.

2.27 Overall, the review team concludes that the University has processes in place to ensure that recruitment, selection, and admission decisions adhere to the principles of fair admission and that they meet the standards set out in the Expectation. 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

2.28   The distance learning model of supported open learning encourages independent learning using different media and methods. During their studies students develop skills for independent learning. Academics and other experts work in teams to design and develop the curriculum. The team approach, previously used at module level, has now been extended to qualifications, and learning opportunities are subject to peer review within each team.

2.29   The main facilitators of student learning are associate lecturers, who are primary student contacts for tutorials and assignment marking, whether by email, telephone or computer conferencing. They help students to understand and reflect on what they have learnt. Learning materials are provided in a variety of media, both online and physical. Online resources are accessed through the virtual learning environment (VLE), and OU Anywhere allows access through smartphones and tablets to downloads of media. The VLE, through the StudentHome page, is the central medium for learning resources, for assessment and for collaboration.

2.30   Disabled students are supported from registration onwards, with necessary adjustments for tutorials or attendance at residential schools. Ensuring that teaching material is designed with accessibility in mind has been the focus of the Securing Greater Accessibility guidance since 2014. A website gives advice for a variety of contexts, such as describing video content or use of colour.

2.31   The University's commitment to open access is also reflected in helping students with little or no experience of prior learning and in support for transition to higher education. Access modules give prospective students an idea of what to expect. Strategies also focus on hard-to-reach groups of students, such as prisoners and forces personnel.

2.32   Associate lecturers (who are also referred to as tutors) play an important role in encouraging students to engage with the learning opportunities provided. The Student Charter and associated Tutor Support Statement specify what students can expect from their tutor. Student support teams are also involved, for instance with new students. Tutors are expected to give advice and guidance and to provide feedback on work. They are also tasked with contacting students who are not engaging with their studies. Students are expected to give feedback on how well their associate lecturers/tutors have performed, and this feedback is considered by line managers, along with reflective comments on tutors' marking.

2.33   The current Learning and Teaching Vision and Plan, 'Learning now for the future', was approved in 2014, and is led by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Innovation). It recognises that there have been changes in the composition of the University's student cohort and the need to address the aspirations of an increasingly diverse student population.

2.34   The Learning and Teaching Vision and Plan resulted from wide consultation among stakeholders, including students. The final version is accessible internally and externally.

The process of designing modules and qualifications is based on the concept of Learning Design, which puts student activity at the heart of the design process. This allows a focus on student performance and promotes activities that will maximise their performance.

2.35   The University has a well developed process to collect student feedback on taught modules. This feedback forms part of a collection of evidence about a particular module, including retention, feedback and progression, which informs annual review. In addition, the Institute of Educational Technology (IET) produces a key metrics report for each faculty, which summarises the module reports in an accessible graphical form, and provides contextual data to facilitate analysis. Additionally, a summary of faculty reports is compiled and considered twice yearly by Student Experience Committee.

2.36   Annual and Periodic review processes enable academic units to reflect on collected evidence about the effectiveness of Learning and Teaching. This information informs action plans and institutional strategic plans.

2.37   The University has a staff development framework, the Academic Professional Development Programme, for all staff involved in teaching or direct support of students. This provision includes OpenPAD, an institutional scheme recognised by the Higher Education Academy (HEA). There are extensive opportunities and resources for professional development open to all staff.

2.38   Associate lecturers have their own staff development resources, online at TutorHome, and can attend events, both online and face to face. Resources cover both generic OpenPad material and specific resources suitable for associate lecturers, including marking, peer review and moderation. New tutors are assigned a mentor for their first year in post. There are also regional and national training meetings.

2.39   The Scholarship Exchange repository stores documents and other digital resources concerned with teaching-related scholarship activity. A number of communities of practice have grown up in specific areas, such as STEM and e-learning, which provide a route to share best practice with colleagues.

2.40   The University has policies and mechanisms for learning and teaching that would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.41   The review team investigated the University's policies and regulations on learning and teaching through meetings with senior staff, faculty staff, teaching staff, professional and support staff and students. It also considered a range of documentation including policies and procedures, committee minutes, student handbooks and online resources.

2.42   Students appreciate the work carried out by the associate lecturers in facilitating learning and answering queries about teaching materials and assessments, with each lecturer responsible for a group of up to 20 students. There is not yet a wide awareness of the Student Charter, outside those OUSA Executive members who were involved in its development. The Charter contains statements of expectations of associate lecturers and of students which will become more useful as the Charter becomes more widely embedded. The StudentHome page on the VLE provides access to learning resources on modules currently studied. It also gives access to assessment regulations, although some students find these to be convoluted. Students raised concerns that printed material seems to be being phased out in favour of onscreen presentation. A print-on-demand service is available for some modules, but is not universal. Students also raised concerns about the effectiveness of online tutorials and the possibility of them replacing face-to-face meetings, also noting technical concerns about software reliability and high-speed network connections.

2.43   Students feel well supported as they begin their higher education studies. Access modules and diagnostic self-test are well signposted, and are very helpful in making the transition. Students with disabilities reported that they felt well supported, with necessary adjustments made and individual contacts identified in student support teams. As students progress from one module to the next, important information about disabilities is passed on to the next associate lecturer, using the University's customer relationship management system.

2.44   Historically, consultation with students has mostly been undertaken through OUSA, and there remain some issues about how effective this has been in engaging the wider student body. By the nature of the institution, with a very large number of students geographically spread across the four UK nations and overseas, engaging students remains a considerable challenge. Recently, there was more significant use of online consultative forums, which have the potential to give wider engagement opportunities. Students welcome the use of these forums, in addition to end-of-module questionnaires, but consider that, although they are frequently consulted, there is less consistent feedback on the results of these consultations.

2.45   The University puts a significant emphasis on defining student activities at module development stage, thereby allowing student performance to be central to the design of each module. Because of the significant cost of developing online teaching materials for new modules, emphasis is placed on detailed design prior to a decision on whether or not to go ahead.

2.46   Significant amounts of data on teaching and learning issues is routinely collected, analysed and presented to relevant committees to assist in planning and review processes. There is a clear desire to present such data in accessible formats, so that it can be interpreted by decision makers and used to improve the student experience.

2.47   Teaching staff are enthusiastic about training and development opportunities available to them. A number of associate lecturers praised the OpenPAD scheme as an effective way to engage tutors who are scattered across the country, with up to 200 staff engaged with OpenPAD at any one time. There is a desire to extend the OpenPAD scheme to staff in collaborative partners. Teaching staff are also encouraged to engage in scholarship projects, experimenting with new ways of teaching and supporting students, and to share the results of such work in the Scholarship Exchange. There is some evidence that project reports uploaded to the Scholarship Exchange repository have been the direct cause of good practice being copied elsewhere in the institution. The University is considering ways in which the Scholarship Exchange could be better publicised within, as the projects described are often interesting and worthy of wider dissemination.

2.48   Overall, the review team considers that the University, working with staff, students and other stakeholders, articulates and systematically reviews and enhances the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices, so that every student is enabled to develop as an independent learner, to study their chosen subject in depth and to enhance their capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.49   The strategic approach to enabling student development and achievement is reflected in the Strategic Plan, with contextualised versions for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Student services staff are currently based in national centres and nine regional centres in England. However, a decision has just been taken by the University to restructure the location of student support staff and to close seven of its regional centres.

2.50   Student support is monitored by the Student Experience Committee, including the receipt of reports on NSS (National Student Survey) and Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES). There are key performance indicators for student support on the institutional dashboard, and student support teams (SSTs) report annually on the volume and nature of interventions. The impact of interventions is monitored by the Learning and Teaching Centre, which may recommend improvements to processes. Student support is also the subject of reflection in annual quality reviews, and in periodic reviews.

2.51   Student support teams became operational in February 2014 and students are now supported by a team of academic and professional staff organised around discipline areas. This move was to enable closer and more enduring relationships between academic staff, associate lecturers, learner support staff and students. There are also national centre-based support staff who ensure that specific support can be accessed, including qualification systems, funding and finance, and professional body requirements. The Model for Integrated Learning and Leaner Support system sets out standard ways in which students are contacted, in terms of purpose, timing, media and initiator. The student support team model is still developing and several projects are under way to use data to target students for particular interventions, including phone contact or more complex actions. A number of these projects report results, which are then disseminated to other teams.

2.52   As students begin their studies specific online support is given to introduce new students to the online learning community, including an online Freshers' Week. Later in the student journey, the key objective is to improve the proportion of students who progress and achieve their intended award. A number of completed projects have focused in this area, including the Student Charter, the introduction of student support teams (SST), and the emphasis on qualifications rather than modules. Several projects are also ongoing, including those on group tuition, use of associate lecturers in early student engagement, a review of the online student experience and the transition to University study.

2.53   The StudentHome pages on the VLE include a qualifications site, which aims to offer a learning environment that includes information on skills and careers, as well as resources for the study journey such as library links and community building.

2.54   It is intended that all Level 1 modules will include elements of personal development planning by 2017. A significant proportion of students are already in employment before they start programmes, and remain with the same employer throughout. The policy statement on employability lays out the approach taken. Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) data is monitored through annual quality review processes. Each academic unit has an 'employability champion', who works with careers service staff to ensure that employability skills are embedded in the curriculum, along with personal development planning.

2.55   A recent review of the student experience for overseas students has resulted in website improvements and amendments to policies and procedures. These include provision for disabled international students and procedures for examinations in an international context. The University acknowledges that some modules are not available to students outside the EU, usually because of software licensing or other content restrictions. However, the only qualifications advertised outside the EU are ones for which there is sufficient module choice to allow students to achieve the qualification's learning outcomes. Any new curriculum will be developed in such a way that it is suitable for worldwide delivery.

2.56   The University has in place policies and mechanisms for enabling student development and achievement, which would enable Expectation B4 to be met.

2.57   The review team investigated the University's policies and regulations on enabling student development and achievement through meetings with senior staff, faculty staff, teaching staff, professional and support staff and students. It also considered a range of documentation supplied by the University, including policies and procedures, committee minutes, student handbooks, and online resources.

2.58   The University's strategy for the changes to arrangements for the location of student support teams, including closure of seven regional centres, is intended to improve student support. Success of the changes will be measured and reviewed by the University, including the time taken to respond to support queries, and students' satisfaction with support responses. A significant level of discussion and consultation has been undertaken on the changes, including with OUSA.

2.59   The review team also saw evidence of the extensive use of data on various aspects of student support. This data is used to drive interventions, either at an individual student level or more strategically.

2.60   Qualification websites complement the module resources available on StudentHome. However, the University has recognised that these qualification websites will need some redesigning so that they present relevant information in the most accessible way. This redesign will be based around user experience surveys.

2.61   The team heard, in several different contexts, about the support offered to students with disabilities. Support includes assistance offered to potential students enquiring about study and discussion of possible adjustments, as well as routine consideration of the needs of disabled students when modules and qualifications are designed. Students also recognise the support available as teaching is delivered, from associate lecturers and student support teams in particular. The highly effective embedding of the needs of disabled students through the design, approval and delivery of the curriculum is **good practice**.

2.62   Overall, the review team considers that the University has in place, monitors and evaluates arrangements and resources that enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B5: Student Engagement*

Findings

2.63   The University has a clear commitment to working with and engaging the student body through a variety of mechanisms. The Student Charter defines the expectations and the responsibilities in the relationship between the institution and the students. These responsibilities include a commitment to work in partnership to achieve the University's mission and to support students to participate actively in its governance, primarily through OUSA.

2.64   The detailed institutional agreement confirms OUSA as the official student representative body. The University delegates responsibility for student representation to OUSA, including the appointment of student representatives for the governing body and central committees, as well as their training and induction.

2.65   The University has three main ways of engaging its students: student representation within decision-making committees, boards and working groups; feedback gathered through a variety of surveys; and online student consultative forums.

2.66   These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.67   To assess the steps taken to engage students individually and collectively, the review team met the University's senior and faculty staff, and undergraduate, postgraduate taught, and postgraduate research students, as well as OUSA representatives. The review team analysed a wide range of evidence, which included committee minutes, report papers, policy documents and strategies and action plans.

2.68   The University approved a new Student Charter in 2013, which was reviewed in 2015. The review identified the low visibility of the Charter among the student body, and the need for it to be implemented rather than amended. The University also resolved to communicate more effectively with the student body about changes made and about its responses to feedback provided.

2.69   Student representatives are appointed and trained by OUSA. The University supports the engagement of students within its committee structure and student representatives feature at all levels and at nearly all committees. The University and OUSA institutional agreement establishes a clear relationship between the bodies and supports student engagement at all governance levels within the University.

2.70   Student representatives are enable to participate effectively within a range of committees. These include programme committees, the Education Committee, Research Committee, Research Degrees Committee, Qualifications and Assessment Committee, Academic Quality and Governance Committee, Student Experience Committee and Curriculum Partnerships Committee. Additionally, OUSA representatives sit on the University Council and are responsible for submitting an annual report to the University. The University has also piloted student membership of Programme Periodic Review panels (PPR) and has embedded this practice in its methodology for future PPR.

2.71   The University recognises that, although there are places for student representatives at committees, the student membership and attendance has been less than consistent, especially at programme committees. This is partially due to the devolved nature

of the institution and the fact that all students are based away from the campus. To enable participation, video and telephone conferencing are available to students who are unable to participate physically in meetings. However, the University and OUSA are aware of the need to facilitate greater engagement with students and further their involvement in the deliberative processes.

2.72   Although students sit on qualification approval committees they are not currently enabled to contribute fully to curriculum development processes. Active student involvement, in most cases, takes place at the latter part of the approval process rather than during the development of modules and qualifications. However, during the qualification and module development processes, student feedback from surveys is taken into account and the University is committed to ensuring greater student engagement in development processes. The review team **affirms** the steps being undertaken to increase student involvement in the design of modules and qualifications.

2.73   Outside the formal committee activity students are often invited to participate in working groups to improve University services and processes. One example of this is the Student Engagement Project, a joint University and OUSA project established to investigate the gaps in student engagement. The project demonstrates the commitment of both organisations to develop students' participation within the University and to work through the identified challenges.

2.74   There are a number of internal and external surveys in place, including the Student Experience on a Module (SEaM), the New Student Survey (PTES), Postgraduate Research Experience (PRES) and the external National Student Survey (NSS). Feedback from SEaM, PTES, PRES and NSS informs quality assurance and enhancement processes through programme annual quality review and in key metric reports. Both of these approaches feed into the faculty business planning process. Furthermore, results are reviewed by the Student Experience Committee and Research Degrees Committee. Results are also shared through the StudentHome webpage and the virtual research environment (VRE), together with actions that faculties have taken in response to the feedback. The University has recognised the need to make results of these surveys more visible. Students are still largely unaware of how their feedback is used and what actions are carried out in response.

2.75   In order to engage a larger number of students, and therefore a more representative sample of the student body, the University has moved to online consultations, implemented through the use of forums and supported with face-to-face meetings.

2.76   The University has student consultative forums made up of both student volunteers and student representatives appointed by the OUSA. Some of these are targeted at specific groups of students, for example students with disabilities. However, the students involved in consultations make up a small sample of the overall student body. One of the recommendations from the student engagement consultation was that the number of students on all forums is doubled, to increase the breadth of engagement and involvement in individual consultations. The review team **affirms** the steps being taken to engage the wider student body, and to inform students more effectively about actions taken in response to their feedback.

2.77   Overall, deliberate steps are being taken to engage with students individually and collectively as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. A range of formal and informal mechanisms is used to collect, collate and disseminate the student voice at all levels of the University, although the nature of the dispersed student body represents a significant challenge. The student representative system is supported by both the OUSA and the University, and its effectiveness is underpinned by a culture of feedback and student consultation. The review team affirms steps being taken to engage the

wider student body, and to inform students more effectively about actions taken in response to their feedback, and to increase student involvement in the design of modules and qualifications. 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

2.78   Strategic oversight of assessment policies, processes and outcomes rests with the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Innovation), while the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Academic Strategy) and the deans are responsible for delivery in accordance with approved policy. Previously, the Assessment Policy Committee was responsible for the development, review and revision of relevant policies for direct provision. Policies were approved by the Curriculum and Validation Committee with more significant changes subject to Senate approval. Under the new governance arrangements the Assessment Policy Committee has merged with the Qualifications Committee to form the Qualifications and Assessment Committee, reporting to the Education Committee.

2.79   In January 2015 the University collated all of its assessment policies into a single Assessment Policy document. This document combines high-level statements of its approach to assessment, and more detailed policies and rules, such as the Senate guidelines for determining results. With the transition from a module-based to qualification-based curriculum, changes to assessment requirements were supported by the New Models of Assessment and Tuition Project. Key outcomes of the project were the approval of seven principles of assessment and the development of the Assessment Hub, an online resource designed to develop assessment knowledge and practice.

2.80   The University requires that assessment strategies are developed and approved for all new and revised qualifications. Module-level assessment strategies are developed by module teams and approved by the Director, Assessment, Credit and Qualifications. External advice on assessment is provided by external assessors at the development and design phase and then by the programme committee external advisors and external examiners during module delivery. Assessment is monitored and reviewed through the annual and periodic quality review processes.

2.81   Modules normally include a combination of continuous assessment and a controlled (examination) component. A variety of assessment methods are used, with 90 per cent of assessments delivered online. Associate lecturers are responsible for marking and providing individualised feedback to students. Standardisation is assured through the use of assessment criteria, detailed advice on grading and monitoring of sample assessments. The consistent application of standards is ensured through the use of centralised systems to manage the assessment process. These procedures include marking training, detailed guidance, moderation of tutor-marked assessments and standardisation of examinations and end-of-module assessments.

2.82   Examination and assessment boards operate at module level to guidelines set by Senate. Results are reviewed by the Module Results Approval and Qualification Classification Panel (MRAQCP), which ratifies the award of credit. The University has agreed new examination board structures which will be implemented with effect from October 2016. Module results will be considered by module results panels feeding into cluster examination and assessment boards, covering a group of cognate modules.

Progression and awards will be considered by a progression and completion board. External examining arrangements are being reconfigured to support the new structures.

2.83   The regulations relating to assessment are available to students through the essential documents webpages. Other assessment related information, including the contribution of assessment components to the module result, is incorporated into module specific guides. Students are provided with guidance on developing good academic practice and reminders are incorporated in module guides.

2.84   The Centre for Inclusion and Collaborative Provision is responsible for the University's Policy on the recognition of prior learning (RPL). Oversight was exercised by the Curriculum and Validation Committee through its qualifications subcommittee. From August 2015 these responsibilities have been assumed by the Qualification and Assessment Committee reporting to the Education Committee. The University employs a number of different models for recognising prior certificated learning. These include credit transfer and credit rating for award of credit, and for recognising prior experiential learning (including portfolio assessment and fast-track modules). A credit rating panel is used to assess the eligibility of non-credit bearing courses.

2.85   The General Qualification Regulations incorporate procedures for credit transfer. Specific credit transfer rules for new or revised qualifications are developed as part of the approval process. The Credit Transfer Centre is responsible for the administration process. Prior experiential learning may be incorporated formally into the design of modules and qualifications. The University approved a new RPL policy in 2015, which it intends to implement in full from 2017-18. Under the new policy credit transfer will be replaced by direct entry to an appropriate stage of a qualification for those holding UK credit-bearing qualifications. Credit transfer will continue for those with overseas qualifications and UK credit (but not qualifications). The credit rating service for partners will close and faculties will take over responsibility for credit rating of non-credit bearing qualifications.

2.86   From September 2015 all partner institutions offering validated awards are required to adopt standard University-devised regulations, supplemented by locally devised policies and procedures, which require verification as part of the institutional approval and review processes. Delegated matters include procedures relating to academic misconduct, extenuating circumstances and RPL.

2.87   The University's framework of regulations, policies and procedures would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.88   The review team explored the effectiveness of the University's assessment practices by considering reports from external assessors, advisers and examiners, documents related to module and qualification approval, annual quality monitoring and periodic programme review reports, and by talking to staff and students.

2.89   The University's Assessment Policy defines the principles and expectations of effective and inclusive assessment. The primary purpose of assessment is clearly stated as the development of 'self-regulated reflexive independent learners'. The learning acquired through continuous assessment and individualised feedback is a distinctive feature of the University's model of distance learning. The development of assessment strategies is integrated effectively into module design benefitting from the advice provided by external assessors. Although students noted variability in assessment load between modules there are mechanisms in place to address assessment volume, including guidance on overall workload, University-wide norms for the number of assignments per module, faculty assessment load models and feedback from tutors and students.

2.90   Accessibility to assessment is embedded into module and assessment design and there are procedures for making reasonable adjustment. Academic staff receive good support in implementing the assessment policy. Each faculty has an assessment lead to provide advice and support. The Assessment Hub provides a repository of guidance and other good practice materials and tutors receive feedback on the quality of their marking. The Assessment Programme project is the focus of enhancement activity.

2.91   Students on direct provision whom the review team met expressed uncertainty about how assessment components contribute to the overall module mark, as well as the transparency of information about assessment. The University accepts that its assessment regulations are complex and that the information provided to students is not as clear as it could be. A project is planned to improve the accessibility of information using a help desk approach. The review team **affirms** the steps being taken to improve the communication of assessment regulations to students. Assessment regulations are kept under regular review by the University's committees and the arrangements for marking and moderation are clearly specified and thoroughly executed. Those involved in examination boards receive training. The MRAQCP plays an effective role in monitoring assessment results and makes good use of data for this purpose.

2.92   Overall, the review team concludes that the University operates equitable, valid and reliable assessment processes, including for RPL, which enable students to demonstrate the extent to which they have met learning outcomes. Therefore 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

2.93   Until September 2015 the University appointed external examiners to individual modules rather than to qualifications or awards. External examiners were members of examination and assessment boards, while the MRAQCP included an external member. As the University moves from a module to qualification-based curriculum, a new structure of assessment boards and external examining arrangements has been approved. These will be implemented from 2016. External examiners will take responsibility for a number of modules and will be appointed to cluster examination and assessment boards. A chief external examiner will be appointed at qualification level to a progression and completion board. The MRAQCP will continue to function with external academic representation. This matter is also addressed under Expectation B6.

2.94   The processes and criteria for the appointment of external examiners is set out in the Statement of Assessment Policy and Procedure. Nominations are approved by the Director, Assessment, Credit and Qualifications and, in exceptional circumstances, by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Innovation). On appointment, external examiners receive a role descriptor, the terms of reference of relevant boards and access to training materials for board members. Information about raising serious concerns, using the QAA Concerns process, is contained in the role descriptor. The University has introduced a new template for external examiners' reports to ensure alignment with the Quality Code.

2.95   The responsibilities of external examiners are clearly documented. Their duties include approving examination papers and end-of-module assessments, considering the validity of assessment activities and the reliability of marking and sampling examination scripts. External examiners receive assessment materials, samples of students' work, the assessment record for each student, analyses of cohort achievement and details of special circumstances. They approve the criteria for each category of result.

2.96   External examiners are required to complete their reports within six weeks of board meetings. The responsibility for responding to external examiners rests with the chair of the board for academic matters, and with the Deputy Director, Assessment, Credit and Qualifications for administrative issues. External examiners' reports are considered by programme committees. The Assessment Policy Committee receives summaries of reports and considers any institutional issues.

2.97   QAA's 2009 Institutional Audit report recommended that the University enabled student representatives to see external examiner reports in full. Representatives now have access to external examiners' reports through their membership of programme committees. Steps have been taken to ensure that student members receive a full set of reports prior to meetings. OUSA is provided with a full set of examiners' reports. Information about the role of the external examiner, the name and affiliation of the specific examiner, and the facility to request a copy of a report is publicised to students on StudentHome. Staff are encouraged to become external examiners and faculties keep records of appointments to try to ensure that there are no conflicts of interest.

2.98   Following a review of validated provision arrangements the adoption of a single set of academic regulations for validated provision, and the transfer of responsibility for the appointment of external examiners from partners to the University, took effect from 2014-15 . The criteria for the appointment of external examiners and their role and responsibilities is

set out in the Handbook for Validated Awards. External examiners participate in generic online induction and receive more specific briefings from the Quality and Partnership Manager. The responsibility for responding to external examiners rests with the partner institution. The University monitors external examiners' reports and responses, through its consideration of annual monitoring reports and through the compilation of subject overview reports.

2.99   The arrangements for external examining would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.100   The review team explored how the arrangements work in practice by reading a sample of external examiner reports and responses and overview reports considered by committees, reviewing how external examiner reports are considered as part of annual monitoring and periodic programme review, and by talking to staff and students.

2.101   The external examiner role is clearly defined and implemented for both direct and validated provision. The criteria and procedures for appointment are transparent. External examiners receive an induction to their role and have access to online training materials. The report template ensures that the University receives timely and detailed information about its assessment practices. The consideration of external examiner reports in annual monitoring is thorough and the monitoring by programme committees is robust. Tutors who are not members of committees do not receive copies of external examiners' reports on a routine basis, although they may receive a digest.

2.102   Student representatives have a good knowledge of the content of external examiners' reports, either through membership of Programme Committees or other higher level committees or in their capacity as OUSA officers. Other students have limited awareness of external examiners' reports, although they understand that they can request a copy. The University has plans for the publication of external examiners' reports from 2016-17 as it moves to qualification-level external examining. The review team affirms the planned arrangements to make available systematically all external examiner reports for direct provision in full to students and staff. The University encourages its staff to become external examiners and has established a forum for its staff who act as external examiners to share good practice. The arrangements for the appointment of external examiners and consideration of their reports in validated provision are robust. Partner institutions are required to make reports available in full to students.

2.103   Overall, the review team concludes that the University has effective arrangements in place for external examining and makes scrupulous use of external examiners' reports. Therefore 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

2.104   The University has an annual quality review (AQR) and a six-yearly periodic review process. The AQR report is written on a detailed template and includes reviews of modules and qualifications, drawing on a number of sources, including external examiners, the external academic adviser and student feedback. The data supplied by the University's IET includes student enrolments, progression, achievement, and a range of internal and external student surveys. IET provides guidance and workshops to assist the review process. Student feedback informs the AQR process through consideration of the SEaM survey, NSS and PTES. The University is considering using student consultative forums to feed into AQR. There is an internal benchmark of 93 per cent overall satisfaction in the NSS. Qualifications that do not meet the thresholds for NSS must report this in the AQR. Programme teams draw up plans in response to NSS and PTES, which are considered by the Learning, Teaching and Student Support Committee. In addition, the University has a module exception review process whereby a module that is deemed to be performing exceptionally well or badly is examined more fully. Such modules are identified by the programme director based on criteria identified by the Institutional Scrutiny Group (ISG), which analyses all AQR reports. Modules that have completed their first year, or are at a life cycle review point, are subject to review.

2.105   AQRs are considered by programme committees, which include external advisers, before submission to the ISG. This group is chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Innovation) and includes members of committees to which the group reports, two Programme Directors and staff involved in student support and institutional enhancement. Outcomes from the scrutiny of AQR reports are reported to QAEC and Student Experience Advisory Group. ISG also annually reviews the AQR process and templates and has recently introduced meetings between ISG and programme directors. Commendations or recommendations arising from the process are referred to the programme directors' group. In addition, IET holds quality enhancement seminars and there is a briefing session each year on the AQR process for programme directors.

2.106   Periodic programme review (PPR) takes place every six years. The panel is chaired by a senior academic from another faculty and also includes an external member and a student member. Services outside the faculty, such as student support and library services, contribute to the self-evaluation and to action planning after the event. Where possible a periodic programme review may also combine with PSRB re-accreditation.

2.107   Outcomes from periodic review reports are considered by QAEC and action plans are developed by programme teams as a result. The action plans are monitored by QAEC. A summary of outcomes from both AQR and periodic review are disseminated annually to programme directors. QAEC produces an annual report to Senate on key issues from PPR and other evidence on the effectiveness of quality systems.

2.108   An evaluation of the periodic review methodology resulted in an enhancement of the guidance, provision of contextual information on strategic enhancement initiatives and the Student Charter, and advice on how to improve reports so that they are more consistent. Dissemination of good practice and the engagement of non-academic units in action planning was also required.

2.109   For validated provision an institutional level overview and annual programme level evaluation (APE) is considered by the Quality and Partnerships Manager, who provides feedback. A working group of the Validation Committee considers the monitoring report and academic reviewer reports. Reports are taken to the Validation Committee and, for other taught collaborations, to the Curriculum Partnerships Committee, which both report to the Curriculum and Validation Committee. In the new committee structure the Curriculum Partnerships Committee will have an overview. Overviews of reports from partners are prepared by the Centre for Inclusion and Collaborative Partnerships. Validated programmes are approved for five years and then revalidated using the process for initial approval. There is a process for minor and major modifications.

2.110   These structures and processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.111   The team met students, senior faculty staff, teaching staff, collaborative provision staff, and professional and support staff. It also looked at AQRs and APEs, periodic programme review reports, subject overview reports, minutes of QAEC and annual reports to Senate.

2.112   The AQRs and APEs provide detailed information and analysis, noting actions from previous reports and how these had been met. Details of future actions, statistics and comments on each module, external examiner and assessor comments, and student feedback are evident. Senior faculty staff confirmed that the University had looked at the effectiveness and burden of the AQR process and that it considers that it has achieved the right balance.

2.113   Students would appreciate more opportunity to contribute to the AQR process, but acknowledge that the programme teams provide responses to student feedback. Student feedback is currently obtained through student consultations and a range of surveys. Students at collaborative partners say that they have an opportunity to feed into the annual monitoring process.

2.114   Each partner completes an Institutional Annual Monitoring report and each programme completes an annual programme evaluation (APE). The reports are considered by University quality and partnership managers and then by a working group, which includes academic reviewers reporting to CPC.

2.115   Periodic programme review reports are detailed and include recommendations for the programme team. Panels include an external member, and, if relevant, a member from a PSRB, and a student member. QAEC receives all periodic programme review reports and action plans and monitors that the plans are being implemented. It produces an annual report to Senate, which summarises the reports from periodic programme reviews and progress on action plans.

2.116   Overall, the University operates effective, regular and systematic processes for monitoring and for review of programmes. These processes take account of external reference points and include an appropriate level of externality. There is clear oversight of actions arising from the processes and outcomes are considered at a range of deliberative committees. 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

2.117   The process for the management of complaints and appeals is set out in the Student Complaints and Appeals Procedure. New complaints and administrative appeals procedures have been applied from August 2015, and for new academic appeals from October 2015. The approach is an integrated one as the University recognises that submissions are sometimes complex enough to straddle both complaints and appeals. The procedures are comprehensive in scope and detail. They state how students at partner organisations should seek advice on complaints and appeals, provide further assistance for disabled students, and set out the arrangements for research students. In addition, they are clear that no student will be disadvantaged for making a complaint or an appeal. Appeals against academic decisions, for entry to taught postgraduate qualifications and modules, are referred to the relevant Programme Committee.

2.118   The student casework team oversees the tracking of complaints and appeals. These are monitored and evaluated by the Complaints and Appeals Steering Group. An annual report to the Student Experience Committee provides information on the effectiveness of procedures, including how complaints and appeals are dealt with, monitoring against equality and diversity criteria, and reports on cases by subject matter, department and outcome.

2.119   All validation partners are required to develop student complaint and appeal procedures, which are approved by the University. Affiliated Research Centres (ARCs) establish appropriate complaints procedures, and appeals are considered directly at the University. These retain a right for students to complain or appeal to the University. Validation partners are required to report statistical information on appeals and complaints within the annual monitoring process. Institutions are expected to have appropriate mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness and fairness of such procedures and to reflect on their outcomes for enhancement purposes.

2.120   The policies and procedures in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.121   The review team explored the University's approach to the handling of academic appeals and student complaints by viewing documentation, including the complaints and appeals procedures, the website, the Research Degrees Student Handbook and annual reports to Senate. In addition, the review team met staff and students from across the provision and from partner institutions to verify its findings.

2.122   There are distinct appeals procedures for academic and administrative issues. The academic appeals procedure applies to requests for a review of a decision taken by an individual or academic body charged with making decisions about students' progression, assessment, and awards. The administrative appeals procedure is linked with the complaints procedure and applies when the University makes a non-academic decision about any aspect of a student's access to learning or learning experience. The University introduced this distinction to deal with formal complaints and appeals through an integrated structure that covers the full range of disputes that arise.

2.123   Procedures for complaints and appeals are clear, include timescales for resolution, and are equally accessible to all students. These are made available to students (including prospective applicants) through the Essential Documents section of the Student Charter website, and at induction. Research students are provided with this information in the Research Degrees Student Handbook and on the virtual research environment (VRE). Students can receive information and support through a variety of methods. These include OUSA, the student casework team, the student support teams, or for postgraduate students, through the research degrees office. Students demonstrate an awareness of where information and support is available. Those studying at collaborative partners were aware of the routes to escalate a complaint to the University.

2.124   The revised procedures place a high level of emphasis on early and informal resolution. The first stage requires students to make contact with the department about which the complaint or appeal is being made. Both the procedures and the website provide a set of contacts for each department to direct students to the appropriate area. However, this information has not yet been made available for the student-facing version of the website. It has been delayed until personal staff email addresses are replaced with email addresses for their functions, which will allow emails to be monitored and responded to continuously. The review team **affirms** the work being undertaken to provide students with comprehensive contact information to support the resolution of complaints and appeals.

2.125   Complaints and appeals are recorded on the University's customer relationship management system or, for research students, on the student's file. The system maintains tracking information on cases to monitor and ensure compliance with response times and records actions taken as a result of complaints or appeals. Monthly monitoring reports, issued to heads of department and deans of faculty, are used to check progress. In addition, the policy requires that the student casework team produce a quarterly report on complaints and appeals, available on the student complaints and appeals website. As the procedures have only been in place for a short time, no such report has yet been produced.

2.126   At present, validated provision complaints and appeals are referred at final stage to the Director of the Centre for Inclusion and Collaborative Partnerships. From 2016-17, they will follow the standard University procedure for the final stage.

2.127   Overall, the review team considers that the University has procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints about the quality of learning opportunities that are fair, accessible and timely and which enable enhancement. 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

2.128   The University engages in a range of collaborations with partners to allow it to fulfil its mission, particularly through diversification of its curriculum and widening participation.

2.129   The four main partnership types are validated provision (provision designed and delivered by partners with University approval and oversight), collaborative curriculum (in which partners are involved in development of curricula or provision of modules that contribute to the University's courses), collaborative presentation (in which partners provide local student support for the University's qualifications and modules and may contribute to teaching and assessment) and collaborative research degrees (primarily Affiliated Research Centres where supervision is fully delegated to the partner). Some of the University's validation arrangements lead to dual awards, but at the time of the review there were no awards of joint qualifications offered with other institutions.

2.130   The University has recently adopted a more proactive strategic approach to partnership for validated provision, with due regard to risk management and financial contribution. A particular emphasis is on collaboration with UK further education colleges. Internationally, there is now a greater emphasis on licensing the University's content to organisations to use for their own purposes. Overseas collaborative presentation arrangements have been reduced following consideration of risk and financial matters.

2.131   The University takes responsibility for the academic standards and quality of all of its awards delivered in partnership with others, through institutional and course approval, monitoring, review and assessment processes.

2.132   Arrangements for the University's validated provision were reviewed in 2012 in order to ensure greater consistency, enhanced oversight of academic standards and improved risk management. As a result of this review the University introduced a consistent regulatory framework for all validated partners from 2015-16, while recognising the value of some limited local variation. Prior to this date, each partner devised its own assessment regulations for University approval.

2.133   Senate has authority for approving and for reviewing partner institutions, and validating and revalidating programmes. This authority is exercised through the University's CPC for all decisions on institutional approval and validation of taught provision. Institutional approval is required before programmes of study can be validated. The University undertakes due diligence that ensures a partner's financial and legal status is sufficiently robust to honour its commitments to registered students. Once an institution is approved, a legally binding institutional agreement is drawn up and signed, setting out the relationship between the University and the institution and defining respective responsibilities.

2.134   Approval and review of institutions is considered, in the first instance, by the University's Validation Committee, which makes recommendations to CPC. Members of Validation Committee are drawn from members of University academic staff and partner institutions, and from external bodies. Where programmes are to be delivered and assessed

in a language other than English, the University requires that there is a sufficiently experienced bilingual peer group to allow the University to monitor the programmes. Collaborative curriculum and presentation arrangements follow standard arrangements for managing the quality of direct provision, with additional monitoring through an Annual Review of Curriculum Partnerships.

2.135 For validated provision the University requires partner institutions to produce an annual monitoring report for each qualification, together with the responses to external examiners' comments. A separate institutional annual report is required, which evaluates the effectiveness of monitoring and other quality assurance arrangements. These annual monitoring reports are considered by quality and partnerships managers, in conjunction with an annual monitoring subgroup of CPC. Each partner institution receives individual feedback, which may identify issues requiring immediate action. CPC receives a report on the annual monitoring process and outcomes, including action on immediate issues, and reports to Education Committee. Annual subject-based overviews are also compiled by the Centre for Inclusion and Collaborative Partnerships for partners, University faculties and CPC. These reports provide an additional route by which the University identifies enhancement activities to undertake with partners.

2.136 The University reviews the institutional approval of all partner institutions at intervals normally not exceeding five years. Major changes to a programme require formal approval by the University and a revised student handbook and programme specification.

2.137 A member of University staff is appointed as the academic reviewer to support the quality assurance and enhancement of validated provision. The intensity of University oversight of collaborative partnerships varies according to the different stages of the relationship, across partner institutions, and across validated programmes within a partner institution.

2.138 The academic reviewer attends final examination boards and other key committees, such as academic boards at the partner institution. Each reviewer submits a summary record of their engagement with the partner over the year. Where issues are raised, the University expects institutions to consider these as part of their annual monitoring process.

2.139 The changes to University procedures for the award of results, including assessment board structures planned for autumn 2016, will apply equally to collaborative presentation and curriculum, as well as to direct provision. Ratification of validated provision results for all taught provision takes place through the MRAQCP.

2.140 Where a partner institution wishes to stop delivering a validated programme the University requires the institution to confirm the means by which existing students will be able to complete their qualification.

2.141 Collaborative research degree arrangements follow the standard University processes. All academic decisions are either made by the University or, in the case of Affiliated Research Centres (ARC), recommended for approval in line with processes for other research degrees students. ARC arrangements for ensuring appropriate training for supervisors are checked at approval and review visits, and through annual monitoring.

2.142 The University's policies and regulations relating to the management of higher education provision with others would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.143 The review team assessed the operation and effectiveness of the University's policies and procedures governing the management of its provision with others through meetings with staff, partners involved in supporting the delivery of learning opportunities, and

students. The review team considered a range of evidence relating to approval, review and management, committee minutes, as well as legal and other documentation.

2.144   The University implements a strategic approach to delivering learning opportunities with others and has processes to ensure appropriate levels of resources are committed to these activities. The University has appropriate governance arrangements to ensure sufficient oversight of its collaborative provision.

2.145   Legally binding agreements effectively set out the rights and obligations of the University and partner, which are scrutinised in approval and periodic review processes, and signed by an authorised representative of the University. The University maintains an accurate and comprehensive record of all its arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with others. All written agreements provide for termination, and for the partner's responsibility to enable registered students to complete their awards in such an event. Where decisions have been made to exit from collaborations, effective arrangements are made to ensure that students are able to complete their studies for one of the University's qualifications.

2.146   Policies and procedures ensure that there are adequate safeguards against financial impropriety or conflicts of interest that might compromise academic standards or the quality of learning opportunities, and manage the risks associated with collaborative provision. Consideration of the business case is conducted separately from approval of the academic proposal.

2.147   The University takes responsibility for ensuring that it retains proper control of the academic standards of awards where learning opportunities are delivered with others. University oversight of validated provision has improved since 2014-15. The University now takes responsibility for the appointment of external examiners, the inclusion of a member of University staff in all final examination boards at partners, and the collection of students' personal contact details and progression information, to better manage the risk of unexpected partner failure.

2.148   The approval of collaborative programmes is as rigorous, secure and open to scrutiny as that for assuring quality and academic standards of programmes directly provided by the University. The University has effective processes to ensure that the awards delivered in collaboration with partners are consistent with UK threshold standards.

2.149   The Institutional approval process clarifies which organisation is responsible for admitting and registering a student to modules or programmes delivered with others. The University also has effective processes to ensure that its partners involved in the assessment of students understand and follow the approved assessment requirements.

2.150   The University has processes to control the accuracy of all public information, publicity and promotional activity relating to learning opportunities delivered with others. There is evidence that some information provided by partners is not consistently or regularly checked and this matter is also addressed in Part C.

2.151   Overall, the review team concludes that arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with organisations who are in partnership with the University are implemented securely and managed effectively. Therefore the Expectation is met and the associated 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

2.152   The University offers research degrees, which include both full and part-time PhD and MPhil qualifications. These are either undertaken directly with the University, or by registering with one of the 21 ARCs. There is also a part-time professional doctorate in Education (EdD). Direct research degrees are managed through faculties and research centres, and central functions are provided by the Research Scholarship and Quality Unit. Governance is delegated by Senate to Research Committee and thence to Research Degrees Committee. The regulations for research degrees are found in the Research Degrees Student Handbooks, along with the Code of Practice for Supervisors and Research Students. These have been considered in line with the Expectation and indicators of *Chapter B11* of the Quality Code.

2.153   The University's network of 21 ARCs are centres of research excellence in the UK and overseas without their own research degree awarding powers, where students can work towards a research degree from the University. University procedures for student progress and assessment are followed in the ARCs, with the additional constraint that at least one supervisor must be employed by the ARC.

2.154   The link between research students and the University's overarching research strategy is provided by the Research Scholarship and Quality Unit. As well as ensuring that the research environment is suitable to sustain research degree programmes, it also covers research management issues, such as integrity and ethics, intellectual property and research conduct.

2.155   The institutional research strategy and priorities are laid out in the Research Plan. An annual survey assesses the research environment to see whether it meets the needs of academics and researchers. Results are fed into improvement activities and the strategic plan. Further information to improve research degrees is taken from annual reviews, the national PRES, the Principal Investigators and Research Leaders Survey, and the Careers in Research Online Survey.

2.156   Regulations, policies and guidance on research degrees are overseen by Research Degrees Committee (RDC) and are published in the Research Degrees Handbook, as well as online. Management data is considered by RDC at each meeting and includes figures on registration, submissions, withdrawals and appeals. The University monitors key metrics in a number of ways: through the Institutional dashboard (which is considered by the Vice Chancellor's Executive); through a dashboard of more detailed data, which is prepared for the Research Scholarship and Quality Unit; and through reports to RDC on areas such as relevant surveys and the outcomes of annual monitoring processes.

2.157   Information needed for the recruitment and admission of research students is found in the online Research Degrees prospectus. Terms and conditions and the Code of Practice are found in the student handbooks, which are available to candidates at the point of offer. Guidance for staff involved in recruitment was revised in 2013, along with associated

documentation, and annual updates take place to ensure consistency. Recruitment in ARCs is overseen by the University thorough the review visit process and by annual monitoring.

2.158   Research students starting programmes participate in a variety of induction events. Full-time directly supported students are obliged to attend both institutional and faculty inductions, and, if appropriate, sessions for international students. There are also events for part-time students, and specific events for EdD students. For students in ARCs, responsibility for induction is delegated to the ARC, and is monitored by the University.

2.159   Each research student has at least two academic staff as supervisors, with one identified as the lead. There is a clear statement of the roles and responsibilities of both supervisor and student in the Code of Practice, found in student handbooks and on the virtual research environment (VRE). As well as their supervisor, students can access advice and guidance from a named third party monitor, who is responsible for pastoral support outside the supervision framework.

2.160   Supervision teams meet criteria laid down in the Research Degrees Supervision policy. These cover both experience and expertise of the supervision team, and CVs are submitted for each supervisor. Online training modules are available on the VRE.

2.161   The University's processes for monitoring students' academic progress include a probationary period, and the submission by all students of progress reports at six-monthly intervals. These are monitored at faculty level. Guidance notes and assessment criteria are found in the student handbooks.

2.162   External examiner nominations are approved by RDC, except in the case of ARC students in life and biomolecular sciences, where approval is delegated to the management group. Separate examiner reports are completed before the viva, and the final exam report is reviewed and ratified by the Research Degree Examination Result Approval Committee to ensure consistency.

2.163   Appeals and complaints by research students are dealt with according to the University procedures for all taught students. Information on the procedures is available on the VRE, in student handbooks and on the essential documents website.

2.164   The VRE is an online repository for documentation related to research degrees. It also contains a training zone to support doctoral workshops and online training for both students and supervisors. There are also development planning tools and skills audit tools, helping students to plan their own development needs. The VRE is particularly important for part-time students who may have difficulty attending face-to-face training.

2.165   The University's research environment is lively, with seminars, workshops and conferences in which students can get involved. There are teaching opportunities in schools through the Brilliant Club charity, but traditional PhD teaching opportunities on undergraduate programmes are more limited. Some research students are involved with module development and a few are associate lecturers, but this is not the norm.

2.166   All research students are supported through the VRE, and some physical resources are available. Those based on campus have desk space, IT and specialist equipment as needed. Off-campus students have to provide their own offices, but IT provision has recently been enhanced, giving access to required software packages. There is a project underway looking at IT needs of all research students to enable equality of provision.

2.167   Research students have a number of routes to offer feedback on their experiences, either through student reps, or as an individual, or through the annual review by RDC. There is a feedback facility within the VRE, but it is seldom used. PRES or an internal equivalent

survey takes place each year, and results are analysed by RDC. Consultative forums are used when student input is needed on particular topics.

2.168   The University has policies and regulations concerning the management of research degrees that would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.169   The review team investigated the University's policies and regulations about research degrees through meetings with staff and research students, both those who are studying directly at the University and those who are at ARCs. It also considered a range of documentation supplied by the University, including policies and procedures, committee minutes, student handbooks and progress report templates.

2.170   Research students confirmed that the application process to enrol on a research degree at the University is clear and straightforward. Initial research proposals are refined prior to acceptance through a formal interview, and the induction process is generally satisfactory, though the review team heard some concerns about the time taken to complete the initial set up of IT equipment.

2.171   Students have a good understanding about the arrangements for supervision and assessment, and are appreciative of the Third Party Monitor scheme. This identifies a specific academic with responsibility for providing support to students, outside their normal supervisory team. There are effective mechanisms for oversight of student progress, with regular progress reports signed off at faculty level.

2.172   Students have access to training in research skills, which varies according to faculty and individual needs. Training resources can also be accessed on the VRE. A student handbook for research students, containing much useful information, is available on the VRE, with an alternative version available for students in ARCs. However, there was little awareness of the information among students, and consequently little knowledge of the Code of Practice for Supervisors and Research Students contained therein.

2.173   The available routes for research students to offer formal feedback on their experience are not widely used, though students are aware of these. A recent pilot survey allowed student representatives in ARCs to comment on University services and student representation. Among other results, the survey shows that ARC students are aware of the VRE, but most only use it once a week or less frequently, and then mostly as a repository for forms and documents.

2.174   Students stated that they would appreciate more opportunities to be involved with teaching, as a useful addition to an academic CV. However, they recognise the difficulty in providing teaching opportunities, given the University's delivery model for taught courses. In other areas, students consider the support from the University is good, although they would have appreciated more support in finding accommodation. Students consider that the lack of on-campus undergraduate students means that support services are not accustomed to providing such support.

2.175   Staff and students stated that the VRE is the online location where information can be found, and that the site contains a large number of useful resources for students and supervisors, including handbooks, policies, forms, and training materials. However, the University is aware that the VRE is not used as frequently as might be expected, and students commented that it is difficult to navigate. Some students who found the VRE hard to use were given an orientation session. There are plans to improve the design and usability of the VRE and to improve its usefulness for research students. The review team **affirms** the current review of the usability of the virtual research environment to improve its use as a learning tool.

2.176   Students in ARCs follow the University's progress review and assessment arrangements, and are clear that they are working towards a research degree from the University. ARC staff are content that they are included in various events run by the University. The ARC coordinator attends a biennial conference at the University, and supervisors are invited to attend training sessions. These meetings facilitate contact with the University, and with other ARCs, and enable the sharing of good practice. ARCs receive a site visit from University staff every three years, and the review team was advised that there is prompt feedback from the University to annual monitoring reports.

2.177   Overall, the review team considers that research degrees are awarded in an environment that provides secure academic standards for doing research and learning about research approaches, methods, procedures and protocols. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.178   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.

2.179   All applicable Expectations have been met and the risk is judged to be low in each case. There is one recommendation, six affirmations and three features of good practice.

2.180   The one recommendation arising from Expectation B2 encourages the University to draw together the wide range of information on admissions to provide a single comprehensive point of reference for applicants and staff.

2.181   The affirmations confirm the steps being taken to continue to review the academic governance structures; to engage the student body more effectively and provide feedback on issues raised; to increase student involvement in the development of modules and qualifications; to improve the communication of assessment regulations; to make external examiners' reports more widely available; to provide students with comprehensive contact information to support the resolution of complaints and appeals; and to review of the usability of the Virtual Research Environment.

2.182   The three features of good practice confirm the ongoing improvement of the Stage-Gate process; the support provided to enquirers and applicants in line with the University's commitment to open access and widening participation; and the embedding of the needs of disabled students through the design, approval and delivery of the curriculum.

2.183   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's primary channel for communicating with its stakeholders is its website, which contains a breadth of information for prospective applicants, current students, employers and partner organisations. The University Strategic Plan 2012-17, published on the website, describes its mission, values, guiding principles and overall strategy. The Student Charter outlines the broad commitments from the University and OUSA to students, and from students to the University. The University also publishes information about partnerships with other higher education providers.

3.2   Formal procedures apply for checking the accuracy of public-facing material and then maintaining its continued currency through regular review. There is an annual process for reviewing the policy and procedures published on the Curriculum Management Guide to ensure any updates have been made.

3.3   The policies and procedures in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

3.4   The review team explored the University's approach to the production of information by viewing information, including a wide range of information available electronically, websites, handbooks and qualification and module descriptors. In addition, the review team met staff and students from across the University and from partner institutions to verify its findings.

3.5   A range of research into the prospective student experience has informed the design of the new online prospectus, launched in 2014. The website is currently being redeveloped for postgraduate study to bring it into line with the undergraduate site, which requires applicants to select their country of residence in order to contextualise information, for example around funding options. The main site provides general information for students overseas, but there is also a dedicated website for international students with more tailored content about admissions, fees and student support. A range of videos available on the website help prospective students to make decisions about their study. Prospective research students can access advice and guidance from a designated section of the website.

3.6   Prospectuses are detailed and provide information on the ways in which the University offers qualifications, student finance and support dependent upon geographical location, other support and guidance including how to apply, and the structure and requirements for qualifications.

3.7   Qualification pages are detailed in content, with entry requirements where applicable, diagnostic tests in some subject areas so applicants can assess whether they are ready to undertake a module, and signposting to other sources of information. The qualification pages also contain key information statistics (KIS) data, which is checked annually by the information office prior to updating by Unistats. Information about credit transfer, with a link to the credit transfer website, is also available. In response to feedback from students and staff the University asserts that, since May 2015, it has been publishing full module descriptors for all three stages of an undergraduate degree to provide more

comprehensive information for applicants. Previously it had only provided full information for stage 1. However, sampling of the qualification pages showed that this is not the case. The review team **recommends** that, by September 2016, the University ensures the publication of full module descriptors for all stages of a qualification to inform prospective students.

3.8   All promotional material relating to provision in the next academic year is made available up to ten months before each course starts. The University's 13 subject-based prospectuses offer a detailed overview of a qualification, including information on any changes to modules that will take place during the academic year. All online module descriptors include information about future availability, updated in the spring of each year. An annual review of online and print content is also undertaken prior to registration opening, to ensure accuracy and relevance. The University also offers print prospectuses in a wide range of alternative formats, including enlarged print, talking book, audio and screen reader compatible PDFs. Information on the support disabled students can receive is provided online and in print. The University's cross-faculty Accessibility Working Group works with marketing and communications staff to improve information in module descriptors and to determine improvements to be made at qualification level.

3.9   StudentHome is the virtual gateway for all directly taught students to access academic and administrative materials. Access to the site is provided prior to enrolment so that prospective students can access and use resources about module selection and planning their qualifications. Changes to study programmes are also highlighted to students through StudentHome on the Essential Documents page. Where students have already enrolled on a module, qualification-specific mailings are sent out. In addition, the Student Charter, which sets out the responsibilities of the University and of the student, is also made available through this site.

3.10   At any time during their studies students can download a transcript of their achievement and, when they complete their studies, they can download the final diploma supplement. The University is working towards the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR), consulting with the Higher Education Academy (HEA) to apply it in the University's context.

3.11   For research students, information is made available via the VRE. This site provides information about training, forthcoming events and services provided in support of research, as well as links to important documents such as the Student Handbook. Students and staff commented that there is a broad range of information but it lacks structure. This feedback has prompted a review of usability of the VRE which will be undertaken in 2016. This matter, and the affirmation concerning the review of the usability of the VRE, is also addressed under Expectation B11.

3.12   The primary source for information about academic standards and quality is the Curriculum Management Guide, which provides a detailed source of reference for staff involved in developing and approving the curriculum. The opening pages of the website provide factsheets about aspects of quality management, which give bitesize and user-friendly guidance.

3.13   External examiner reports are made available to student representatives and are obtainable by any student upon request. As the University is moving to a more qualification-based system, programme examiners will be appointed and whose reports will routinely be published on StudentHome. This matter is also addressed under Expectation B7 with an affirmation supporting planned arrangements to make available systematically all external examiners' reports for direct provision in full to students and staff.

3.14   The University works in partnership with other organisations to deliver courses, collaborate on new curricula, validate programmes and share expertise. A register of

collaborative partnerships is maintained and is available on the website. A standardised set of procedures for partner-published information has been developed to cover the major types of partnership and implemented from 2014.

3.15   For collaborative curriculum, presentation, and research degree arrangements, the majority of information is provided by the University. However, partners providing qualifications and/or modules in translation are asked to translate information for students. Local Academic Advisers are responsible for ongoing checks on the accuracy of the translations, accompanied by an additional check by a bilingual member of University staff for new or revised curricula. In validated provision, the partner provides the bulk of material for students. Student handbooks are considered as part of the evidence provided for approval and review events. Checks of proofs of hard copy materials and an annual check of website materials are undertaken by the Centre for Inclusion and Collaborative Partnerships between events. The University provides a Student's Guide to Studying On a Programme Validated by The Open University in hard copy and on student websites. This sets out the student's relationship with the University as the awarding body.

3.16   The review team noted that the last check on information for the American College of Thessaloniki (ACT) had taken place in May 2014 and that staff from ACT had considered that their materials were not required to be approved by the University. The ACT website has two different webpages containing a 2014-15 and a 2015-16 version of the student handbook for Open University provision, which could cause confusion to students, particularly as the handbook for 2015-16 had not been approved in time for the start of the current academic year. The team **recommends** that, by September 2016, the University should consistently implement the procedures for checking validated partners' student information. The University issues all certificates and transcripts, except for validated partners, who are required to follow University guidelines.

3.17   For research students in an Affiliated Research Centre (ARC) the research degrees office checks information published by the partner annually. The Research Degrees Student Handbook sets out the relationship with the University and the ARC is asked to confirm annually that the link has been sent out to students.

3.18   Overall, the review team considers that the University produces information for its intended audiences about the learning opportunities it offers and that this is largely fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. Further work needs to be undertaken to publish full module descriptors for all three stages of qualifications, and more consistently to implement the procedures for checking validated partners' student information.

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

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

3.20   Information published by the University is generally fit for purpose and trustworthy. Processes for the development and verification of information are understood by staff. Students confirm that information is comprehensive, accessible and helpful to them, and provides them with sound information to support their learning.

3.21   However, there are two recommendations related to the need to publish full module descriptors for all three stages of qualifications, and to implement the procedures for checking validated partners' student information more consistently.

3.22   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's strategic approach to enhancement is shown in the Strategic Plan, which is supported by the Learning and Teaching Vision and Plan and the Curriculum Fit for the Future project. These strategies describe the principles underlying the long-term quality enhancement activities of the University. Academic, administrative and support staff at the University are committed to the ongoing enhancement of learning opportunities across the institution and are dedicated to the enhancement-led ethos.

4.2 This commitment to enhancement is demonstrated by the leadership of the institution through a number of strategic enhancement projects. These projects have been identified by the Vice-Chancellor's Executive and have led to the establishment of a group that maintains oversight of developments to ensure an institutional approach. The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching) is further supported by the Learning and Teaching Centre to execute enhancement activities by monitoring and evaluation of projects once they are underway. Supporting research is provided by the Institute of Educational Technology (IET), the Knowledge Media Institute and through faculties.

4.3 These strategies and processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

4.4 The review team tested the systematic nature of enhancement at the University by examining evidence of the different strategies, initiatives and structures in place. This was followed up by meetings with students and staff to confirm the extent to which these are allowing the effective dissemination of good practice.

4.5 The University's quality assurance procedures, Periodic Programme Reviews (PPR) and Annual Quality Reviews (AQR), contain elements promoting the identification of opportunities for enhancement in the programmes under review, and the identification of good practice to support enhancement elsewhere.

4.6 There is a well developed approach to the use of data, with staff in the IET presenting analysis of data in an accessible graphical format to faculties, and for review purposes. In addition, the IET produces institutional-level analysis of key data which feeds into strategic enhancement projects. Reviews make use of data from an extensive range of sources, including surveys, associate lecturers and external examiners. This data is used extensively to monitor students' progression, retention and achievement and provide interventions where necessary. The widespread commitment to student success as a focal point for enhancement activity is **good practice**.

4.7 AQRs are considered by the Institutional Scrutiny Group, and this group is the mechanism by which the University is assured that necessary matters have been addressed. The QAEC has oversight of enhancement processes, receiving PPR reports and action plans, and reporting annually to Senate. For longer-term enhancement projects the Quality Enhancement Advisory Group advises the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching). This work has now been combined with that of the Student Experience Advisory Group into a single formal Student Experience Committee.

4.8 Once identified, there are a number of mechanisms for sharing good practice, including annual Quality Enhancement Seminars and a new report series on quality

enhancement. In addition, outcomes from AQRs and PPRs are shared with relevant communities of practice, such as student support teams (SST). In particular areas, specific resources have been set up to facilitate the sharing of good practice. A good example of this is the Assessment Hub, which draws together policies, data and experiences from within the University and links to external resources, giving module and programme teams a searchable resource to support on the design and evaluation of assessment activities.

4.9   Academic staff are strongly encouraged and supported to take part in continuous professional development activities, such as OpenPad. Contributions to OpenPad are also shared within initiatives such as Scholarship Exchange, where academic staff are encouraged to share good practice with each other.

4.10   Although University staff are largely aware of opportunities for enhancement and are involved in contributing to enhancement-related projects, students are mostly unaware of these developments. The University is committed to seeking ways of better developing and closing the feedback loop in order to allow students to be part of the enhancement ethos of the University.

4.11   The ethos of expecting and encouraging the enhancement of student learning opportunities is evident across the institution, from the standard quality assurance processes to the establishment of the Scholarship Exchange Platform, which is a repository for sharing scholarship outputs, both institutional-level projects and smaller individual ones. The importance of the development of staff is recognised in the Academic Professional Development Framework, which supports academic, professional and research staff. Quality enhancement contributions are also recognised in promotion criteria and in the OU Teaching Awards.

4.12   Overall, enhancement is embedded within all major strategies of the University and is demonstrated through the systematic manner in which it carries out enhancement-focused projects and activities to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities. There is good practice in the widespread commitment to student success as a focal point for enhancement activity. The review team concludes that the Expectation on Enhancement is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.13   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.

4.14   Enhancement is embedded within all major strategies of the institution and can be demonstrated from the systematic manner in which the University carries out enhancement-focused projects and activities. There is one area of good practice in the widespread commitment to student success as a focal point for enhancement activity.

4.15   The single Expectation in this area is met and the level of risk is low.

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

5   Commentary on the Theme: Digital Literacy

Findings

5.1   The University seeks to be a world leader in the design, content and delivery of supported open and distance learning, and this informs its approach to developing digital literacy.The University's Library Services and the Institute of Educational Technology (IET) have developed the Digital and Information Literacy (DIL) framework, and were responsible for consultation with its stakeholders and for providing supporting materials to staff and students. The DIL framework was built on an existing information literacy levels framework, which was adopted in 2010. This approach is underpinned by the Jisc definition of digital literacy. Qualifications and modules are designed for an online environment, using technology-enhanced learning approaches and appropriate tools to build online communities. Digital and information literacy (DIL), contextualised by discipline, are a core part of the teaching model.

5.2   The University has a clear and strategic approach to digital literacy. Information literacy has been part of the strategic agenda since 2003 and part of the undergraduate Levels Framework since 2005. The institution is active in its research in the area and refers to technology as an 'enabler', and as a guiding principle of the Learning and Teaching Vision Plan.

5.3   The University's learning design strategy involves a collaborative approach to embedding digital literacy skills in the curriculum, with academic staff, learning developers, library staff and learning technologists working in partnership. Practical guidance for curriculum teams and tutors on integrating digital literacy into the curriculum is clearly set out. Curriculum teams in all faculties use the DIL framework as a starting point when identifying relevant skills for their context, developing appropriate learning outcomes and determining how DIL should be assessed. The importance of digital and information literacy for employability is clearly highlighted in guidance for staff.

5.4   The University's DIL framework is being used to map digital literacy at all levels of every qualification. It is committed to embedding the framework within each qualification it delivers. There is an expectation that its students would have basic digital literacy skills when they begin a qualification at Level 1. However, for an Access level qualification there is no expectation that a student would have any digital literacy skills, and this is reflected in the design of qualifications at that level.

5.5   The University also has an inclusive approach towards digital literacy by making information easily accessible to students. The Library Services team is currently working with students to make the language of the DIL framework more accessible. Students are enabled to give feedback on the University's strategy, including digital literacy, through online consultations. However, some students have limited awareness of what constitutes digital literacy, and are sometimes unsure as to whether they possess the necessary capabilities listed within the DIL framework. The University is continuing to find ways to communicate the framework and digital literacy capabilities to students, and to ensure a shared knowledge is established.

5.6   Staff are supported in embedding digital literacy in the curriculum through detailed guidance material available to them and the help of the IET and Library Services. In 2013-14 more than 60 per cent of pathways were audited for digital literacy development and the data was used to inform the curriculum teams' decisions about the digital skills content. The project is continuing until all qualifications have been audited. An institutional curriculum record system is used to record the implementation of DIL skills in modules.

5.7   Staff and students are proactively encouraged to consider the importance of embedding digital literacy skills. The University is also looking at relating digital skills specifically to employability, and how it might further engage the student body to think about their value. The University is in the process of introducing personal development planning at Level 1, which will also support the development of digital literacy. The University was recognised nationally for its work in the area of digital literacy and has received citations in work produced by Jisc and New Media Consortium, as well as a number of awards.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

e-learning
See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

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

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

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

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

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