Higher Education Review of the University of Bedfordshire

June 2015

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at the University of Bedfordshire. The review took place from 1 to 5 June 2015 and was conducted by a team of six reviewers, as follows:

- Ms Gillian Butler
- Mr Ruaidhri Donnelly
- Mrs Penny Renwick
- Mr Anthony Turjansky
- Professor Denis Wright
- Ms Caroline Dangerfield (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

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

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

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

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

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[1] The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code
[2] Higher Education Review themes: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106
[3] QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us.
[4] Higher Education Review web pages: www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review

Key findings

QAA's judgements about the University of Bedfordshire

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

- 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 is **commended**.

Good practice

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

- The overarching quality framework for course approval, delivery, monitoring and review, which supports staff in designing and enhancing curricula (Expectations A3.1, A3.2, A3.3, B1, B8, C and Enhancement).
- The institutional culture and support available to staff to develop and reflect on their learning and teaching practice (Expectations B3, B4 and Enhancement).
- The integrated, institution-wide, academic and pastoral support for taught students, which enables them to develop their academic, personal and professional potential (Expectations B4, B3 and Enhancement).
- The open and proactive approach taken by the University to seeking out, listening and responding to the taught student voice at all levels of the institution (Expectation B5).
- The comprehensive arrangements in place to support collaborative partnerships, including clear governance and the effective support provided by Account Managers and Link Co-ordinators (Expectation B10).
- The wide and in-depth range of informative and searchable information provided on the University website for a range of audiences (Expectation C).
- The accessible and comprehensive virtual learning environment, which is used extensively across the University and collaborative partners (Expectations C, B3 and Enhancement).
- The institution-wide commitment to enhancing students' learning experience (Enhancement).

Recommendations

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

By December 2015:

- ensure consistent arrangements for the oversight of public information about the University's provision published by partners in languages other than English (Expectations C and B10).

By March 2016:

- ensure there is appropriate representation of postgraduate research students on University-level deliberative committees with responsibility for postgraduate research policy and practice (Expectations B5 and B11)
- review the current arrangements to ensure coordinated support for postgraduate research students across all support services, including the Research Graduate School and the International Office (Expectations B11 and B2).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The work being undertaken with the Students' Union to increase participation in course approval and periodic review panels in line with the University Quality Handbook (Expectations B1, B5 and B8).
- The steps being taken to develop a postgraduate research student forum to engage students and strengthen their voice (Expectations B5 and B11).

Theme: Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

The University of Bedfordshire's Strategic Plan clearly prioritises the student experience, with a strong focus on working in partnership with students. Two enabling strategies, covering the learner experience and student experience, are central to promoting student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement activities. The recently relaunched University Community Partnership Agreement, developed jointly with students, articulates the mutual expectations of students, the Students' Union and the University academic and professional service community. A strong example of this is the annual joint conference of the University and Students' Union, which has led to strategic enhancements such as the inclusion of student representatives on course teams.

Student representation is administered by the Students' Union in partnership with the University. Student representatives are members of course teams, Portfolio Executive Committees (groupings of courses within a particular subject grouping), faculty boards and most University-level committees. The President of the Students' Union is a member of the Vice-Chancellor's Executive Group and is supported to carry out this role effectively. Thus, the student voice is involved in all decisions affecting their experience. The one more challenging area is the involvement of postgraduate research students in representational structures, which is being addressed primarily through development of a new postgraduate research student forum.

A notable example of the University's commitment to working in partnership with students is that student representatives are members of staff recruitment panels for academic roles, from lecturer to professor, which are more than 50 per cent student-facing. Students are also members of panels that assess staff in applying for Higher Education Academy membership through the University's Professional Teaching Scheme. Students are appropriately supported to undertake these roles.

Examples of enhancement initiatives either initiated or delivered by students include Student Experience Projects (StEPS) and Peer Assisted Learning (PAL). StEPS asks students and staff to submit ideas for improving the student experience, and pitch their proposals to a

panel including the Vice-Chancellor and other senior staff in order to gain funding. PAL involves trained second or third-year students supporting first-year students as part of a weekly timetabled session, now embedded in the first-year experience for all undergraduate students. Students whom the review team met were very positive about both the StEPS initiative and the PAL scheme.

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

About the University of Bedfordshire

The University of Bedfordshire (the University) was established in August 2006 by order of the Privy Council, following a merger between the University of Luton and De Montfort University's Bedford campus. It has main sites in Luton and Bedford but also has campuses at Butterfield Park in Luton and Oxford House in Aylesbury (for Nursing and Midwifery provision), Putteridge Bury between Luton and Hitchin (for some Business courses and as a conference centre), and a new campus in Milton Keynes.

The University is structured around four faculties: the University of Bedfordshire Business School; Creative Arts, Technologies and Science; Education and Sport; and Health and Social Sciences. Each faculty operates across multiple campuses, although Education and Sport is mainly based on the Bedford campus. Faculties are supported by a range of professional services staff. Ten Research Institutes, a number which has remained largely stable over the period of review, support research activity and manage postgraduate research students. The Research Graduate School (RGS) acts as a central source of oversight, information and advice for postgraduate research study.

Student numbers fluctuate during the year, as the University and its partners operate multiple intakes. At the time of the review the University had around 20,500 students. Around 15,500 are full-time, 4,600 part-time and 400 postgraduate research. Of this number, 3,500 students are studying with partners outside of the UK.

Minor amendments were made to the University's mission alongside the development of the current Strategic Plan 2012-17 to emphasise more strongly the notion of community and the breadth of experience provided to learners. The University's mission statement is currently:

> We create a vibrant multi-cultural learning community enabling people to transform their lives by participating in an excellent and innovative learning experience, through our curriculum, co-curriculum, extra-curriculum, scholarship and research.

The University states that its mission-led commitment to widening participation, to furthering social and economic opportunity and justice, and to the regional and broader impact of its innovation and scholarship, informs its priorities and approaches, and their implementation through Strategic Planning.

The University Strategic Plan 2012-17 has five key areas of strategic development:

- improving the student experience
- raising staff and student aspiration and achievement
- growing the quality and impact of research and enterprise
- building home and UK partnerships
- investing to ensure a sustainable long-term business.

There have been a number of major changes at the University since the last review in 2009. Bill Rammell succeeded Professor Les Ebdon as Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive of the University in 2012, and led the final review of the new Strategic Plan, which has a key focus on the quality of the student experience and employability. The four Faculty Deans became Executive Deans and have formed part of the Vice-Chancellor's Executive Group (VCEG) since 2013. The President of the Students' Union also became a member of the VCEG, ensuring that the student voice features at all levels of decision making.

At the time of the 2009 Institutional Audit, the Academic Board had four subcommittees: the Teaching Quality and Standards Committee (TQSC); the University Research Committee; the University Research Ethics Committee; and the Student Consultative Committee. There has since been a number of changes in governance. The Academic Board and TQSC remain in place, however, some of the functions of the latter are now performed by the Quality Enhancement Committee. The University Research Committee has been reformed as the Research and Enterprise Committee. A separate Research Degrees Committee has been established to take responsibility for the detailed monitoring of postgraduate research students. The University Research Ethics Committee now reports to the Research and Enterprise Committee. The previous Student Consultative Committee has been replaced by the Vice-Chancellor's Student Experience Group, chaired by the Vice-Chancellor to reflect his prioritisation of the student experience. Two committees reporting to the TQSC have been established to oversee the operational management of collaborative partnerships from a quality perspective: the UK Partnerships Committee and the Overseas Partnerships Committee.

There has been a doubling of postgraduate research students since the time of the Institutional Audit. The University's restructure of its research management responsibilities has included the appointment of a Director for Research Development, whose remit for the development of the research environment includes the oversight of postgraduate research. The role of the Research Graduate School is to oversee and coordinate the work of Research Institutes in their support of student progress and achievement, and to provide a central source of information and guidance on matters related to postgraduate research study.

The University has made significant investments in the development of the estate to support the enhancement of the student experience. The first phase of development is complete, with the construction of a new Campus Centre at the Luton campus, housing active social learning spaces, student support services and facilities, together with a new postgraduate and continuing professional development centre. The second phase began in 2013-14 with a major new academic building opening at the Bedford campus in January 2015. Indoor and outdoor sports facilities have been enhanced in response to student feedback. Early in 2014, the Art and Design department relocated to a refurbished building close to the Luton campus, offering specialist teaching and learning facilities for its students. A major new library is due for completion on the Luton campus in 2016. The University Campus Milton Keynes became fully operational in 2013-14 and now has around 200 students, with plans to grow to around 450 students by 2017.

The University identifies a number of key contextual changes and challenges since the 2009 Institutional Audit. These include:

- the shifts across all key demand markets, combined with changes in the parameters of recruitment, driven by policy, funding and regulatory change
- the significant shift in government policy on the recruitment and training of teachers towards school-based training, which has challenged recruitment in an area of traditional strength

- the context in which the University maintains its long-standing commitment to partnership working, in the UK and overseas, including changes in the 'core and margin' process
- the diverse and growing student population at all levels of study, which has required attention to a range of underpinning structures and processes designed to support staff and students
- the admission of a growing population of international students.

The University has a long-standing and very wide commitment to partnership, working both in the UK and internationally, with 3,500 students studying overseas. This has continued to develop and change. Key highlights include: supporting one long-standing partner to achieve taught degree awarding powers; the continuing development of long-standing overseas partnerships, such as Kaplan in Singapore and Hong Kong, and Majan College in Oman; and the development of new partners, such as the University of Modern Sciences and Arts in Egypt.

The University has responded well to the recommendations and good practice from the Institutional Audit in 2009 and all the areas have been addressed.

Explanation of the findings about the University of Bedfordshire

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

1.1   The academic regulations explicitly locate the University's awards within *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and the Higher Education Credit Framework for England (HECF). The regulations contain a list of award types and their associated credit structures, which demonstrates the level and volume of credit associated with each. Taught degrees are approved at levels 4 to 7 of the FHEQ and include intermediate awards that are available to students who exit with the requisite amount of credit. Level 3 credit is awarded for approved foundation year courses. The relevant provisions allow Expectation A1 to be met.

1.2   In considering this Expectation the review team examined the University's academic regulations and Quality Handbook; course approval documentation, including sample unit and course specifications; sample external examiner reports; and reports of course approval events. The team tested its findings through discussions with members of academic and senior staff.

1.3   Credit is awarded at unit (module) level on the achievement of defined learning outcomes. The University has adopted a standard 15/30 credit size for units. Units are designated either core (compulsory) or optional, and no distinction is made in relation to the award of credit. Unit Information Forms indicate their FHEQ level and credit value and contain two learning outcomes per unit. Learning outcomes are written with reference to

national credit descriptors, including the HECF and Southern England Consortium descriptors. Learning outcomes are referenced directly to assessment to demonstrate how they are achieved.

1.4   Course Information Forms make reference to FHEQ qualification descriptors, Subject Benchmark Statements and any relevant professional body standards. Course Information Forms list the units that contribute to the course (programme) by title, level and credit value. The University has recently revised learning outcomes for exit awards available to students who are unable to gain their original target qualification. Course learning outcomes are mapped to units to demonstrate where they are achieved. Assessment criteria enable student attainment of learning outcomes to be measured.

1.5   In meetings with the review team, staff were clear about the use of external reference points within programme design and review. University approval panels for new courses confirm the use of national reference points during course design and the appropriateness of proposed award titles and learning outcomes.

1.6   Portfolio Monitoring Reports give consideration to the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements. External examiners are asked explicitly to consider the relevant qualification descriptors and Subject Benchmark Statements. External examiners' reports confirm that the standards set at course approval are appropriate and that national threshold standards are being achieved. External examiners comment on comparability with the standards of other providers.

1.7   Programme Information Forms provide the definitive record of research degrees, indicating their positioning at level 8 of the FHEQ.

1.8   On the basis of the evidence, the review team concludes that the University takes due account of national qualification and credit frameworks in setting and maintaining academic standards. The review team therefore concludes that Expectation A1 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

1.9　　The University has developed quality assurance systems and structures to deliver its strategic priorities within a fast-changing external environment while at the same time securing academic standards. The Academic Board retains ultimate responsibility for the standards of the University's awards, and delegates responsibility for the approval, monitoring and review of taught courses to its Teaching Quality and Standards Committee (TQSC), and to the Research Degrees Committee for research provision. The regulations and the relevant sections of the Quality Handbook and related policies and procedures, including those relating to academic appeals and good academic practice, constitute the University's academic framework.

1.10　　The Quality Directorate of the University's Academic Registry provides central management of quality processes, including unit approval and minor course modifications, which are delegated to faculties. Faculty TQSCs have dual reporting lines to faculty academic boards and to the institutional TQSC. Committee structures are reviewed and evaluated to ensure that quality responsibilities are managed with appropriate oversight. The University's requirements are sufficiently robust and its processes are appropriately designed to allow Expectation A2.1 to be met.

1.11　　In considering this Expectation the review team examined the University's Academic Board and committees' terms of reference; academic regulations and Quality Handbook; organisational and committee structures; committee minutes and reports of course approval events. The team tested its findings through discussions with members of academic and senior staff.

1.12　　The chapters of the University Quality Handbook describe the processes for course approval and modification; annual monitoring and periodic review; assessment, including the operation of assessment boards; external examining; learner representation (student engagement); quality assurance of teaching and student support; and processes for the quality assurance of collaborative provision and research degrees. Staff are cognisant of the Quality Handbook and use it as a key reference point.

1.13　　The Academic Board approves and oversees the application of the University's academic regulations for taught courses, in which it is supported by the TQSC. The regulations, which are accessed via the external website, and also the Bedfordshire Resources for Education Online gateway, locate the University's awards within the national level and credit frameworks and describe the rules of assessment, including: grading, classification and the treatment of borderline marks; progression, including condonement, referral and re-assessment; recognition of prior learning (RPL); and regulations governing academic misconduct and academic appeals. Separate regulations are published for undergraduate and taught postgraduate courses. The course approval process confirms that all new courses comply with the academic regulations. The professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) monitoring subgroup of the TQSC advises on any variations for professionally accredited courses.

1.14 The Research Degrees Committee of the Academic Board has oversight of the regulations for research degrees and professional doctorates, and is the progression board for research degree students. The Research Degrees Committee provides biannual reports to the Academic Board on the standards of research degrees and the quality of the research degree student experience. The Research Graduate School of the University's Academic Registry has operational oversight of the management of standards and quality for research degrees.

1.15 Committee structures are regularly reviewed to assure that committees are effective in discharging their responsibilities and that membership recognises evolving University structures. Following the development of the Quality Code, the University reviewed its quality framework and processes. This resulted in minor changes to the regulations, and reviewing and extending the Quality Handbook. There are changes taking place in the assessment regulations in a managed process overseen by the Academic Board.

1.16 All courses, including credit-bearing short courses and collaborative provision (other than validated provision delivered by accredited partners) are allocated to a portfolio, which is a group of courses allied to an identifiable subject area within an academic department. Portfolio groupings provide the basis for governance arrangements, including examination boards and quality assurance procedures, including annual monitoring. The University operates a two-tier examination board system for its taught courses that operates with the delegated authority of the Academic Board to confirm the award of a qualification to a student and ensure consistency of treatment across the relevant scheme. Portfolio boards approve unit grades and progression, while scheme boards confirm awards. Portfolio boards also make decisions concerning claims for RPL, and a new institution-level board has been established to monitor the consistency and reliability of RPL decisions across the University. External examiners are members of portfolio and scheme boards.

1.17 Examination of postgraduate research theses is by postgraduate research examination boards, comprising the chair and examiners of a postgraduate research thesis. Postgraduate research examination boards operate under the regulations for research degrees and report to the Research Degrees Committee.

1.18 The review team considers the University's academic regulations and Quality Handbook to be comprehensive and fit for purpose, and saw evidence that they were subject to regular evaluation and review. The review team therefore concludes that Expectation A2.1 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

1.19   Course and Unit Information Forms are the definitive records of the University's taught provision and the main documentation for the approval of programmes and qualifications. Modified versions are used to provide a definitive record of credit-bearing short courses. These documents demonstrate compliance with the University's academic and regulatory frameworks, and requirements are laid out in the Quality Handbook. Course and Unit Information Forms prepared for approval panels require specification of the FHEQ level and the credit value of both proposed award and constituent units in line with the University's academic framework and regulations.

1.20   The University's requirements are sufficiently robust and its processes are appropriately designed to allow Expectation A2.2 to be met.

1.21   In considering this Expectation the review team examined the relevant chapters of the Quality Handbook, sample course and unit Information Forms and associated guidance for their completion, together with the University website. The review team met staff involved in course approval and review.

1.22   The course Information Form identifies the title of the course, entry requirements, and the mode and location of study. It describes target and intermediate awards in relation to FHEQ qualification level descriptors, Subject Benchmark Statements and any relevant professional body standards. It lists the units that contribute to a course by their title, level and credit value, and identifies whether a unit is core (compulsory) or optional. The course Information Form summarises how students are taught, assessed and supported. Course aims and learning outcomes describe the knowledge and skills that students will have attained on achievement of their award. The University has recently enhanced the information provided on course and unit Information Forms to include further details on topics such as learning and teaching approach, learning time and employability. Modifications are authorised through detailed processes for major and minor modifications that are understood by staff. Course and unit Information Forms log any changes made as a result of major or minor modifications.

1.23   Following approval, the course Information Form is made available electronically to staff and students as the reference point for course delivery and assessment. Course Information Forms are accessed by prospective students and the wider public through the University website.

1.24   The unit Information Form identifies the unit's title, FHEQ level and credit value, and any prerequisites that may restrict a student's ability to undertake it. The unit Information Form describes the unit's aims, content, learning activities, resources, learning outcomes and the assessment by which they are demonstrated. Following approval, the unit Information Form is available electronically to staff and students as the reference point for unit delivery and assessment.

1.25   The student record system generates transcripts for students and graduates. Programme Information Forms are the definitive record of research degrees and describe the qualification award by FHEQ level; mode and duration of study; entry requirements; programme structure, aims and outcomes; teaching and learning, including supervision arrangements; and assessment.

1.26   On the basis of the evidence, the review team considers that course, unit and programme Information Forms provide a definitive record of the University's taught and research degree provision, and are approved and modified through approved due processes. The review team therefore concludes that Expectation A2.2 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

1.27   The University's course approval process takes account of the national level and credit frameworks and institutional regulations for the award of qualifications and credit. Course approval and modification processes are supported by documentation that describes the content and level of units, qualifications and awards. The documentation is peer reviewed by panels that contain academic externality and confirm alignment with the University's own regulations, national qualification level descriptors and Subject Benchmark Statements. Reports are received and considered within the University's deliberative committee structure before units and courses are approved for delivery to students. This process allows the Expectation to be met.

1.28   In considering this Expectation the review team examined course approval documentation and associated guidance for its completion, together with sample reports of course approvals and modifications, and committee minutes. The team also explored the course approval process and supporting guidance through discussions with senior academic managers and academic staff.

1.29   Course and Unit Information Forms form the basis of evidence for academic approval. Awards are located within the FHEQ, the University's own academic regulations, and, where relevant, professional standards linked with PSRB accreditation. Course learning outcomes are defined at the appropriate FHEQ level. Credit is awarded at unit level on demonstration of the achievement of defined unit learning outcomes, which are set at the appropriate FHEQ level.

1.30   Staff involved in course design and approval receive guidance on the Expectations of the Quality Code, including national level descriptors and Subject Benchmark Statements, through the University's comprehensive Quality Handbook and associated guidance, support and staff development. Course approval reports make explicit reference to alignment with FHEQ level descriptors. The Quality Handbook in particular is understood and used extensively by academic staff, who contribute to its ongoing evaluation and development. The review team identifies the University's overarching quality framework for course approval, delivery, monitoring and review, which supports staff in designing and enhancing curricula, as **good practice**.

1.31   University approval panels for new courses utilise external academic experts who comment on the appropriateness of standards in relation to the national reference points. Industry representatives, including PSRBs, comment on alignment with professional standards. Final consideration of reports for taught programmes is by the Course Approval Task Group of the University's Teaching Quality and Standards Committee (TQSC), which confirms that due academic process has been followed.

1.32   Modification processes for existing courses or units are operated by faculties with institutional oversight and, for major modifications, institutional approval through the TQSC Chair's action. Modifications processes ensure that the academic standards set at approval are not compromised.

1.33   The approval of research degrees is based on the completion of Programme Information Forms, which position the qualification at the appropriate FHEQ level and define intermediate awards and programme learning outcomes in relation to the national level 8 descriptor and QAA guidance on doctoral degree characteristics. Final approval of research degrees is through the University's Research Degrees Committee.

1.34   The University's course approval and modification procedures take appropriate account of its own regulations, national qualifications and credit frameworks, and Subject Benchmark Statements when setting academic standards. On this basis, the review team concludes that Expectation A3.1 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

1.35   The standards, purpose and principles of assessment are set out in the University's academic regulations. The Quality Handbook has a chapter devoted to assessment that describes the processes required to implement the regulations. This is accompanied by detailed documentation designed to increase staff engagement with the Quality Code, the concept of threshold standards and the process of writing learning outcomes.

1.36   Course approval and review processes require all courses to have clearly defined learning outcomes for all target and exit awards.

1.37   The credit scheme for the award of credit and conferment of awards is set out in the academic regulations. The processes for making assessment decisions about the award of credit are documented in the Quality Handbook. The unit grade confirmation process confirms the reliability of recorded marks/grades for all units within the portfolio. There is a tiered system of departmental pre-boards, chaired by departmental heads, portfolio boards and scheme boards. The boards operate through authority delegated by the Vice-Chancellor as the chair of the Academic Board, to the designated senior member of the Academic Board, acting as chair of the Scheme Board of Examiners or as chair of the Research Degrees Committee.

1.38   The requirements and processes documented in the regulations and Quality Handbook address the University's academic standards, UK threshold standards and the level and definition of credit. These processes allow the Expectation to be met.

1.39   The review team tested the systems in place by reviewing documentation in the academic regulations, the Quality Handbook, course approval documentation, examination board minutes and external examiner reports. The review team viewed information about unit assessments on the virtual learning environment (VLE) and discussed assessment processes in a range of meetings with staff and students.

1.40   The Quality Handbook provides detailed guidance on the process of assessment, marking, grading and moderation. University approval and review panels scrutinise the appropriateness of intended learning outcomes, whether intended learning outcomes are tested through the assessment process and the appropriateness of the assessment strategy. Staff development, which includes briefing sheets, is provided to support new chairs of panels.

1.41   There is a requirement for unit learning outcomes to be mapped to course learning outcomes to ensure that these are attained. Staff development is provided to support staff in designing learning outcomes and assessments through the Centre for Learning Excellence.

1.42   Unit Information Forms state the intended learning outcomes and include details of the assessment tasks. These are available on the University VLE and follow the guidance provided in the Quality Handbook and accompanying manuals. Students who the review team met during the review were clear about their assessments and understood the feedback they received.

1.43   The University's academic framework provides an effective system for the assessment of learning outcomes, which is very clearly understood by staff and students. This includes detailed guidance on implementation in the Quality Handbook, which contributes to the good practice in Expectation A.3.1.

1.44   The University's assessment regulations for undergraduate and postgraduate students take account of issues arising from previous concerns and changes in the Quality Code. A series of staff development briefings have been held to support the current transition from a 16-point grading scheme to a 100-point, percentage-based marking scheme.

1.45   Undergraduate and postgraduate scheme boards are designed to ensure consistency across the entire scheme in relation to the University's academic regulations, based on reliable evidence, and to arrive at final judgements on awards for all students. The requirements for externality and limitations of discretion are clearly set out. A senior member of academic staff, not associated with the faculty, is appointed by the Vice-Chancellor to act as chair.

1.46   Portfolio boards operate within clear terms of reference to confirm decisions on the award of credit and recommend awards to the Scheme Board of Examiners. They involve at least one external examiner.

1.47   The Research Degrees Handbook details the assessment procedures for research students and sets out guidance on learning outcomes and assessment criteria, with reference to the relevant FHEQ descriptors for level 7 and 8 awards.

1.48   The Research Degrees Committee is responsible to the Academic Board and acts as a board of examiners in receiving and confirming decisions relating to progression and awards.

1.49   The process for making reasonable adjustments entails the development of Learning and Teaching Support Plans, signed and agreed by the student, and then sent to the faculties for departments to implement any reasonable adjustments to assessments and to provide the required support.

1.50   Course Information Forms on the VLE all have readily accessible statements regarding the availability of support and reasonable adjustments.

1.51   The review team found that credit and qualifications are awarded where the achievement of relevant learning outcomes has been demonstrated through assessment. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (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

1.52   The University's Academic Board delegates operational responsibility for the monitoring and review of taught courses to the Teaching Quality and Standards Committee (TQSC) and its associated task groups for annual monitoring and periodic review. Monitoring and review processes consider evidence of cohort performance and the reports of external examiners to confirm that the standards set at approval are being maintained and achieved by students. Reports of both processes are received and considered within the University's deliberative committee structure, which allows any standards related issues to be addressed and good practice shared. This process allows the Expectation to be met.

1.53   In considering this Expectation the review team explored the annual monitoring and periodic review processes, through its consideration of guidance documentation, monitoring and review reports, minutes of relevant committees, and discussions with academic staff and students.

1.54   Processes for the annual monitoring and periodic review of taught provision are described in the University's Quality Handbook. Annual monitoring of taught provision takes place at unit, course, portfolio, faculty and scheme (cross-faculty) levels. Unit Co-ordinators produce Enhancement Plans (formerly reports), which evaluate cohort performance data, including unit pass rates and feedback from external examiners in relation to academic standards. Course Co-ordinators produce course Enhancement Plans (formerly reports), which evaluate cohort progression and completion data, degree classifications and external examiner feedback. Unit and course Enhancement Plans inform the production of Portfolio Monitoring Reports that evaluate the standards of a cognate subject group of courses. Portfolio Monitoring Reports also describe and evaluate curriculum changes, including course modifications and closures.

1.55   External examiners comment explicitly on whether courses meet the national threshold standards as defined by FHEQ level descriptors and Subject Benchmark Statements, and the extent to which standards are comparable with those of similar provision of other awarding bodies. Comments from external examiners are evaluated and responded to via action plans contained within Portfolio Monitoring Reports.

1.56   Faculties use Portfolio Monitoring Reports, including external examiner reports, to produce Faculty Monitoring Reports for consideration by the Annual Monitoring Task Group (AMTG) of the TQSC. The AMTG considers Faculty Monitoring Reports and their associated action plans, reporting on standards to the TQSC and assigning follow-up activity to faculties. Scheme Monitoring Reports are received by the TQSC and Academic Board, and enable comparison of standards across faculties.

1.57   The University's subject-based quinquennial periodic review process enables longitudinal analysis of cohort achievement and progression to confirm that the standards set at course approval are being maintained and achieved. Periodic review confirms that courses remain aligned with the relevant national academic reference points and professional standards.

1.58   The review team considers that the University's monitoring and review procedures take appropriate account of the national qualifications framework and Subject Benchmark Statements. In particular, the periodic review process considers alignment with academic and professional benchmarks when recommending continued course approval.
The University's overarching quality framework and its support for course monitoring and review has led to a feature of good practice in Expectation A3.1. On this basis, the review team concludes that Expectation A3.3 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

1.59   The University has procedures in place to ensure that independent external expertise is used when approving new courses and reviewing existing courses. The University requires external examiners to be appointed to all taught courses and units to advise and comment on the maintenance of threshold standards. The requirements for externality in setting and maintaining standards for research degrees are described in the academic regulations and Quality Handbook.

1.60   The policies and procedures of the University allow Expectation A3.4 to be met.

1.61   The review team tested Expectation A3.4 by reviewing: documentation and guidance in the Quality Handbook relating to unit and course approval, review, modifications and the role of external examiners; reports of periodic reviews and programme approvals; external examiner reports and responses to them; and minutes of committee meetings. The review team also discussed arrangements for the involvement of external and independent expertise in a range of meetings.

1.62   The Quality Handbook details the requirements for the development and approval of new courses and the periodic review of existing courses. Development must be informed by independent, external advice from subject specialists and from industry or other relevant stakeholders. The nomination process must be completed at least four weeks prior to the date of a scheduled University approval panel meeting. Panels require confirmation from external advisers of the coherence of the proposal and the appropriateness of standards, with reference to external academic, industry and PSRB reference points.

1.63   Reports of new course approvals demonstrate the engagement of external advisers and the presence of sector/industry expertise. Course approval or re-approval of provision is dependent on confirmation that an external examiner is in place.

1.64   Reports of periodic reviews similarly provide evidence of robust processes followed in accordance with the University's own procedures.

1.65   The University has responsibility for appointing external examiners for all courses and units, including those with collaborative partners. There is a detailed procedure for appointing external examiners and the responsibilities of University staff in this process are clearly identified. The External Examiners Committee (EEC) acts to ensure that reciprocity and conflicts of interest are avoided. There are three mechanisms in place to ensure effective management oversight of external examiner reports and the responses to them. Faculty Quality Officers prepare issues logs to confirm that portfolio and faculty annual monitoring addresses matters raised, and that these have been responded to. Responses to external examiner reports are drafted by the Course Co-ordinator and confirmed by the Head of Department before submission to the faculty Executive Dean, who formally responds to the external examiner. All responses are also submitted to the Quality

Directorate. The issues log containing the response/action taken with respect to issues raised is also referenced through Portfolio and Faculty Annual Monitoring Reports. On behalf of the Vice-Chancellor, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) reviews all reports and raises any matters of serious concern directly with the Chair of the Academic Board if they occur. General issues and themes, and serious specific issues, are reported to the Teaching Quality and Standards Committee (TQSC), which ensures there is an adequate response. For example, in 2012-13 examiners reported some variation in evidence of moderation and as a result the University introduced a standardised moderation form. The EEC reviews all reports to identify any systemic issues in the operation of the external examining system and identifies these to the Academic Board through its annual report.

1.66   The external examiner report pro forma ensures that external examiners comment on alignment with UK threshold academic standards and the University's own standards, clearly identifying any issues relating to the setting, delivery and maintenance of standards. The vast majority of external examiner reports seen confirm that standards meet the threshold requirements, that courses remain current, and that course learning outcomes are in line with the relevant qualification descriptors and Subject Benchmark Statements. Exceptionally, where this is not the case there is evidence of action being taken to address the concerns in accordance with the University's procedures. Effective monitoring and oversight of issues is provided through faculty issues logs, annual monitoring and, when needed, by the TQSC.

1.67   External examiners appointed to the undergraduate and postgraduate scheme boards also produce reports, so providing the opportunity for an overarching view and the confirmation of standards and adherence to internal and external requirements.

1.68   For postgraduate research degrees, external examiners are appointed by the Research Degrees Committee. Through an independent report, external examiners assess whether submissions meet the learning outcomes and standards for FHEQ levels 7 or 8 as appropriate. They also ensure the fairness and rigour of the exam process.

1.69   The review team therefore concludes that Expectation A3.4 is met and the associated level of risk is low, as the University has very clear robust procedures that are implemented effectively.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

1.70   In reaching its judgement the review team matched its finding against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.71   All seven of the Expectations for this judgement area are met and the associated level of risk is low in each case. There are no recommendations or affirmations in this judgement area. There is one feature of good practice identified concerning the overarching quality framework at the University. This feature is primarily located in Expectation A3.1 but is also relevant to Expectations A3.2 and A3.3.

1.72   The University has rigorous policies and procedures concerning academic standards; the review team therefore 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 The University's course approval process adopts a staged approach to business planning and academic approval. Course approval and modification are supported by documentation that describes the content and level of units, qualifications and awards. Approval documentation is peer reviewed by an academic panel containing appropriate externality, which reports through the University's deliberative committee structure before units and courses are approved for delivery to students. This process allows the Expectation to be met in theory.

2.2 In considering this Expectation the review team examined the University's guidance for course approval and modification. The team sampled course approval and modification documentation, and the reports of course approval events. The team examined the minutes of committees where course approvals and modifications were considered or reported. The team also explored the course approval process and supporting guidance through discussions with academic managers and staff.

2.3 The University's strategic intent is to develop and grow its course portfolio in respect of providing a broader range of subjects and awards. The University seeks to develop innovative and flexible courses that support students' academic and career success and provide a high quality student experience in the context of its aims to increase access and employability. The Curriculum Renewal Project of 2012, supported by associated review activity, reinforced the role of employability within curricula (units) by embedding skills of enquiry, collaboration and enterprise alongside subject-based knowledge and skills. All courses will have adopted this model by 2015-16. Course content and delivery are informed by relevant staff research activity.

2.4 The University has sought to establish a more integrated and strategic approach to academic planning. The annual Business Planning Cycle involves all academic and professional service areas and seeks to integrate performance monitoring with decisions about portfolio development and resource allocation. Faculty business plans are reviewed by the Corporate Management Team (CMT), which assesses the continued appropriateness of the academic portfolio and the viability of new course developments.

2.5 The processes for curriculum design, development and approval are described in the University's Quality Handbook. Course proposals originate in faculties and are approved to proceed to the CMT's Portfolio Strategy and Planning Group, which has responsibility for development and oversight of the academic portfolio and ensuring the strategic fit of new courses. All four faculty Executive Deans are represented on this Group, which enables consideration of opportunities for cross-faculty collaboration. Once in receipt of business approval, new course proposals proceed to separate academic approval.

2.6 Staff involved in course development and design receive guidance and training in the Expectations of the Quality Code, including level descriptors and Subject Benchmark

Statements through the University's Quality Handbook and associated documentation. Course and Unit Information Forms form the basis of course approval documentation, which is subject to internal faculty scrutiny before proceeding to University-level approval. Course approval reports make explicit reference to alignment with FHEQ level descriptors. The overarching quality framework for course approval, delivery, monitoring and review, which supports staff in designing and enhancing curricula, has led to a feature of good practice in Expectation A3.1.

2.7   Course approval is managed through a panel-based process. University approval panels are chaired by senior members of academic staff external to the proposing area and include other senior academics, including heads of department, principal lecturers and research professors, who are independent of the proposing faculty. Panel chairs and members receive written guidance and training for the role, with opportunities to observe before undertaking panel duty. Approval panels explore the course's academic rationale; target and intermediate qualification awards; market rationale, and fit with the University's strategic objectives; alignment with national academic and PSRB reference points; course structure and content; teaching, learning and assessment strategies; student support; staffing (with CVs) and resources; course management arrangements; and compliance with the University's academic regulations.

2.8   Panels contain external academic experts and industry representatives, and a nomination and approval process ensures they have the appropriate qualifications and experience and that there is no previous association with the University that may compromise their independent judgement. External subject experts comment principally on academic standards while industry representatives contribute to discussions concerning employability. Where appropriate, the University operates a conjoint approval process with PSRBs.

2.9   Following consideration by a University approval panel, which may set conditions of approval, final approval is by the Teaching Quality and Standards Committee (TQSC), represented by the Academic Registrar, with the process reviewed by its Course Approval Task Group (CATG). In addition to confirming the completion of conditions, the CATG also identifies any emerging issues and features of good practice and evaluates the effectiveness of the course approval process itself.

2.10   The Quality Handbook specifies that, in addition to meeting with student representatives, University approval panels also contain student panellists who receive training and support from the Quality Directorate and Students' Union. Approval reports sampled by the review team demonstrated limited evidence of student panel membership. However, the University has recognised this as an area for development and will monitor its progress through the CATG. The review team **affirms** the work being undertaken with the Students' Union to increase participation in course approval and periodic review panels in line with the procedure the University has set out in its Quality Handbook.

2.11   In addition to industry representation on approval panels the University seeks to involve employers during course development. Evidence of employer involvement ranges from detailed comments on proposed curriculum to more general support, including offers of work placements. Evidence of employer or industry consultation is strongest among those courses that have professional body accreditation or recognition.

2.12   The criteria for distinguishing minor and major course modifications are described in the Quality Handbook and reflect the nature of the proposed change and its impact on a validated course and learning outcomes. The University TQSC delegates to faculty TQSCs the approval of new course units and minor modifications to existing courses or units, while

major modifications are referred by faculties for the TQSC Chair's action. Course and Unit Information Forms record changes made through the relevant modification procedures.

2.13   Course re-approval forms part of the University's periodic review process, although faculties may seek re-approval during the quinquennial review cycle where the desired change exceeds the normal threshold for modification. Periodic review also provides the opportunity to review the appropriateness of curricula in respect of their continuing fit with University priorities and evidence of continued market demand.

2.14   Written guidance for the completion of course approval documentation is supplemented by training and development provided through the University's Centre for Learning Excellence. Among the initiatives that underpin course design and delivery is the 'CRe8' curriculum framework, containing key principles for effective teaching and learning with a particular emphasis on learner development and employability. The University has also introduced a set of principles for the design of level 4 teaching and assessment and is developing similar principles for level 6 courses. Additional guidance on inclusive course design is being rolled out for use in course approval from academic year 2015-16.

2.15   The review team found that the University has robust processes for the design, development, approval and modification of its taught courses. There is appropriate separation between business decisions and academic approval, and the course approval process makes relevant use of externality, including academic and professional benchmarking. Decisions from course approval are reported through the deliberative committee structure, where final approval is conferred, which provides opportunities to review and evaluate the approval process. While the participation of students in course approval panels remains somewhat underdeveloped, this does not pose a risk to the overall soundness of the approval process. On this basis, the review team concludes that Expectation B1 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

2.16   The University Admissions Policy, set by the Academic Board, covers admissions to all taught courses and research degrees. The Academic Board also sets overarching regulations and approves any non-standard entry requirements for specific subjects. The Recruitment and Participation Strategy sets out a clear institutional plan of activity led by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (External Relations). Recruitment, selection and admission of students is managed by: the Marketing, Admissions, Recruitment and Communications Department, which has an oversight role and a specific focus on UK and EU students; the International Office, which focuses on overseas students; and the Research Graduate School, which deals with research degrees. The University takes primary responsibility for admission to courses that are managed with partner institutions.

2.17   The Admissions Policy, and associated regulations and practices, emphasise transparency and fairness and reflect a commitment to widening participation. The University seeks to recruit, select and admit students who meet appropriate entry criteria and can complete the objectives of their course to the standard required. Published policies and processes are clear and detailed, aligned to the Quality Code, *Chapter B2* and allow the Expectation to be met.

2.18   In considering this Expectation, the review team examined a range of policy and practice documents, including published information on the websites of the University and its partners. Aspects of the admissions process were explored through discussions with students and staff.

2.19   The review team saw a range of evidence about transparent, inclusive and effective recruitment activities, including informative open days, local outreach programmes, and the information available to prospective students of all types via the University's website (including features like 'live chat online'). International students may apply through agents; the University sets detailed policies, requirements and guidance for the work of agents, including due diligence approval checks, handbooks for agents, and reports on staff interactions with agents during overseas visits.

2.20   The review team saw evidence of fair and reliable selection and admissions procedures. Admissions staff have access to and participate in a good range of training opportunities and materials (for example, about inclusivity and dealing with disability). Selection is against defined criteria for each course, which for certain courses includes performance at interview, audition or portfolio assessment.

2.21   For postgraduate research applicants, admission assessments are made jointly by academics and Research Graduate School staff, with staff from academic Research Institutes (which sit alongside the department and faculty structures, and have the ultimate management responsibility for postgraduate research students) making the final decision. However, the review team heard evidence of a lack of coordinated support for postgraduate research applicants, including advice for international applicants, and this has contributed to a recommendation under Expectation B11. For all types of international students,

the University has acknowledged and responded to issues around International Office staff availability, particularly for visa queries, identified through the 'Tell Us' scheme. All Tier 4 international applicants are now interviewed prior to being sponsored for a visa; senior staff confirmed to the review team that that they felt international admissions processes were robust.

2.22   For programmes delivered with partner colleges, the University has detailed procedures manuals for managing admissions: typical features include the use of standard application forms and screening of applicants by the partner. The review team heard that students admitted to such programmes were satisfied with the information provided. For all types of courses, if course changes (including course withdrawals) are agreed, processes to amend or withdraw offers may be invoked, with formal notification letters sent. Just over 100 students were affected by relevant changes in 2013-14, ranging from minor changes of course title to changes of study location and in some cases notifications of course closure. There is also a published process for appealing against admission decisions.

2.23   Registration, orientation and induction has previously been an area of concern among students, as indicated in the student submission, which suggested strengthening pre-arrival communications, especially for international students. However, students whom the review team met gave very positive feedback about their experiences, and the Vice-Chancellor's Student Experience Group is coordinating a major initiative in this area for 2015. Helpful advance information about orientation and induction is provided on the website, including specifically for international students, and there is an international student induction in the week before the start of the main intake of students. Central orientation activities are backed up by course-level inductions, and research degree students have their own specific inductions both at University and Research Institute level. Additional support is proactively offered to students who register late, and likewise to those who enter with low UCAS tariff points, although uptake among the latter group has been lower than expected.

2.24   Surveys of new students, as well as those who decline offers, are used to identify where improvements can be made to the admissions process, pre-arrival support and orientation. The University was only able to arrange for a very small number of Bedfordshire-based taught international students to meet with the review team, but there is no evidence that international students are dissatisfied with the admissions and induction programme. Students at overseas partners whom the review team spoke to via video conferencing were happy with the information they received, and the admissions and induction processes. Evidence from the International Student Barometer Survey indicates that such students' admission and arrival experience at the University is in line with other comparable UK institutions, with no areas of substantive concern.

2.25   The University has clear and comprehensive policies and procedures for the recruitment, selection and admission of students. Practices are fair, transparent and supportive, adhering to the key principles set out in the Quality Code, *Chapter B2*. Organisational management of these activities is firmly delineated and in general appropriately supported. On this basis, the review team concludes that Expectation B2 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

2.26   The University's Strategic Plan 2012-17 aims to provide a curriculum 'which supports both academic and career success' and is delivered by staff who are motivated and 'enabled to do so by continuous professional development and by systems that are developed collaboratively'. These aims are facilitated by the implementation of the University's Learner Experience Strategy 2012, supported by: the Student Experience Strategy 2013, the Organisation and People Development Strategy 2014, the Estates Infrastructure Management Enabling Strategy 2013, and the ICT Enabling Strategy 2013.

2.27   Teaching and learning procedures are described in the Quality Handbook, and the University's approach to teaching and learning is articulated in a staff guide, provided in hard copy and available via the Centre for Learning Excellence (CLE) website. The curriculum framework, CRe8, outlines the key principles for effective teaching and learning, and reflects the University's access mission and focus on student development and employability.

2.28   The University has in place appropriate policies and procedures that allow the Expectation to be met.

2.29   In considering this Expectation, the review team examined relevant documentation provided by the University, including strategies, policies and procedures, and committee papers, and looked at online learning resources. The team tested its findings in meetings with academic and professional staff, and with students.

2.30   In meetings with staff and students, it was evident that there is widespread support and engagement with the implementation of the Learner Experience and Student Experience Strategies. The review team saw evidence of staff and students working in partnership through the deliberative committee structure, forums and projects. It was also evident that there were effective student feedback systems to further develop and enhance the learning environment (see Section 4 on Enhancement).

2.31   The Teaching Quality and Standards Committee (TQSC) and Quality Enhancement Committee (QEC) have oversight of implementation of the Learner Experience Strategy, with an annual joint meeting to review progress and set priorities for the following year. A subcommittee of the QEC, the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Action Group (TLAG), provides a forum for learning, teaching and assessment issues and for developing policies and procedures for consideration by the QEC or TQSC. The QEC has oversight of the Student Experience Strategy, objectives of which include making the best use of new technologies, developing peer support, and supporting staff to enhance the student experience. The course approval, annual monitoring and periodic review processes ensure that course delivery and the provision of learning resources support the attainment of learning outcomes (see also Expectations A3.1, A3.2, B1 and B8). Data from various sources, including student surveys, external examiner reports, examination boards, portfolio and faculty monitoring, and periodic review are used to evaluate and enhance policies, regulations and processes underpinning learning and teaching. The University and Students' Union joint vision for partnership between students, academic and professional staff is

articulated through the Community Partnership Agreement, relaunched in 2014. The Vice-Chancellor's Student Experience Group, which reports to the QEC, provides a forum for students and staff to discuss a range of matters, including student feedback from surveys and from the 'Tell Us' scheme, which allows students to give informal comments on any topic and get a rapid individual response back from the University. Student Experience Projects (StEPS) are student-driven initiatives, funded by the University's Student Experience Fund; 26 StEPS projects were funded in 2013-14, awarded by a panel chaired by the Vice-Chancellor. Reports on StEPS are considered at the Vice-Chancellor's Student Experience Group.

2.32   The review team finds that the University has structures and processes in place for implementation of its curriculum framework, CRe8. Following the introduction of CRe8 in 2007-08, curriculum priorities were revised in 2012 to enhance learner development skills and deliver a clearer articulation of student employability through Graduate Impact Statements. The review team heard from staff that all undergraduate courses have now adopted this approach. Learner development strategies in course and unit Information Forms highlight how students are supported in moving from dependent to independent and autonomous learners. The University's regulations require that level 6 and level 7 (master's) courses include a dissertation or project, and the University is considering the potential for further development of these curriculum elements. Curriculum design and teaching practices are inclusive, and guidance material is provided during staff induction and at staff development workshops. In May 2015, in response to suggestions from students, the Academic Board approved a revised version of CRe8 with two equivalent parts, one for staff and one for students. The former will provide the ongoing basis for staff development and curriculum design across the University's taught provision. Consultations have shown that staff use the CRe8 framework to structure their courses and design teaching and learning activities. The course teams' engagement with CRe8 was evident in documentation produced for course review events.

2.33   In general, students are happy with the learning resources that are made available to them to help them with their studies. The University has made a significant recent investment in its teaching spaces, which is designed to match the expectations of CRe8. A new library building is due to open at the Luton campus in 2016. The University has minimum specifications for each teaching room, with a major investment in wireless access to accommodate students who increasingly use their own mobile devices. The review team heard from both staff and students about the extensive and comprehensive use made of Bedfordshire Resources for Education Online (BREO), which includes the VLE, an e-portfolio tool, software for recording lectures and KeyPads, which support active engagement of students in lectures. The BREO gateway webpage is a key mechanism for signposting students to a range of supporting information (see Expectation B4) and for highlighting impending activities such as the release of the examination timetable. The highly informative VLE, which is used extensively across the University and collaborative partners, has led to a feature of good practice under Expectation C.

2.34   The review team acknowledged that the University is currently engaged in a major review of the use made of technology to ensure that it has the appropriate tools available. As part of the Learner Experience Strategy, a digital literacy group is being formed as a subgroup of the TLAG, and questions on the use of technology have been added to the Bedfordshire Unit Survey (BUS). The annual Students' Union-University Conference has provided a strategic forum for a number of initiatives, including 24/7 library opening and estate design. The Portfolio Strategy and Planning Group has oversight of the University's teaching and learning portfolio and its development, and looks at the fit between course proposals and the University's strategy and resource base. The learning resources provision in relation to partners is considered under Expectation B10.

2.35   Staff development is formally considered during academic probation. A mentor and a personal development plan support academic staff during their probationary year. New staff attend a one-day introduction to teaching and learning delivered by the CLE. There are probationary reports at three, six and nine months, with peer review of teaching on two occasions. Managed development of staff pedagogic practice and expertise is through participation in the University's Higher Education Academy accredited Professional Teaching Scheme (PTS). The development and effectiveness of PTS is monitored by the PTS Management Group, which reports to the QEC.

2.36   The review team finds that the University has a culture of promoting the development of its staff that is driven from the top of the institution. The University's academic promotion framework recognises excellence in teaching practice as a route to professorial status. Staff achievement in learning and teaching is also recognised in various other ways, including the Bedfordshire Teaching Fellow Scheme and annual student experience awards. Higher Education Academy membership is encouraged through either a qualification route (PGCert teaching qualification), or a practice and reflection route for more experienced staff; over 50 per cent of academic staff are currently Higher Education Academy Fellows. All academic staff are peer reviewed at least annually, which provides an opportunity for reflection and guidance, and actions to meet individual goals are discussed at annual staff review. Staff development needs can be addressed through a flexible programme of PTS activities. Other staff development opportunities include annual small project grants from the CLE for practitioner research on teaching and learning, with the results submitted to the Journal of Pedagogic Development; and the annual University Conference, which facilitates the sharing of teaching practice, and combines research and teaching themes.

2.37   Following a review by the QEC's Retention and Performance Action Group in 2012, Personal Academic Tutoring has involved staff being specifically trained in coaching skills by the CLE. Some 87 per cent of tutors had been trained at the time of the review. This is discussed further under Expectation B4. Hourly paid lecturing staff are appointed by heads of department, and there is a clear policy on the induction and support of these staff, which the review team heard about at meetings with staff. Professional staff also have access to training and development through the PTS for supporting students' development and achievement.

2.38   Postgraduate research students are encouraged to engage in teaching as part of their personal and professional development; as part of their induction they attend a half-day training session on learning and teaching (see also Expectation B11), and may also take part in the PTS, leading to a PGCert.

2.39   The review team considers the institutional culture and support available to staff to develop and reflect on their learning and teaching practice to be **good practice**. The integrated, institution-wide, academic and pastoral support for taught students, which enables them to develop their academic, personal and professional potential, has led to a feature of good practice under Expectation B4.

2.40   The BUS provides quantitative and qualitative feedback on the level of student satisfaction on each unit. Outstanding units and those where there are potential issues are identified. For the former, Unit coordinators are contacted to identify and disseminate effective practice. Where there are issues, more detailed analysis is required. To support staff, Associate Deans (Student Experience) have been appointed for each faculty, coordinated by the Director for Student Experience, whose office supports the analysis of data and the planning and monitoring of actions in relation to the NSS, while the CLE performs the same function in relation to the BUS. In all cases, the quantitative outcomes are shared with students together with the associated action plans. The Vice-Chancellor's

Student Experience Group (VCSEG) maintains an oversight of BUS outcomes and an annual report is considered by the TQSC. Teaching satisfaction is an area where the University has steadily improved its rating in the National Student Survey.

2.41   The review team finds evidence that the University has effective systems in place for reviewing, assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, including processes for considering and acting upon feedback from a variety of sources, for reviewing the learning environment, and for supporting staff development. There are also links from the University's support of learning and teaching to two other features of good practice: the integrated, institution-wide, academic and pastoral support for taught students (see Expectation B4); and the highly informative VLE (see Expectation C). There are no recommendations. 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

2.42   The University's approach to enabling student development and achievement is incorporated in its Learner Experience Strategy and Student Experience Strategy, and supported by the University's staff development, estate infrastructure and IT strategies (see Expectation B3). The University aims to ensure equivalence of opportunity for all its students, irrespective of campus. The curriculum framework, CRe8, is premised on personalised learning, and from 2015-16 the course approval process will include an equality impact evaluation. The University Community Partnership Agreement with the Students' Union sets out the responsibilities and expectations of students and staff. The University has centralised orientation and in-course induction events for its students. The principles of student support are described in the Quality Handbook. The VCSEG has oversight of orientation and induction, and, through review, of student health and well-being support services. The University's strategic approaches, its policies and procedures, and the advice and support services provided for students allow the Expectation to be met.

2.43   To determine whether the Expectation is met, the review team examined relevant documentation, including strategies, committee minutes, policies and procedures, and viewed online resources supporting student development and achievement. The team tested its findings in meetings with academic and professional staff, and with students.

2.44   At meetings with the review team, staff and students supported the aims of the Learning Experience and Student Experience Strategies, and CRe8, to further student development and achievement and ensure that all graduates have skills that improve their employability. Students spoke highly of the academic and pastoral support available for their studies and their well-being.

2.45   The Quality Enhancement Committee coordinates the activity of action groups that focus on aspects of student development and achievement: including the Retention and Performance Action Group, which monitors and reviews student retention and performance; the Employability Action Group, a forum for professional support and academic staff to work on employability through the Learner Experience Strategy and the curriculum framework; and the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Action Group (TLAG), which focuses on policies and guidance on assessments, inclusivity and learning technology. The TLAG coordinated the development of the University's Academic Reading and Resourcing Strategy, by Centre for Learning Excellence and learning resources staff in 2013-14; this helps ensure that all students have access to required reading.

2.46   The University's central orientation and course-level induction arrangements for taught students were reviewed in November 2014. Orientation is delivered jointly by the University and the Students' Union, and includes roadshows, introductions to Personal Academic Tutors and Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) leaders, and signposting to resources and services available online, in course handbooks, the Student Information Desk, Students' Union and student representatives. The International Office provides specialist advice for international students, including on visas, and leads an orientation and induction programme for international students. More than 90 per cent of student respondents found orientation sessions met their needs for information, with course-level inductions more positively engaging than central orientations. Students on taught courses who met the review team supported these views. The implementation of PAL, whereby second-year students mentor

groups of first-year undergraduate students, has been welcomed by students, who spoke highly of its impact.

2.47   The Student Information Desk acts as a central point for students to obtain information, advice and guidance, including on other support services available. Students who met the review team spoke highly of this service. Data on trends in enquiries from the Student Information Desk data feeds into the 'Tell Us' system, which allows the University to respond better to issues, through the VCSEG, Quality Enhancement Committee and the Teaching Quality and Standards Committee. Student support services are based within the Academic Registry, and work together and with academic departments to provide centralised, standalone and in-course support. Online and telephone support is available and there are in-person services at all University campuses. The Student Hub has three support teams: Academic Liaison Librarians, Computer Skills Trainers and the Professional and Academic Department, and provides online and face-to-face support on all University campuses. The Careers and Recruitment Service offers students one-to-one contact with Employability Advisers, a dedicated Placements Team for students on sandwich courses (see also Expectation B10), and a Recruitment Services Team, which manages job vacancies. Graduates are offered lifetime careers support. The student support service has specialist teams for Health and Well-being, Money Advice, Community and Faith, and Student Engagement and Mitigation. Within Health and Well-being, the Disability Team work with prospective and existing students to develop individual Learning and Teaching Support Plans, which enable teaching staff to put any required adjustments in place. Counselling and chaplaincy services are supplemented by Student Engagement and Mitigation, which helps identify and support students at risk of failing.

2.48   Portfolio-level student attainment and review boards are held twice a year, and track student progress and engagement. Personal Academic Tutors support students throughout their course, and the introduction of a coaching-based approach for tutors (as explained further under Expectation B3) has been a particularly positive development. Personal Academic Tutors administrative referral software allows both academic and professional support staff to refer students for individual support and to track student progress. Student Engagement Monitors draw on all available information to track student engagement and ensure there is appropriate follow-up. This integrated system for supporting and identifying students at risk has led to improvements in retention and achievement and was spoken of highly at meetings with staff and students. The review team considers the integrated, institution-wide, academic and pastoral support for taught students, which enables them to develop their academic, personal and professional potential, to be **good practice**.

2.49   Monitoring and review of support for student development and achievement is embedded in the annual monitoring and periodic review processes (see Expectation B8 for further details). Annual reporting indicates that the University is effectively improving equality of outcomes. The Equality and Diversity Committee monitors progress of the University's Equality Policy and Strategy Action Plan 2012-17, and monitors and reviews data related to the equality of opportunities and protected characteristics. Professional Service Operating Plans are developed alongside faculty business plans to enable effective planning by professional support teams; a student-centred 'stakeholder review' of professional support teams has also been introduced. The University library is working toward 'customer service excellence' and the Careers and Recruitment Service holds the matrix award. Employability Advisers and Academic Liaison Librarians are encouraged to obtain relevant professional qualifications and Higher Education Academy recognition.

2.50   The review team finds that the University has in place robust and effective systems to support students in their academic, personal and professional development. The integrated, institution-wide, academic and pastoral support for taught students is a

feature of good practice, and there are links to a second feature of good practice: the institutional culture and support available to staff to develop and reflect on their learning and teaching practice (see Expectation B3). 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 (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

2.51   Working in partnership with students and their representatives is an objective of the University Strategic Plan 2012-17. Student engagement is a key objective of both the Learner Experience Strategy and the Student Experience Strategy. These strategies, and their implementation, are designed to support the delivery of the University Strategy, and are overseen by the Teaching Quality and Standards Committee (TQSC) and Quality Enhancement Committee (QEC) respectively. The University's approach to partnership working is articulated in the University Community Partnership Agreement, which was launched in 2013-14 by the Vice-Chancellor and the President of the Students' Union, and is accessible to students and staff via the University website and Bedfordshire Resources for Education Online (BREO). There is an established student representative system for taught students, which is administered by the Students' Union, working closely with the University. Membership of the Vice-Chancellor's Executive Committee has included the Students' Union President since 2012. The University operates a number of formal and informal mechanisms, such as student surveys, in order to provide opportunities for the wider student body to provide feedback on their educational experience, and the full range of feedback is triangulated at the Vice-Chancellor's Student Experience Group, which reports to the QEC. The University has appropriate strategies, policies, procedures and systems in place to allow the Expectation to be met.

2.52   In considering this Expectation, the review team examined relevant documentation such as strategies, committee terms of reference, committee minutes, responses to student surveys and action plans. The team tested its findings in meetings with University management, academic staff, professional service staff, students and student representatives, including Students' Union Sabbatical Officers.

2.53   The University and the Students' Union believe their working relationship to be a positive partnership based on mutual respect. Students' Union Sabbatical Officers regularly meet with University senior management, and senior management regularly hold open meetings to ensure their work is informed by the views of the wider student body.

2.54   There is an annual Students' Union-University Conference, which is a strategic forum initiated in 2011-12 and focuses on just one or two areas a year so that each can be discussed in depth. A number of strategic enhancements have resulted from these conferences, including the change to a percentage grading system, the revised Personal Academic Tutoring system and increased library opening hours.

2.55   Students are represented, in the form of Students' Union Sabbatical Officers, on the main University-level committees, including the Academic Board, TQSC, QEC and the Vice-Chancellor's Student Experience Group, as well as on a number of task groups, including: the Student Information Task Group; the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Action Group; and Retention and Performance Action Group. Given the extensive number of task and action groups that are currently in operation at the University, the Students' Union sometimes struggles to ensure there is adequate student representation at all times due to limited capacity. The President of the Students' Union sits on the Vice-Chancellor's Executive Group, which meets fortnightly to review and determine key strategic and operational matters. This ensures the student voice is heard at the highest level of decision making at the University, and the post holder is fully supported through a series of one-to-

one meetings with University senior management to ensure they are able to undertake the role effectively.

2.56   Working closely with the University, the Students' Union is responsible for administering the student representative system. There are currently 628 taught student representatives across the six campuses, which has increased from 522 in 2013-14 and 459 in 2012-13. Academic and professional service staff assist the Students' Union with student representative elections, and the Vice-Chancellor's Student Experience Group monitors the number and extent of representatives. Student representatives are trained and supported by the Students' Union; however, there are staff resource constraints in this area. Student representatives met by the review team reported that they were well supported to carry out their roles effectively. Department representatives are members of the Students' Union Education Committee, chaired by the Vice-President (Education). Its membership also includes University professional service staff, further demonstrating the partnership approach adopted at the University.

2.57   The Students' Union reviewed their Student Representation Framework in 2013 to ensure it met the Expectations of the Quality Code and aligned with the University strategy. This review led to the Think BIG initiative, with the intention of changing the ethos of the system and encouraging staff and students to think more innovatively about the student experience. The initiative encourages representatives to convey the 'best' areas of their education, the areas for 'improvement' and the new ideas they want to 'get going'. While a relatively new development, it demonstrates positive partnership working between staff and students and will be developed further over the next academic year.

2.58   Course representatives are formal members of course teams. Course teams meet regularly and provide an opportunity for key staff and student representatives, not only to discuss student feedback but also the progress of the course more generally, and to be proactive in taking early action to resolve any matters of concern. This development arose from a Students' Union-University Conference. Portfolio Executive Committees and faculty academic boards also include student representative members.

2.59   The University's Quality Handbook states that students should be full members of course approval and re-approval panels, periodic review panels, and contribute to annual monitoring through their membership of course teams. However, the Students' Union was concerned about its capacity to source appropriate student representatives for every event, and the University and Students' Union are working together to improve student representation on course approval and periodic review panels. This is the subject of an affirmation under Expectation B1. In October 2014, the Students' Union proposed a framework using the Think BIG initiative to ensure student input into Annual Monitoring Reports.

2.60   The University uses external and internal surveys in order to engage with the wider student body and to solicit their feedback on their experiences. These include the National Student Survey, the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey, the International Student Barometer and the Bedfordshire Unit Survey (BUS). The BUS is a unit-level survey that is coordinated by the Centre for Learning Excellence. Results are analysed and presented to the Vice-Chancellor's Student Experience Group, and quantitative analysis is provided in a uniform way on all BREO sites. This is accompanied by a response from the Unit Co-ordinator detailing action taken in response to the feedback. This presentation of results ensures the closing of the feedback loop for the following cohort. The BUS is carried out after the mid-point but before the end of the unit, to ensure that any quick changes that can be made have a positive effect for the current cohort studying the unit.

2.61   Student surveys are coordinated by the Student Experience Office, which is led by the Director for Student Experience. The Director for Student Experience also coordinates the work of the four Associate Deans (Student Experience) in each faculty. One of the responsibilities of the Director is to ensure that the University hears the student voice and acts on the messages from students, supporting the analysis of student survey data, planning and monitoring actions, and overseeing the implementation of the Student Experience Strategy. The Student Experience Office is the owner of the student survey matrix, which is designed to agree the most appropriate timing and method of delivery of student surveys, while helping to limit survey fatigue. However, while students the review team met were positive about being given opportunities to provide feedback, they also believed there could be too many surveys covering too many topics.

2.62   The Student Experience Office introduced the Tell Us scheme in 2013-14, which enables students to give feedback on their wider experience in a variety of different ways. Input can be given via an online feedback form, email, telephone or comment boxes across the campuses, and there is a 'topic of the month' to solicit feedback on a particular theme. Action taken as a result of feedback is communicated directly to the student and is the subject of 'You Said, We Did' campaigns across the University. There was widespread awareness and positive views of the scheme among the students the review team met.

2.63   The University has undertaken a great deal of work to increase National Student Survey response rates and to improve their level of overall satisfaction, which increased from 80.1 per cent in 2013 to 84.2 per cent in 2014, which is the highest percentage increase in the sector. The Senior Leadership Team receive regular updates while the survey is live, and results are discussed at Senior Leadership Team meetings and at most other University committees, including the Board of Governors, Academic Board and Vice-Chancellor's Student Experience Group. Each faculty and course team are required to review National Student Survey results and to create action plans in response each November.

2.64   The positive partnership working with the Students' Union and the use of informal and formal feedback mechanisms has led the review team to conclude that the open and proactive approach taken by the University to seeking out, listening and responding to the taught student voice at all levels of the institution is **good practice**.

2.65   Arrangements are in place to ensure that students studying in partner organisations are provided with opportunities to feedback on their experience of the course via staff-student meetings. The Students' Union acknowledges that they are unable to specifically support student engagement within collaborative partner colleges. However, students studying at collaborative partners with whom the review team met confirmed that they were given opportunities to provide feedback on their course; some were able to provide examples of changes made as a result. Students studying with partners were clear that they have regular opportunities for face-to-face meetings with University staff, which provide a further opportunity to give feedback on their educational experience.

2.66   Arrangements for the engagement of postgraduate research students have recently undergone change. Before 2013-14, postgraduate research student representation operated through the Research Student Support Group, which was a specific association for postgraduate research students. The Director for Research Development and the Research Graduate School are currently working with the Students' Union to redevelop postgraduate research representational structures, currently through implementation of a postgraduate research student forum. This first met in March 2015 and aims to provide a forum for postgraduate research students to discuss their experience and to build links with the Students' Union, with a view to creating a more formal postgraduate research student

representation system in due course. The review team **affirms** the steps being taken to develop a postgraduate student forum to engage students and strengthen their voice.

2.67   While the terms of reference for the postgraduate research student forum state that the forum reports to the Research Degrees Committee, the Research Degrees Committee currently has no student representation. This is due to the fact the Committee also operates as an exam board, which entails significant restricted business. However, this means there is no institutional-level representation of postgraduate research students at the University. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that, by March 2016, the University ensure there is appropriate representation of postgraduate research students on University-level deliberative committees with responsibility for postgraduate research policy and practice.

2.68   The review team considers that the University takes deliberate steps to engage students in quality assurance and enhancement processes, and noted good practice in this area. While there is a recommendation and affirmation in relation to postgraduate research student engagement, this is confined to one area of the University's provision. 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 (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

2.69   The academic regulations of the University set out the policy determining assessment practice. This is the responsibility of the Academic Board, overseen by the Teaching Quality and Standards Committee for taught provision, and the Research Degrees Committee for research degree awards. The relevant chapter of the Quality Handbook details the principles and processes of assessment from design stage to providing feedback. A comprehensive manual, pro formas and specifications assist staff in designing assessment tasks, supported by guidance from the Centre for Learning Excellence. These are readily accessible on the website. The policy for the recognition of prior learning is determined by the Academic Board and issued by the Academic Registry. These procedures allow Expectation B6 to be met.

2.70   The review team scrutinised relevant regulations and policy documents, manuals, minutes of meetings, staff development resources relating to assessment, National Student Survey data, and a wide range of external examiner reports. The team met staff and students and viewed assessment related information for students on the University's VLE, Bedfordshire Resources for Education Online.

2.71   Assessment strategies and design are scrutinised during course approval and monitored through annual monitoring and periodic review. All courses are required to have appropriate mechanisms in place to provide diagnostic, formative and summative assessment. Realistic student workloads are encouraged through the use of assessment maps.

2.72   Guidance in setting assessment tasks and ensuring the authenticity of student work is provided in the Quality Handbook, and support is provided through the Centre for Learning Excellence.

2.73   Course designers are required to specify the ways in which an understanding of academic integrity will be developed and this process is supported by the academic integrity resource.

2.74   Academic regulations and academic malpractice are discussed in course inductions for new and returning students. All students whom the review team met understood the importance of academic integrity.

2.75   The University has recently reviewed and revised the procedures for the recognition of prior learning and is in the process of implementing them. Accessible information for applicants is available on the University website. Support is provided by a subject expert when an applicant is preparing a submission. Decisions are confirmed by portfolio boards. A new board has been established to mirror aspects of the scheme boards with respect to the recognition of prior learning and ensure consistency across faculties.

2.76   Unit Information Forms are the reference point for assessment briefs. The review team was able to access a selection of VLE unit pages that provided detailed guidance on

assignment requirements and threshold criteria. A pro forma for assessment briefs, which can be adapted in accordance with the needs of the discipline is provided in the Quality Handbook; the exemplars provided to the review team illustrate this. Students are clear about where to find information about their assignments and what they are required to do.

2.77   Comprehensive guidance on feedback, marking and moderation in the Quality Handbook is supported by pro formas and advice to use appropriate external reference points. Improving National Student Survey scores for assessment and feedback suggest this is working, and most students whom the review team met found their feedback helpful, although timeliness is a concern for some.

2.78   A recent review of the regulations has included the introduction of a percentage based marking scheme in response to concerns raised by students about the previous system. The students whom the review team met were satisfied that they understood the new system and supported the new arrangements.

2.79   A two-tier system of examination boards for recommending and approving awards is outlined in the Quality Handbook. To ensure accurate reporting, template agendas support the effective operation of the two-tier examination board system.

2.80   Arrangements for the assessment and examination of postgraduate research students, including the appointment of external examiners, are set out in the academic regulations and Quality Handbook, and are discussed further under Expectation B11.

2.81   A wide range of management information is used to monitor and compare student achievement and to inform discussion about assessment practices.

2.82   The review team concludes that the University has in place comprehensive and thorough assessment regulations, policies and processes that support all students to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes as required by Expectation B6. The clarity of the Quality Handbook and associated guidance related to assessment ensure that the requirements are widely understood by staff and students as well as collaborative partners. The review team concludes therefore that Expectation B6 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

2.83 The University's policy and procedures for the appointment and use of external examiners are described in the Quality Handbook. The External Examiners Committee is a subgroup of the Teaching Quality and Standards Committee (TQSC); it oversees the implementation of the policy and reports directly to both TQSC and the Academic Board. The University has responsibility for the appointment of all external examiners for all awards for which it is responsible. This policy allows the Expectation to be met.

2.84 The review team tested the application of the policy and procedures by scrutinising relevant regulations and guidance, a wide range of external examiner reports, University responses to external examiner reports, and the minutes of teaching quality committees at faculty and University level. The review team also discussed the sharing of external examiner reports with students and staff.

2.85 The role and responsibilities of external examiners in relation to examination boards are described in the Quality Handbook, and specified in their contracts and letters of appointment. Development and support for external examiners is supplemented by an external examiner conference held each year and resources on the external examiner website.

2.86 External examiner induction is thorough, with a central programme entailing meetings with senior staff, as well as departmental induction. The Quality Directorate maintains a record of staff external examiner engagements with other providers. New nominations are checked against this to guard against reciprocity.

2.87 The external examiner reports provided are fit for purpose. All were appropriately completed and confirmed the role of the University in supporting external examiners to discharge their responsibilities.

2.88 External examiner reports are reviewed through three routes. They are all read by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), who reports to the TQSC on any issues arising from external examiner reports that are urgent or serious, issues to be monitored by the TQSC, or issues for wider consideration. At faculty level, course coordinators draft responses that are submitted to Executive Deans, who formally respond to the external examiner. The external examiner report and the response to it form part of the data set used in formulating action plans for portfolio monitoring and periodic review. Issue logs are then compiled by the faculty Quality Officer. The third route for consideration is that the External Examiners Committee reviews the reports to identify any systemic issues relating to the external examining process.

2.89 Nearly all of the 30 external examiner reports seen by the review team confirm that standards meet the threshold requirements, that courses remain current, and that course learning outcomes are in line with the relevant qualification descriptors and Subject Benchmark Statements. From the responses to external examiner reports there is clear evidence of thoughtful engagement leading to improvements in processes such as moderation.

2.90 In a very small number of cases seen by the review team, external examiners did not consider that they had received a sufficient or timely response to their reports. However, an audit trail in relation to one such issue provided extensive evidence that the

issue was addressed fully within the faculty. The other matters raised by external examiners did not pose a risk to standards.

2.91   The University has moved to make available all information about external examiners, including their reports and responses to them, on the gateway page of the VLE. This information is very accessible but students whom the review team met had mixed awareness of the role of external examiners and, other than a good knowledge among student representatives, mixed awareness of their reports.

2.92   After evaluating the evidence, the review team finds that the University makes scrupulous use of external examiners. The review team concludes therefore that Expectation B7 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

2.93   Responsibility for the annual monitoring and periodic review of taught courses is delegated by the University's Academic Board to the Teaching Quality and Standards Committee (TQSC) and its associated task groups for annual monitoring and periodic review. Monitoring and review processes consider evidence of cohort performance and feedback from external examiners and students to confirm that the standards set at course approval are being maintained and achieved, and the quality of learning opportunities maintained and enhanced. Reports of both processes are received and considered within the University's deliberative committee structure, which allows any standards or quality-related issues to be addressed and good practice shared. This process allows the Expectation to be met.

2.94   In considering this Expectation the review team examined the University's guidance for annual monitoring and periodic review. The team sampled all levels of Annual Monitoring Reports and the reports of periodic reviews. The team examined the minutes of committees where the reports were received and considered. The team also explored the monitoring and review processes and supporting guidance for them through discussions with academic managers, staff and students.

2.95   The University's Quality Handbook describes the aims and processes of monitoring and review. Annual monitoring of taught provision takes place at unit, course, portfolio, faculty and scheme (cross-faculty) levels. Unit Coordinators produce Enhancement Plans (formerly reports), which evaluate cohort performance and feedback from students and external examiners, and propose improvements for the unit's next delivery. Students use the Bedfordshire Unit Survey questionnaire to comment on the teaching and assessment of each unit.

2.96   Course Co-ordinators produce Enhancement Plans (formerly reports), which evaluate cohort recruitment, retention and performance data and feedback from students and external examiners, and propose improvements for the course's next delivery. Unit and course Enhancement Plans are used to inform production of a Portfolio Monitoring Report that evaluates the quality and standards of a group of cognate subject-related courses. Portfolio Monitoring Reports contain analysis of student recruitment, retention and progression data, including unit pass rates, course completion rates and degree classifications, and graduate employment. Portfolio Monitoring Reports describe and evaluate changes to curriculum, including course modifications and closures, arrangements for teaching and student support, and how student feedback has been taken into account in delivery. Comments from external examiners are evaluated and responded to in the form of actions. Actions from the previous Portfolio Monitoring Report are updated and a new action plan included.

2.97   Annual monitoring of validated and franchised programmes follows a broadly similar process to that for campus-based provision, with the production of unit and course Enhancement Plans. Monitoring is supported by a course journal, continuously updated by the delivering partner, which tracks the completion of actions and informs the University's Portfolio Monitoring Report. Partner students are represented on course committees and

boards of study where monitoring occurs. Monitoring of validated or franchised programmes is also supported by the production of University Link Tutor reports.

2.98   Faculty Monitoring Reports are organised under similar headings to Portfolio Monitoring Reports and draw upon them to provide summary evaluation for University-level consideration. Faculty Monitoring Reports and their associated action plans are received and updated by faculty TQSCs, and reviewed by the institution-level TQSC through its Annual Monitoring Task Group (AMTG). All levels of reporting, especially at portfolio and faculty level, provide opportunities to identify and comment on good practice with potential for wider dissemination. The AMTG also evaluates the annual monitoring process itself and makes recommendations for operational adjustments to the TQSC.

2.99   Scheme Monitoring Reports enable comparisons between the standards and quality of undergraduate and postgraduate taught courses delivered across faculties. Scheme reports are received for the direct consideration of the TQSC and Academic Board.

2.100   The University's 10 Research Institutes produce Annual Monitoring Reports for consideration by the Research Degrees Committee. Postgraduate Research Monitoring Reports evaluate academic standards through the analysis of student recruitment, retention, progression and completion, appeals and external examiners' comments. The quality of the research degree student experience is evaluated through consideration of staffing (supervision), learning resources, research skills training and other support, and student feedback. The Director for Research Development draws upon these reports to compile an institution-level annual report on research degree programmes for consideration by the Academic Board.

2.101   The University's periodic review process complements annual monitoring, and according to the Quality Handbook 'allows for a broader and more holistic consideration of courses and subjects, through a more sustained review process of self-evaluation and peer review'. Separate periodic reviews are conducted for taught and research degrees. The University has moved from the periodic review of individual courses to reviewing clusters of cognate subject-related courses, within a standard five-year cycle. Subjects produce a self-evaluation document for consideration by a University panel that includes academic and professional or industrial externality. Panels are chaired by senior members of academic staff and comprise other senior academics, including heads of department, principal lecturers and research professors who are all independent of the faculty that hosts the provision. Panel members receive written guidance, training (including one-to-one training where necessary), and opportunities to observe a periodic review event before participating.

2.102   Subjects' self-evaluations are informed by course-level data on student recruitment, retention and progression, previous Annual Monitoring Reports, external examiner reports, National Student Survey outcomes, and evidence of course additions and major changes completed since the previous review. Individual panel meetings are held with senior managers, teaching staff and student course representatives. The Quality Handbook also specifies student membership of panels for which training is provided by the University's Quality Directorate and Students' Union. However, the University acknowledges that this is not yet consistent across all periodic reviews and is working with the Students' Union to address this.

2.103   Periodic review delivers separate judgements for academic standards and the quality of student learning opportunities, including student support. The evaluation of standards is based on discussions of curriculum content and learning outcomes, supported by evidence of academic and professional benchmarking, feedback from external examiners (and professional bodies where relevant), and analysis of student retention, progression and

completion data. Evaluation of the quality of student learning opportunities is based on consideration of teaching and assessment practices and learning resources, and is informed by feedback from staff and students.

2.104   A report of each periodic review containing the panel's judgements, conditions and recommendations is received by the Periodic Review Task Group (PRTG) of the TQSC for taught courses and professional doctorates. In addition to their receipt by the PRTG, periodic review reports also receive direct consideration by the Academic Board.

2.105   Periodic review confers continuing approval of current courses subject to the meeting of any associated conditions that may include the requirement for course modifications. Action plans resulting from the setting of recommendations from monitoring and review are routinely monitored by faculty TQSCs. Periodic review reports also identify effective practice.

2.106   Partner-delivered courses are included within the periodic review of their host university subject area except for validated courses, which undergo standalone review. Periodic review and re-approval of individual partnerships (institutional review) takes place every five years through a panel-based process reporting to the Academic Board.

2.107   The PRTG evaluates the periodic review process and makes recommendations for improvement to the University-level TQSC. For example, where some reviews had to be adjourned and reconvened resulting in multiple reports, this has been addressed through enhanced guidance and support. Preparation for periodic review is supported by comprehensive guidance documentation and specific development activities for panels and participants. The University has recently introduced a schedule of five-yearly Strategic Reviews of themed areas of support-related activities, comprising: outreach and widening participation; recruitment and admission; careers information and guidance; learning resources and support (including Information and Communications Technology); student health and well-being; and student finance, immigration and accommodation services. The review team saw evidence of the first such review of student health and well-being having been completed, with the remainder being programmed over the next three years.

2.108   Course closures are managed through the University's major modifications process and approved by the TQSC Chair's action. Closure proposals require consideration of their impact on current students, and how the standards and quality of the provision will be maintained during any run-out period. The review team saw evidence of effectively managed processes for course closure including collaborative provision.

2.109   The review team concludes that the University has comprehensive and thorough processes for the monitoring and review of courses, which are effective, regular and systematic and also support the continuing approval or closure of provision. Outcomes of annual monitoring and periodic review are reported through the University's deliberative committee structure, which provides opportunities to review and evaluate both processes. Periodic review makes appropriate use of externality. The overarching quality framework for course approval, delivery, monitoring and review, which supports staff in designing and enhancing curricula, has led to a feature of good practice under Expectation A3.1. While the participation of students in periodic review panels remains somewhat underdeveloped, this does not pose a risk to the overall process, and the review team acknowledges the work being undertaken with the Students' Union to increase participation in course approval and periodic review panels in line with the University Quality Handbook, which has led to the affirmation under Expectation B1. On this basis, the review team concludes that Expectation B8 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

2.110   The University has a procedure for academic appeals against formal assessment decisions, and a complaints procedure for all other matters; each of these apply to both taught and research degree students. Guidance about both processes is published on the website, on the VLE (Bedfordshire Resources for Education Online) and in course handbooks. Each process has a clear set of timescales, with scope for appropriate exceptions where students can show good reasons. Before engaging these processes, students are encouraged to raise any concerns through any of a variety of informal means, including the Tell Us scheme. Once in the formal process, both appeals and complaints procedures retain an opportunity for face-to-face dialogue (with participation through videoconferencing being possible for appeals), and students can be accompanied to formal meetings by a Students' Union representative or another appropriate supporter.

2.111   For students studying at associate partner institutions, appeals are dealt with directly by the University; for those studying on validated provision at accredited (established) partners, appeals are dealt with through the partner's processes, which will have been checked for compatibility with the University's policy during partnership approval or review. In the latter case, students can request that the University review the partner's decision once made. Students who wish to make a complaint should initially do so under the policy of the partner institution (unless it relates directly to the actions of the University), and have the option to pursue this with the University at a later stage of the process.

2.112   Formal appeals may only be made arising from mitigating circumstances or operational problems, and not against academic judgement, while allegations of victimisation or unfair discrimination are dealt with as complaints. It is a principle that there should be no detriment to a student arising from their decision to appeal. The process involves initial Stage 1 consideration by a nominee of the Academic Appeals Committee (AAC), and, where appropriate (on the basis of new and significant information or evidence), a final Stage 2 review by a panel chaired by an AAC member, with appeal reviewers being drawn from a small pool of senior staff. Upheld appeals result in the relevant examination board being asked to review or revise the decision appealed. Procedures vary appropriately for appeals by research degree students, including that any such students based at collaborative partners are always subject to the University's procedure, and appeals against viva outcomes always proceed directly to Stage 2, with the examiners being invited to attend or submit a written response. In line with Expectation B2, appeals against admission decisions are covered by a separate process set out in the Admissions Policy.

2.113   Formal complaints may be made by students against any aspect of the University's services - including teaching, academic and learning support services, and administrative services - save where this is covered by a separate specific procedure, such as for academic appeals, disciplinary issues, harassment, or 'whistleblowing' public interest matters. The policy sets out appropriate guiding principles, including that complaints will be treated fairly, consistently and confidentially, and that submission of a complaint should not adversely affect a student or lead to recriminations. Collective complaints may be made by a group. There are clear timescales and deadlines for all aspects of the process, which divides into three stages: informal discussion; then, if necessary, formal investigation by the Student Adjudication Team (normally expected to lead to a final outcome); and, in certain closely

defined circumstances, a final Stage 3 review by a complaints panel. There is no student representation in the process. Complaints against the Students' Union are dealt with under the Unions' own separate complaints procedure.

2.114   The Student Adjudication Team communicates appeal and complaint outcomes to students, with a formal letter setting out the decision and reasons for the outcome at each stage, and follows up to ensure that outcomes are enacted. Appeal outcomes are specifically communicated back to examiners, including external examiners, via exam board minutes or direct correspondence from the Research Graduate School. When all the stages have been completed, a formal completion of procedures (CoP) letter is issued in accordance with guidance provided by the Office for the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education.

2.115   The review team was satisfied that the design of the University's appeals and complaints procedures supports fairness, effectiveness and timeliness, is well aligned to the Quality Code, *Chapter B9* and allows the Expectation to be met.

2.116   The review team tested the University's procedures through examining a range of policy and practice documents, including the policies for academic appeals and for complaints; annual reports on these matters; and further guidance, including partnership manuals. The team further tested the procedures through discussions with students (in particular) and staff.

2.117   The University's procedures for both complaints, and especially appeals, have been through various changes in recent years; both processes are now supported by the central Student Adjudication Team. The review team saw evidence of improved information for students about appeals, as well as diminishing volumes of formal complaints, which were also being resolved more quickly, following the introduction of new business processes and case management approaches.

2.118   The student submission made no mention of appeals, nor of complaints, as a formal process, and students whom the review team met did not proactively comment on these matters; the team was satisfied therefore that these were not areas of concern to the wider student body. However, the review team found there to be mixed awareness of the formal appeal and complaint procedures among students studying on-campus, while across five separate groups of students studying with partner institutions there was a consistent lack of awareness of the formal procedures. Handbooks for students studying with partners do not always provide the necessary detail on how to make an appeal or complaint. Students whom the team met nonetheless had a clear understanding that they could easily find out more about formal processes if needed, for example, on the VLE or by asking or emailing staff such as Programme Leaders or Link Tutors; several stated that concerns they had raised had indeed been adequately addressed following informal discussions (which is what the University's procedures recommend). Academic staff whom the review team met were clear and informed about the correct processes students should follow, and staff at partner institutions expected to liaise with a University Link Tutor where issues arise. Partner agreements and procedures manuals for partner staff also include this detail. Therefore, the team did not have undue concerns in this regard.

2.119   In terms of monitoring appeals and complaints, annual reports are seen by the TQSC and Academic Board. The University has also recently started to report detailed appeals statistics to the Equality and Diversity Committee. Reports are comprehensive, reflective and identify institution-level matters for follow-up. Additionally, the Student Adjudication Team provides brief update reports on a more frequent basis, and the review team saw evidence of the provider seeking to learn from student appeals. The number and outcomes of cases that are considered by the Office for the Independent Adjudicator after

completion of the University's procedures is within appropriate parameters for the total number of registered students. The most recent student adjudication update outlined a group complaint concerning a master's degree where a mid-programme hiatus of ten weeks had created practical difficulties for international students. The review team saw evidence of an effective response from the University, which had acted promptly to modify the delivery pattern through formal programme modification procedures

2.120   Overall, the review team finds that the University has clear policies and procedures for academic appeals and student complaints, which meet the requirements of the Quality Code, *Chapter B9.* The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (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

2.121   The University has a long-standing commitment to partnership working as a means of extending higher education opportunity. The Strategic Plan 2012-17 describes partnership and collaboration as essential to providing access to learning and delivering an excellent student experience. Relationships with colleges and employers operating in geographical hubs in the UK and overseas are reflected in the University's Global Engagement and Regional Engagement Strategies, which aim to strengthen existing partner relationships and develop new partnerships in target markets.

2.122   The University's Regional Engagement Strategy makes reference to 'multi-layered partnership relationships in which the development of academic collaborative provision, research and enterprise are mutually beneficial'. The University's major UK hubs are in Luton, Bedford, Milton Keynes and Aylesbury. Current UK partnerships comprise franchise arrangements with nine further education colleges, mainly for the delivery of foundation degrees but also including initial and continuing teacher education and a small amount of Pearson Higher National provision. The University has developed validation or franchise arrangements with schools consortia for the delivery of school-centred initial teacher training. The University has validated the master's-level provision of two professional health training organisations. Since the previous review the number of students on franchised courses within the UK has declined by around three-quarters, reflecting the impact of changes to government policy on the allocation of funded student numbers. According to its Regional Engagement Strategy, the University will 'consolidate and deepen partnerships with further education colleges'.

2.123   The University's Global Engagement Strategy prioritises the development of cultural awareness and internationalisation of the curriculum, and embraces student recruitment to the UK as well as the delivery of courses through overseas franchise and validation arrangements. Target overseas markets comprise the Asian subcontinent, Africa and the Far East, including China, with additional focus on Central Asia and South America. Current overseas partnerships comprise franchise and validation arrangements in ten countries, with significant amounts of validated provision at the University of Modern Sciences and Arts, Cairo, and Majan College, Oman, and franchised provision in Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Singapore. The number of students on overseas courses has increased steadily, and at the time of review 3,500 students were studying with University partners outside the UK.

2.124   Policies and procedures governing collaborative provision are laid out in the Quality Handbook, which gives the different categories of collaborative provision that map to the Quality Code and includes arrangements for the termination of a partnership or of provision delivered with a collaborative partner.

2.125   The University has in place an appropriate framework for the management of higher education with others that allows Expectation B10 to be met.

2.126   In considering this Expectation the review team examined relevant strategies and the University's guidance for the approval, monitoring and review of collaborative provision. The team sampled the reports of collaborative partner approval and review, and the

committees where reports of partner and course approval are received and considered. The team met a selection of University staff, and staff and students of other organisations with which the institution delivers franchised or validated courses.

2.127   The QAA Audit of Collaborative Provision of 2009 resulted in a judgement of confidence in academic standards and learning opportunities, with three desirable recommendations made regarding collaborative provision; the University has now revised and strengthened a number of arrangements relating to collaborative provision. Oversight of standards and quality is through the Academic Board, and the Teaching Quality and Standards Committee (TQSC) UK Partnerships Committee and Overseas Partnerships Committee, led by the Executive Dean of Academic Partnerships, with strategic responsibility for UK and overseas partnerships. These have replaced the single collaborative partnerships subcommittee. The Centre for Academic Partnerships manages collaborative provision, taking over direct responsibility for administration that previously resided in faculties. Staff report that the new Centre is having a positive impact on the coordination of activity and on the support provided for staff who work with partners.

2.128   The University's taxonomy of collaborative partnership contains three categories: Associate Partnership, Accredited Partnership and Link Partnership. New partners receive Associate Partner status and may subsequently progress to Accredited Partnership on demonstration of mature quality systems. Accredited Partners enjoy greater autonomy, for example in the operation of course monitoring where their own processes may be used, subject to alignment with the University's requirements for monitoring and review. Link Partnership does not entail course delivery, and covers articulation and progression agreements or the provision of study facilities only. No articulation arrangements are in current operation and the University is not engaged in the delivery of joint or dual awards. In both Associate and Accredited Partnerships, the University franchises its own course or validates the partner's course for the award of a University qualification or credit. Validated and franchised courses may also involve some element of delivery by University staff in a 'flying faculty' arrangement.

2.129   New partnership proposals are considered by the Vice-Chancellor's Executive Group and progress to the Board of Governors' Student Experience Committee, and either the UK Partnership Committee or the Overseas Partnership Committee, where approval is given to proceed to academic approval. Proposals for new franchised or validated provision follow a similar process to that for on-campus course approval, but also consider course liaison arrangements. Proposals for articulation arrangements consider the equivalency of the partner's course to the volume and level of credit on the University course to which entry with advanced standing is being sought.

2.130   Partner approval is by an academic panel, with appropriate externality, which reports to the TQSC via its UK Partnership Committee or Overseas Partnership Committee for the ultimate approval of the Academic Board. Academic approval is contingent on the completion of business approval. This requires evidence of alignment with the University's mission and values, and the completion of due diligence and risk assessment procedures in respect of financial, legal, academic and reputational considerations relating to the proposed partner and partnership. Each collaborative arrangement has a legally binding, time-limited, endorsed and signed agreement that sets out the responsibilities and expectations of each party and combines standard terms with those specific to individual partnerships. Institutional approval reports presented to the Academic Board include external representation and are thorough and detailed. They give due consideration to the Quality Code.

2.131   The University maintains a register of collaborative provision and publishes details of its collaborative partnerships on the Centre for Academic Partnerships website. The accuracy of information published by partners is monitored by the Centre for Academic

Partnerships and reported to the appropriate TQSC partnership committee. Collaborative provision is explicitly addressed within the published information policy, and this is audited, but an example was found of public information published by a partner in a language other than English that was not known to the University. This had led to a recommendation under Expectation C.

2.132   The University issues certificates and transcripts, specifying location of study, language of assessment, and the institutions involved in delivery, to those students who have satisfied the assessment and examination requirements for the award at a partner institution.

2.133   For franchised and validated courses, a procedures manual details the responsibilities delegated to the partner that are dependent on the category of partnership and the maturity of the relationship. Procedures manuals contain the operational protocols for course liaison and monitoring; student recruitment and enrolment; assessment and certification; appeals and complaints; approval of course publicity; the approval and development of teaching staff; and access to University learning resources, including the Bedfordshire Resources for Education Online (BREO) portal. Procedures manuals are updated annually Procedures manuals are in place for international partners and are now being rolled out for UK provision.

2.134   The academic leadership of and accountability for collaborative provision resides in faculties, with operational activity managed by the relevant Head of Department. The University is in the process of renaming Link Tutors as Link Co-ordinators; these are the staff who manage the course level relationship with a collaborative partner to help ensure that academic standards, the quality of learning opportunities and the equivalency of the student experience are maintained and enhanced. The University is extending the role of account manager, currently used for overseas partnerships, to include UK partnerships from the start of the next academic year. The aim is to improve the consistency of its partner liaison in all cross-faculty partnerships. Account managers will be producing quarterly reports of visits, and annual summaries of visits will be produced for both the Overseas Partnership Committee and the UK Partnership Committee. Staff at partner institutions spoke positively about the active and supportive engagement provided by account managers and Link Co-ordinators, while University staff spoke equally positively about the support they were able to provide and the benefits that collaboration brought to the University. The review team considers the comprehensive arrangements in place to support collaborative partnerships, including clear governance and the effective support provided by account managers and Link Co-ordinators, to be **good practice**.

2.135   The University approves the delivery of partner staff to teach on its courses and provides staff development for assessment and general course administration both locally and overseas. Staff development for Link Co-ordinators and account managers is provided by the Centre for Academic Partnerships, and relevant staff development is provided for overseas and UK partners.

2.136   University systems and processes for the appointment of external examiners and the operation of examination boards apply to collaborative provision. The University retains responsibility for the selection and appointment of external examiners for all collaborative provision.

2.137   Arrangements for complaints and appeals are set out in the procedures manuals. Complaints from students at partner institutions are in the first instance managed locally with the option of referral to the University. Academic appeals from students at Associate Partner institutions are dealt with directly by the University, while Accredited Partners may use their own policy subject to University approval. University systems for unit evaluation and course

representation are supplemented with partner-specific surveys. A Partnership Course Handbook describes the operation of the partnership to students. Students know how to informally raise concerns and several knew where to look for advice on complaints or appeals on BREO.

2.138   The University conducts institutional reviews of associate and Accredited Partnerships in a five-year cycle. Courses are reviewed as part of the periodic review of their host University subject area, except for validated provision, which has a separate review process. Periodic review and re-approval of individual partnerships (institutional review) is through a panel-based process. The specific arrangements made for validated provision delivered by accredited partners is normally considered at a separate event at the partner's premises alongside institutional review. Discontinuation of partnerships is through an exit strategy, which protects the interests of current students and safeguards course standards and quality during any run-out period. The Academic Board receives institutional review reports and periodic review reports, approves exit strategies and confirms their conclusion.

2.139   Annual monitoring of validated and franchised programmes is similar to that for on-campus provision with the completion of unit and course Enhancement Plans. Collaborative provision operated by Associate Partners is included in annual portfolio and Faculty Monitoring Reports. Portfolio Monitoring Reports provide the opportunity to identify issues in collaborative provision and for changes to be instigated. Course journals are used where patterns of partnership delivery do not support the use of fortnightly course team meetings. Where the University offers provision with an accredited partner, an institution report is required in lieu of inclusion in University reports.

2.140   There is evidence of the University responding to issues at a range of partners. In one example, an initial exit strategy was revised to provide alternative delivery arrangements to secure the teach-out of a cohort in an overseas partner. In another example, in the case of one UK partner, in response to poor student satisfaction, action was taken to bring the course on to the University campus, although this took a number of years to be resolved.

2.141   The University aims to deliver a fully accredited curriculum in which all of its courses are recognised formally by professional bodies or employer organisations or its own employability scheme. The University aims to build on the work already taken by its central Enterprise and Innovation Team in coordinating and consolidating links with business organisations. A PSRB-monitoring subgroup of the TQSC oversees the operation of accredited provision, including PSRB requirements for course approval and monitoring.

2.142   Placements are not included in the University's taxonomy of collaborative provision and are covered by separate guidelines. There is a policy on placement learning. Faculties are responsible for developing and maintaining employer links for course-related placements, which include statutory practice hours for nurse and teacher training. Placements are supported by learning agreements that describe the individual and shared responsibilities of the learner, the placement provider and the University. Placement handbooks contain guidance for staff, students and employer-mentors concerning workplace conduct and communication, and support during placements. The University's mid-term review of the Strategic Plan will provide a basis for further work in embedding placement and work-based learning opportunities more formally within the curriculum. Placement learning has recently been embedded in a revision to CRe8, the University's curriculum framework, and programme teams are starting to develop sandwich provision, but to date, other than in placements in health and education, the volume of placement activity is low. The University is investing in providing students with an international experience through the Go Global initiative. This provides UK students with the opportunity to undertake managed study

exchanges and educational visits to partner institutions in Asia and the Far East; over 400 students have participated to date.

2.143   The review team acknowledges the comprehensive processes for partner approval and review that inspire confidence; the strength of the partnership arrangements that are maintained; and that risk is managed effectively at all stages of the partnership cycle. On this basis, the review team concludes that 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

2.144   The University's Strategic Plan 2012-17 aims to increase its national and international profile in applied research, with three-quarters of core academic staff contributing actively to research or enterprise activity. The research environment for postgraduate research degree students is supported by the University's Research Strategy (revised 2013), key aims of which are to maintain the strength of the University's Research Institutes and to ensure appropriate levels of service to enrol and retain research students. The Learner Experience Strategy 2012 aims to develop a culture in which research supervisors engage in evidence-based reflection and development of the learning experience of their students, and to ensure research students are supported in providing the University with feedback that promotes continuous improvement of their learning experience. The Director for Research Development provides strategic leadership for research development, including research students.

2.145   The University awards research degrees at master's and doctoral level, including PhD by published work and professional doctorates. Learning outcomes for research degrees are set out in the Research Degrees Handbook for each programme, in accordance with FHEQ qualification descriptors, and discussed with students during postgraduate research training programmes. There are explicit policies and regulations for research degrees, approved by the Academic Board and its subcommittees, the Research Degrees Committee and the Teaching Quality and Standards Committee. The Research Degrees Committee oversees quality assurance for the research degree provision and compliance with the Quality Code, and is responsible for regular review of the research degree regulations. The University's Quality Handbook brings together in a single place links to the University's policies and procedures for research degrees. The Research Graduate School (RGS) is led by the Director for Research Development and has operational oversight of the management of standards and quality in research degree provision, and of administrative arrangements for research programmes and students. All postgraduate research students are members of a Research Institute, with the RGS overseeing and coordinating the support provided by the Research Institutes to allow student progression and achievement. The RGS webpage on the VLE is a central source of information and guidance on postgraduate research study for students and staff.

2.146   The University has the structures, strategies, policies and procedures in place to ensure that research degrees are awarded in an environment that secures academic standards and encourages students' professional and personal development, thus allowing the Expectation to be met.

2.147   To determine whether the Expectation is met, the review team examined relevant documentation, including regulations, policies and procedures, committee minutes, and online resources. The team tested its findings in meetings held with academic and professional staff, and with students.

2.148   The admission process for postgraduate research students is overseen by the RGS, which identifies the Research Institute an application should go to. Entry

requirements, including those for English language, are on RGS webpages, and students can also contact a dedicated email address prior to application. The RGS website provides links to the University's research degree regulations, the Research Degrees Handbook, and QAA's *Doctoral Degree Characteristics*. Bursary-funded studentships are awarded at faculty level and are covered by terms of agreement that set out the conditions of the award. Students whom the review team met were generally satisfied with the admissions process.

2.149   Staff involved directly in research degree admissions receive advice and support from the RGS, including statutory requirements for recruitment of international students. All research degree proposals are screened to see whether approval from the Research Ethics Committee is required. Applications for postgraduate research registration by University staff, or by staff from partner colleges, are considered according to the University's policy on staff postgraduate research degree registration, which have been revised in response to two 'cause for concern' cases in 2012 and 2013, which were associated with staff PhD examinations. The review team concludes that suitable safeguards are in place.

2.150   Postgraduate research students are recruited and inducted as cohorts in October and March. Induction for research students is an integral part of their registration. Following an initial one-week induction - which includes input from the RGS, International Office, Learning Resources and Careers, Professional and Academic Department, and Students' Union - the induction period extends for six months, with support also provided by the Department of English Language and Communications, the supervisory team and the Research Institute. Students whose first language is not English take a diagnostic assessment and may be required to undertake specialist academic language support. The Research Degrees Handbook has a section on student support available at the University. In contrast to taught students (as detailed in Expectation B4) the research students who met the review team were much less satisfied with the advice and support they received. This was particularly the case for international students who encountered a lack of communication between the RGS and the International Office (see Expectation B2 for further details). Some dissatisfaction with the RGS was recorded in the 2013 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES). Difficulties encountered by research students in liaising with different service departments were raised at the research student forum in May 2015. The review team **recommends** that, by March 2016, the University review the current arrangements to ensure coordinated support for postgraduate research students across all support services, including the Research Graduate School and the International Office.

2.151   Student supervisory arrangements are confirmed prior to admission by the Research Degrees Committee. Research students, except candidates for PhD by published work, must have at least two supervisors who are members of University staff. Criteria for research supervisor appointments are given in the regulations, and take into account the University's academic workload planning policy. New PhD supervisors are partnered with an experienced supervisor. The responsibilities of postgraduate research students, supervisory team members and departmental directors of studies are set out in the Research Degrees Handbook and regulations, with further information on the RGS webpages. The Director of Studies ensures that regular supervisory meetings take place and are recorded by the student. The RGS monitors supervisory meetings. There are annual supervisor away days and compulsory supervisor development sessions. Both new and experienced supervisors who met the review team spoke highly of the training opportunities available. The 2013 PRES showed a satisfaction score for supervision 3.6 per cent above the sector average.

2.152   Annual monitoring of individual research students' progression is undertaken between formal progress assessments. Students and their departmental Director of Studies submit separate reports to the Director for Research Development. A review of research degree regulations by the Research Degrees Committee has led to amendments to

progression processes, with the introduction of progression point summative assessments for MPhil/doctoral programmes and for transfer to doctoral registration, with the aim of improving the timing of formal and explicit progress reviews. The Research Degrees Handbook provides details on procedures for the final assessment process, including vivas, and on procedures for seeking an extension or interruption of studies. The criteria for appointment of examiners for the different categories of research degrees are set out in the regulations and Research Degrees Handbook. All research degree vivas have an independent chair; recommendations are considered by the Research Degrees Committee. The appeals procedure for postgraduate research students was revised in 2012-13 following a 'cause for concern' case investigated by QAA. Complaints and appeals procedures are signposted in the Quality Handbook, the Research Degrees Handbook and the RGS webpage. Students who met the review team generally knew how to access the relevant information if required.

2.153   The RGS works with Research Institutes and supervisors to ensure that research students have adequate support for their programme and access to training programmes. All research students do a training needs assessment in their first month; this assessment is repeated each year. Generic skills training is coordinated centrally by the RGS, with Research Institutes providing research specific training. Embedding skills development for each research student is developed through annual training needs analysis by the Director of Studies. The Research Institutes engage students in seminars and events they organise, and research students also participate in the University's annual conference. The Research Degrees Handbook refers to the University policy on engagement of research students in academic roles, and the requirements and support of that engagement. Just over 50 per cent of research students teach, and all research students attend a session on learning and teaching as part of their induction (as explained further under Expectation B3). Postgraduate research students may also access, with permission from their supervisors, the Higher Education Academy accredited Professional Teaching Scheme. In the 2013 PRES, 52 per cent of postgraduate research students at the University said that they had opportunities to teach. The Students' Union has recommended greater resources are invested in supporting research students who teach.

2.154   Student views on their supervision are sought in the annual monitoring process together with a confidential exit survey. Research student representatives are members of Research Institute boards. The Research Student Support Group (RSSG), which provided student representation and support for postgraduate research students, was dissolved in 2013-14. The Students' Union is currently working with the Director for Research Development to redesign the postgraduate research representational structure. In the 2013 PRES, 64 per cent of research students felt that the University listened to their feedback. A postgraduate research student forum was introduced in March 2015 to widen opportunities for feedback from students following the end of the RSSG, and to hear about the University's response to their feedback. The steps being taken to develop a postgraduate research student forum to engage students and strengthen their voice has led to an affirmation in Expectation B5. There is also a recommendation in Expectation B5 to ensure there is appropriate representation of postgraduate research students on University-level deliberative committees with responsibility for postgraduate policy and practice.

2.155   The University uses national benchmarks, including thesis submission and completion rates and the PRES survey, and has internal review processes to monitor and enhance the quality of provision for research students. Annual monitoring considers student numbers, recruitment, completion rates, cohort data, outcomes of vivas, withdrawals, appeals and complaints. The Research Degrees Committee receives and monitors actions in relation to annual monitoring and reports to the Academic Board. Periodic reviews of research degree programmes are considered by the Research Degrees Committee and Academic Board. In the 2013 PRES, the University was in the upper quartile of participating

universities for supervision, progression and assessment, and rights and responsibilities, and in the lower quartile for resources, research skills and professional development. Action plans have been produced in relation to these results and will monitored by the Research Degrees Committee

2.156   The University's research student provision increased from 171 in 2009-10 to 398 in 2013-14; in 2014-15, there are 367 registered research students. This growth in research students reflects in part the increase in research-active staff, with a corresponding growth in the quantity and quality of research providing an environment to support greater numbers of research students. In light of growing volume and quality of research, as indicated in the Research Excellence Framework 2014, the University is currently reviewing its Research Institute structure.

2.157   The review team finds that the University's policies and procedures for the management of its research degree programmes, and the quality of its research provision, provide an environment that supports research students in their academic, personal and professional development. There is a recommendation to review the current arrangements to ensure coordinated support for postgraduate research students across all support services, and a link to a recommendation in Expectation B5 to ensure there is appropriate representation of postgraduate research students on University level deliberative committees. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met with a moderate level of associate risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

2.159   Of the 11 Expectations in this judgement area all 11 were met, 10 of which are judged to be with a low risk. The exception is Expectation B11, which is judged to have a moderate risk due to the review team's concerns around gaps in coordination of support for postgraduate students and the lack of postgraduate research student representation on appropriate University-level deliberative committees

2.160   There are three features of good practice in this judgement area located in Expectations B3, B4 and B5. These concern the institutional culture and support available to staff to develop and reflect on their learning and teaching practice (Expectation B3); the integrated, academic and pastoral support for taught students (Expectation B4); and the open and proactive approach to seeking out the student voice (Expectation B5). The good practice identified under Expectations A3.1 and C is also relevant to this judgement area.

2.161   There are two affirmations in this judgement area, located in Expectations B1 and B5. These concern the work being undertaken with the Students' Union to increase participation in course approval and periodic review panels (Expectation B1) and the steps being taken to develop a postgraduate research student forum (Expectation B5).

2.162   There are two recommendations in this judgement area, both concerning postgraduate research students. The first concerns ensuring there is coordinated support for postgraduate research students across all support services and is located in Expectation B11. The second concerns ensuring there is appropriate representation of postgraduate research students on University-level deliberative committees with responsibility for postgraduate research policy and practice and is located in Expectation B5.

2.163   The review team notes that all of the Expectations in this judgement area are met. Furthermore, the review team notes that there are features of good practice in this judgement area and the recommendations are confined to a small area of the provision. The review team therefore concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the University of Bedfordshire **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 management and publication of information about the University's educational provision is governed by a Public Information Policy, agreed by the Academic Board. This is a comprehensive framework, which explicitly aims to align to the Quality Code, Part C and to other sector reference points such as the HEFCE Wider Information Set. A Student Information Task Group, reporting to the TQSC, oversees implementation of the Public Information Policy regarding information for students, while a Web Strategy Group oversees the effectiveness of the University website in meeting audience needs. The publication of internally facing information on the VLE was comprehensively reviewed in 2014, while substantive enhancements to the University's website have been made in 2014-15; both are major platforms for delivering information, with direct feeds from the student records system at appropriate points. The Public Information Policy identifies major categories of published information (both printed and electronic) and their principal audience (for example, staff, students, prospective students and the wider public), then identifies the 'owner' responsible for ensuring the information remains current and fit for purpose, and assigns further responsibility for cross-checking by other staff.

3.2 The types of information covered by the Public Information Policy include information for prospective, current and graduated students, about the University generally, and about academic standards and quality. The Public Information Policy also highlights responsibilities for information provided by the University to staff and students based at partner organisations, as well as information, marketing and publicity materials (whether hardcopy or online) published by collaborative partners and recruitment agents that refer to either the partnership or to the University and its courses. Detailed guidance for partner staff and agents about their responsibilities is set out in procedures manuals for individual partners and in agent agreements. This approach is consistent with the Quality Code, Part C and allows the Expectation to be met.

3.3 The review team tested this Expectation by reading a wide range of information produced and published by or about the University, including: web-based information about study at the University; information about the University's courses published on its website, in prospectuses and other marketing materials, and on partner websites; handbooks and guidance published for students and staff; materials published on the University's VLE, Bedfordshire Resources for Education Online (BREO); and regulations and policies relating to academic governance, quality assurance and enhancement (including the Public Information Policy, the University's Quality Handbook and a wide range of committee papers and reports). The team discussed points arising from its evaluation of the published information with students and staff.

3.4 A range of institutional information, consistent with the expectations of the HEFCE Wider Information Set, is published on the University's website. This includes the University's mission, values and strategy, with the Learner Experience and Student Experience Strategies being of particular relevance to learning and teaching. An up-to-date collaborative

register of academic partnerships is maintained by the Academic Registrar, supported by the Head of Quality (Collaborative Partnerships).

3.5 The website provides filter and search functionality to easily access (via two clicks from the homepage: 'About Us' and 'Our Documents') a very wide range of public interest and academic governance documents, filtering by audience (students, alumni, partners, researchers or staff), category (for example, academic rules and regulations, and teaching and learning) and document type. This is a comprehensive suite of documentation, which demonstrates a strong commitment by the University to making information about its activities publicly accessible.

3.6 The University's regulations and Quality Handbook, both accessible via the public website, set out the University's framework for managing academic standards and quality assurance and enhancement. These are supplemented by related policies and guidance published by the Centre for Learning Excellence. The regulations and Quality Handbook are regularly reviewed to ensure alignment with the Quality Code, in addition to other relevant external reference points, and policy control boxes on related documents identify ownership responsibilities and revision and publication histories

3.7 The comprehensive and helpful Quality Handbook makes a particularly positive contribution to effective management of the quality of learning opportunities offered by the University; this forms part of the feature of good practice identified under Expectation A3.1, regarding the overarching quality framework. The handbook specifies types of information to be used as part of quality processes, and the review team saw evidence of a broad spectrum of such information being used to assure and enhance provision.

3.8 A good range of further quality-related information is available for staff and students, including: results of internal student surveys; procedures and outcomes for course approval, monitoring and review; and details about examination procedures, including policies for student complaints, appeals and representations. However, while all staff and student representatives showed good awareness of the existence and purpose of external examiner reports, other on-campus students had limited awareness, and students studying with partner institutions had generally poor awareness.

3.9 Course pages on the website provide all expected details, with a notably useful feature being that 'this year' and 'next year' versions are available to help distinguish the appropriate information for either current entrants or prospective new applicants. The Quality Handbook sets out procedures for ensuring that information on new courses is available to admissions teams and prospective students. Course pages link to Course Information Forms, which are comprehensive programme specifications drawn up in line with manuals maintained by the Centre for Learning Excellence; these support the feature of good practice identified under Expectation A3.1 relating to the University's overarching quality framework. Variations to University regulations are clearly set out in course handbooks.

3.10 The website presents an excellent range of information for prospective students, including: clear guidance for different audiences, such as international applicants or postgraduate research applicants; easily searchable course pages; details about entry criteria, including standard of English required; features such as virtual tours and 'Live Chat Online' for answering questions; and information about fees, financial and student support, and student life more widely. Prospectus documents are also available online or can be ordered in hardcopy. Open days provide additional opportunities for potential applicants to learn about the University. For those who have accepted an offer, there are dedicated web pages for pre-enrolment and induction, and a 'welcome' publication is also posted in hardcopy to all UK and international students to reach them in good time before they begin their course. Students whom the review team spoke to, including at partner institutions, were

broadly complimentary about the information that had been available throughout the application and admissions stages and felt it had been sufficient and accurate.

3.11   The wide and in-depth range of informative and searchable information provided on the University website for a range of audiences is **good practice**.

3.12   Information provided to and by agents who help recruit international students is monitored regularly (including through staff trip reports about visits to agents), and agents are contractually restricted from producing and distributing their own marketing material without written authorisation. All international applicants are interviewed by International Office staff prior to a Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies letter being issued, which provides an opportunity to confirm that they have received accurate information from any involved agent.

3.13   Responsibilities for information about courses run by collaborative partners are set out in partnership agreements, with agreed procedures manuals describing how this is operationally managed for each partnership. Local arrangements are monitored by Link Tutors (a responsibility moving to the revised roles of Link Co-ordinators and account managers from 2015-16) who provide structured reports to the relevant University committees. These reports show careful consideration of the quality of published information.

3.14   Wherever partners publish information about the University in a language other than English, Link Co-ordinator reports should confirm, as per contractual requirements, that a certified translation has been provided for sign-off by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (External Relations). However, in checking the websites of partners, the review team identified a specific example of non-English language material about the University's courses for which the University could not confirm that a certified translation had been provided or approved, and thus concludes that the University's policy and procedures for verifying partner-published information are not operating consistently. These specific examples appeared to be direct translations of University-produced material and not a cause for substantive concern. However, the review team **recommends** that, by December 2015, the University ensure consistent arrangements for the oversight of public information about the University's provision published by partners in languages other than English.

3.15   A key channel for provision of information to current students is BREO, the University's VLE. This acts as a gateway to all types of information, whether held within BREO or on the University's website or SharePoint system, such as: University-level academic regulations, and appeals and complaints procedures; course-level handbooks (including for research students); course and unit Information Forms; unit-specific resource sites, including reading material; course-specific handbooks on topics like placements; resources for subject communities, which cut across different courses and departments, promoting University services; and external examiner reports. Excellent structured guidance is available for staff to help them understand the ways in which they are expected to provide study-related information to students, including minimum expectations for the content of course handbooks and BREO unit sites, and to point to other sources of support and information that may help students in their studies. Feedback from tutors is communicated to students through BREO. Students specifically praised the BREO app for mobile phones. Students at UK and overseas partner institutions also made good use of BREO, noting, however, that it may include a lot of campus-focused University information that is not relevant to them.

3.16   From meetings with students and staff, it was apparent to the review team that use of BREO is an integral and effective part of the student learning experience, both at the University and for students studying with partners, making a strong contribution to the quality

of information available to students and underpinning the quality of online learning opportunities. The accessible and comprehensive virtual learning environment, which is used extensively across the University and collaborative partners, is **good practice**.

3.17   Beyond BREO, the student experience section of the website brings together a range of information on studies, support services, life and community at the University, including: library, IT and learning resources, student support and well-being, faith, money advice, accommodation, social and leisure opportunities, study abroad and internships. Research degree students indicated that, while regulations, handbooks and a variety of web pages are available, they often refer to supervisors or the Research Graduate School (whose support can vary) for specific guidance about University services and processes.

3.18   The University Community Partnership Agreement, agreed between the University and Students' Union, is a charter setting out the mutual responsibilities of staff and students, including provision of reliable, useful and accessible information to applicants and students.

3.19   Graduates are issued with a degree certificate and transcript. To supplement these, a Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR) has been designed in conjunction with students, to provide additional information on extra and co-curricular achievements verified by a HEAR award board. The 2014-15 undergraduate entry cohort will be the first to receive a HEAR.

3.20   Overall, the University provides information in a wide variety of forms that is clear, accessible and fit for purpose. Information is judged by those accessing it to be helpful and trustworthy. There are two areas of good practice identified, relating to range and depth of information on the University's website, and the comprehensive nature of its well-used VLE; while information provided in the Quality Handbook forms part of the overarching quality framework identified as good practice under Expectation A3.1. A recommendation is also made, but this relates to a small defined proportion of the University's provision and the risk is low. 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 the information about learning opportunities: Summary of findings

3.21   In reaching its judgement the review team matched its finding against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

3.22   Expectation C is met and the associated level of risk is low. There are two features of good practice identified in this judgement area, the first relating to the wide and in-depth range of informative and searchable information provided on the University website, and the second relating to the accessible and comprehensive VLE, used extensively by students, staff and collaborative partners. The good practice identified in Expectation A3.1 relating to the overarching quality structure is also relevant to this judgement area. There is one recommendation in this area concerning the University ensuring consistent arrangements for the oversight of public information in languages other than English. There are no affirmations in this judgement area.

3.23   Given that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low, 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 first strategic priority of the University's Strategic Plan 2012-17 is the prioritisation of the student experience; and one of the ways in which the University intends to implement this is by involving students and their representatives as partners in all aspects of University decision making, developing student leadership and the quality of the student experience.

4.2 The Strategic Plan is enabled by two further strategies the Learner Experience Strategy and the Student Experience Strategy. The Quality Enhancement Committee (QEC) oversees the implementation of the Student Experience Strategy and is jointly responsible with the Teaching Quality and Standards Committee for the implementation of the Learner Experience Strategy. The Student Experience Strategy is explicitly designed to 'outline a programme of initiatives aimed at bringing around a significant and measurable enhancement in the experience of students'. The aims of the Learner Experience Strategy include: to develop a learning and teaching culture in which teaching staff and research supervisors engage consistently in evidence-based reflection and development of the learning experience for which they are responsible; and for students to be supported in providing feedback that promotes the continuous improvement of their learning experience.

4.3 The University's Quality Handbook states that quality assurance and quality enhancement cannot be pursued in isolation from each other and are part of a holistic process in the form of a cycle of planning, implementation, evaluation and revision. The principles of the Quality Handbook also confirm the University's commitment to student engagement in quality assurance and enhancement, and students are supported to make an active contribution in formal and informal ways. Unit and course Enhancement Plans, Portfolio Monitoring Reports and Faculty Monitoring Reports are all designed with a strategic approach to enhancement, using management information and student feedback to produce action plans and logs in order to continually improve the quality of learning opportunities.

4.4 The University has appropriate strategies and policies and procedures in place to allow the Expectation to be met.

4.5 In considering this Expectation the review team examined appropriate documentation, such as the Quality Handbook, completed course Enhancement Plans and Portfolio Monitoring Reports, strategies, action plans and reports of various enhancement initiatives. The team tested its findings in meetings with senior management, academic staff, students and student representatives, including Students' Union Sabbatical Officers.

4.6 The Student Experience Strategy and the Learner Experience Strategy, supported by the Organisation and People Development Strategy, embody the direction of the University's enhancement work. The deliberative committee structure, in particular the QEC, which reports to the Academic Board, is designed to foster a culture of enhancement, and the QEC subgroups demonstrate an integrated framework for doing so.

4.7 The Quality Handbook sets out the use of quality assurance procedures to identify opportunities for enhancement. In addition to the guidance in the Quality Handbook, staff involved in course design, approval, annual monitoring and re-approval receive support and staff development on using routine quality assurance procedures to enhance the courses

they are responsible for. As well as confirming standards are being maintained, unit and course Enhancement Plans, Portfolio Monitoring Reports and Faculty Monitoring Reports use management information, such as student attainment and progression data, external benchmarking and student feedback, to produce action plans and logs in order to enhance the quality of learning opportunities. The Quality Handbook is referred to extensively by academic staff at the University and collaborative partners, and they also contribute to its ongoing evaluation and development. The overarching quality framework for course approval, delivery, monitoring and review, which supports staff in designing and enhancing curricula, has led to a feature of good practice located in Expectation A3.1.

4.8   The Portfolio Strategy and Planning Group is the executive group with responsibility for oversight of the portfolio and its development. Working alongside the annual Business Planning Cycle, which was introduced in 2013-14, the University adopts a strategic approach to the management of its academic portfolio and resources. Through the use of balanced scorecards and extensive management information, which includes a traffic light system to highlight areas of good practice and areas which need attention, the University is actively monitoring its key performance indicators and using this to identify opportunities for enhancement.

4.9   The Centre for Learning Excellence (CLE) plays a central role in the University's approach to enhancement. In addition to its day-to-day support for staff and students to enhance the quality of learning opportunities, it has led a number of strategic initiatives. Academic staff can apply for funding for small-scale learning and teaching projects through an annual round of project bidding, and academic staff can share good practice from these projects by publishing in the University's in-house journal, 'The Journal of Pedagogic Development. Opportunities to share good practice are also available at the annual University conference. The conference contains a number of different sessions covering teaching and research themes, with good levels of staff attendance in recent years. The CLE is also responsible for the creation and development of CRe8, the University's pedagogic strategy and framework for curriculum. First developed in 2007-08, CRe8 provides a series of statements of key principles of effective learning and teaching reflecting the University's mission and focus on student development. CRe8 is well established and fully embedded in the University; in consultation with students and staff, the CLE recently led a review of the framework to ensure it continues to be relevant and up to date.

4.10   The University's academic promotion framework recognises teaching in its route to professorial status, and the CLE relaunched the Bedfordshire Teaching Fellowship in 2011 to provide a mechanism to identify, recognise and support outstanding teaching practice. It provides guidance and support to early career academics, supporting the development of their leadership profile in learning and teaching.

4.11   The CLE also has responsibility for the University's Professional Teaching Scheme. The scheme is designed to build a professional, reflective learning community and is accredited by the Higher Education Academy. Students are involved in the recognition process as members of the accreditation panel. Academic staff are highly positive about the support provided by the scheme and the impact it has on their learning and teaching practice. The University expects teaching staff to be recognised by the Higher Education Academy and has set a target of having 90 per cent of staff recognised by June 2015. Starting from a base of 17 per cent in September 2013, currently over 50 per cent of academic staff are recognised, with a further 25 per cent actively working through the Professional Teaching Scheme.

4.12   The CLE also supports the University's VLE and Bedfordshire Resources for Education Online (BREO). The site is an information gateway for all staff and students, including those at collaborative partners. Information included on the site includes course

handbooks, course and unit Information Forms, unit resource sites and external examiner reports. The site is also used to provide consistent quantitative responses to feedback and local enhancements made through the Bedfordshire Unit Survey. As well as coordinating the Bedfordshire Unit Survey feedback through BREO, the CLE provides excellent templates and guidance for Course and Unit Co-ordinators in preparing handbooks and BREO resource sites. This ensures there is a consistency in approach for students. From meetings with students and staff, it was clear to the review team that the use of BREO is an integral part of the learning experience at the University, making a strong contribution to the high level of information available and the quality of learning opportunities. It has led to a feature of good practice under Expectation C.

4.13   The University's extensive Peer Assisted Learning (PAL) scheme arose from a CLE pilot in two departments in 2011. Since its inception, it has grown from 26 PAL leaders in seven courses to 350 PAL leaders across all campus-based undergraduate courses. PAL leaders are selected and trained, and provide weekly timetabled sessions. While the CLE initiated the scheme, it is essentially a student-led initiative, and students and staff met by the review team spoke highly of its impact. The scheme was the winner of the Vice-Chancellor's Award at the Vice-Chancellor's Student Experience Awards in 2014.

4.14   Developed in partnership with the Students' Union, the Vice-Chancellor's Student Experience Awards were created in 2013. The awards are an annual event designed to promote the prime importance of improving the student experience and to celebrate success and facilitate the sharing of good practice. Award categories include: the Inspirational Teaching Award, Outstanding Role Model for Students Award, and National Student Survey Course Award. Students are eligible to nominate in 13 out of 16 categories and staff can nominate in nine. Students are members of the panel selecting the winners.

4.15   The Retention and Performance Action Group, which reports to the QEC, has led on strategic developments designed to improve student retention and support. The group has overseen developments to the Personal Academic Tutor (PAT) system and PATAdmin system, which is an integrated system that allows students to be referred efficiently by both academic and professional service staff to a range of student support services and to track student progress. Staff training for PAT includes a particularly positive strand, delivered by the CLE, on the use of 'coaching for performance'; at the time of the review, 87 per cent of active PATs had been trained in this approach. Staff and students whom the review team met were positive about the developments to the PAT scheme. Student Engagement Monitors monitor data on student engagement and progress, and support PATs to re-engage students. This work then feeds into portfolio student attainment and review boards, which are held twice a year to track student engagement and progress. The integrated, institution-wide, academic and pastoral support for taught students has led to a feature of good practice in Expectation B4.

4.16   The University has sought to extend student engagement by the introduction of a student shadowing scheme. It was initially developed to allow senior staff members to shadow students for a day in order to gain a view of the student experience, but it has recently been extended to other staff and for students to shadow staff also. At the end of the shadowing experience, students and staff are asked to complete a short survey, which helps them to reflect on the experience and share any new insights as to how the student experience could be enhanced. The scheme reinforces the University's prioritisation of the student experience, and staff in non-student facing roles found the experience particularly beneficial.

4.17   Coordinated by the Student Experience Office, the Student Experience Projects initiative (StEPS) provides a strong example of student-led enhancement. Students and staff are invited to submit project ideas to improve the student experience. The University has

allocated a specific funding stream for this, and students and staff are invited to pitch their proposals to a 'Dragon's Den' style panel, which is chaired by the Vice-Chancellor and includes other senior staff from the University, who then decide which projects are funded. More than 170 ideas have been submitted, with 26 projects awarded funding to date. Students whom the review team met were extremely positive about the impact of the StEPS initiative.

4.18   The University uses formal and informal, and internal and external, surveys and systems in order to engage with the wider student body and ensure the student voice is heard across the institution. These include the National Student Survey, the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey, the International Student Barometer, the Bedfordshire Unit Survey and the Tell Us initiative. Results are analysed and presented to the Vice-Chancellor's Student Experience Group (which reports to the QEC) to ensure they are triangulated. As outlined in the Student Experience Strategy, and overseen by the Vice-Chancellor's Student Experience Group, the University has undertaken a great deal of work to improve National Student Survey response rates and to improve students' overall satisfaction. In partnership with the Students' Union, the University ran a National Student Survey workshop in September 2014, which brought together academic and professional services staff, and Students' Union officers and staff, to discuss working together to enhance the student experience. The workshop also involved an external speaker from another institution. Based on discussions with the external speaker, the Associate Deans (Student Experience) produced a paper of recommendations for enhancement of the student experience, which was considered at the Vice-Chancellor's Student Experience Group.

4.19   The Tell Us initiative was introduced in October 2013 in recognition that the University did not provide any systematic mechanism for informal feedback. The scheme provides students with an immediate response to their comments, and students are able to provide their feedback in a variety of different ways, including: online, via email, telephone, and comment boxes, which are available at all campuses. Action taken is fed back directly to the student and is also the subject of 'You Said, We Did' campaigns across the University. The Student Experience Office, which coordinates the scheme, also produces monthly reports of student feedback, which are sent to senior managers to make them aware of the volume, nature and importance of feedback where the ability to make changes is in their control and resource allocation. There was widespread awareness of the scheme and the subsequent enhancements to the student experience among the students the review team met.

4.20   Meetings with all staff and students during the review demonstrated the University's prioritisation of the student experience and an ethos which expects and encourages the enhancement of learning opportunities. This commitment is driven by the Vice-Chancellor (evident in his chairing of the Vice-Chancellor's Student Experience Group and active involvement of many student enhancement initiatives) and the support provided to staff throughout the University to develop and reflect on their teaching practice has led to a feature of good practice located in Expectation B3. The University has a strategic approach to enhancement, which is coordinated at provider level and has resulted in an extensive number of initiatives that are enhancing the quality of learning opportunities. The institution-wide commitment to enhancing the student learning experience is **good practice**.

4.21   The review team considers that deliberate steps are being taken at provider level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities, and noted a number of wide ranging features of good practice located both primarily and secondarily in this Expectation. There are no recommendations or affirmations; the review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

4.23   The Expectation is met and the associated risk is low. There are no recommendations or affirmations in this judgement area. There is one feature of good practice, which is very wide ranging and concerns the institution-wide commitment to enhancing students' learning experience. However, four other features of good practice are also relevant to this judgement area. These concern the overarching quality framework, which supports staff in designing and enhancing curricula (located in Expectation A3.1); the institutional culture and support available to staff to develop and reflect on their learning and teaching practice (located in Expectation B3); the integrated, institution-wide, academic and pastoral support for taught students (located in Expectation B4); and the accessible and comprehensive VLE (located in Expectation C).

4.24   The review team note that the feature of good practice located in this judgement area is significant and encompasses the entire judgement area. Moreover, the review team notes that the features of good practice located in sections A and B of this report that are relevant to this judgement area are also significant and wide ranging. In addition, the review team notes that:

- there is an institution-wide commitment from all levels of the University to enhancing the student learning experience;
- there are examples of good practice in this area and no recommendations for improvement;
- the University has plans to enhance this area further;
- student engagement in the management of this area is widespread and supported;
- managing the needs of students is a clear focus of the provider's strategies and policies in this area.

4.25   The review team thus concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the University of Bedfordshire is **commended**.

5   Commentary on the Theme: Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

Findings

5.1   The appointment of a new Vice-Chancellor in 2012, and the development of a new Strategic Plan, signalled a step-change in student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement at the University. The University Strategic Plan clearly prioritises the student experience, building on partnership working to continually improve. Two enabling strategies that sit alongside the University Strategy, the Learner Experience Strategy and the Student Experience Strategy, are central in promoting student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement activities, and require partnership working by all members of the University community.

5.2   The recently re-launched University Community Partnership Agreement was developed jointly with students following benchmarking and consultation, and is designed to articulate what is expected of students, the Students' Union and the University academic and professional service community.

5.3   A strong example of the University's commitment to working in partnership with students is the annual joint conference of the University and Students' Union, held in the autumn. This focuses on just two themes each year so that they can be discussed in detail, with each suggesting one topic. The conference was first held in 2011 and has led to strategic enhancements, such as the inclusion of student representatives on course teams, restrictions on group work assessment, and the development of a more systematic approach to reading lists.

5.4   The Students' Union administers the student representation system, working in partnership with the University. Student representatives are members of course teams, which meet every two weeks to discuss all aspects of their course and to identify any enhancements that could be made in response to good practice or concerns. Student representatives are also members of Portfolio Executive Committees, which are groupings of courses within a particular subject area. Departmental student representatives are members of faculty boards. While there are no student members of faculty Teaching Quality and Standards Committees, this is a deliberate shared choice of both the University and Students' Union in light of the technical focus of these meetings. However, there are student members of most University-level committees; for example, the President of the Students' Union is a member of the Vice-Chancellor's Executive Committee. This institution-wide approach helps ensure that the student voice is involved in all decisions affecting their experience. Student role-holders (not least the President of the Students' Union and other Sabbatical Officers) are supported to carry out their roles effectively, both through training and on an ongoing basis; for example, the Students' Union recently developed a framework to ensure students contribute to the Annual Monitoring Report for each course.

5.5   The University and Students' Union acknowledge that there is an ongoing challenge in involving postgraduate research students in student representational structures. As the main channel to address this, the Research Graduate School and the Students' Union are working in partnership to develop a new postgraduate research student forum, as an initiative to ensure postgraduate research students have a stronger voice in the development of their educational experience.

5.6   Other notable examples of the University's commitment to working in partnership with students include that students are members of staff recruitment and professional development panels. For recruitment of academic roles from lecturer to professor, which are more than 50 per cent student-facing, a student representative is required on the interview

panel. Student reps are also included on panels, which assess staff for Higher Education Academy membership through the University's Professional Teaching Scheme continuing professional development route. They are supported by the relevant University department in order to undertake such roles, and the student representatives the review team met reported their membership of both types of panels to be a positive experience.

5.7   Examples of enhancement initiatives either initiated or delivered by students include Student Experience Projects (StEPS) and Peer Assisted Learning. As part of StEPS projects, students and staff are invited to submit ideas that will improve the student experience, and then pitch their proposals to a 'Dragon's Den' style panel, including the Vice-Chancellor and other senior staff from within the University, which can approve funding for projects from the StEPS budget. More than 170 ideas have been submitted to date, with 26 being awarded funding. Peer Assisted Learning involves trained second or third-year students supporting-first year students as part of a weekly timetabled session. Following a successful pilot, this has been embedded in the first-year experience of all undergraduate students. Students the review team met were very positive about both the StEPS initiative and the Peer Assisted Learning scheme.

Glossary

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

e-learning
See technology enhanced or enabled learning

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Programme specifications
Published statements about the intended **learning outcomes** of programmes of study, containing information about teaching and learning methods, support and assessment methods, and how individual units relate to levels of achievement.

Public information
Information that is freely available to the public (sometimes referred to as being 'in the public domain').

Quality Code
Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is the UK-wide set of **reference points** for higher education providers (agreed through consultation with the higher education community, and published by QAA), which states the **Expectations** that all providers are required to meet.

Reference points
Statements and other publications that establish criteria against which performance can be measured.

Subject Benchmark Statement
A published statement that sets out what knowledge, understanding, abilities and skills are expected of those graduating in each of the main subject areas (mostly applying to bachelor's degrees), and explains what gives that particular discipline its coherence and identity.

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or **e-learning**)
Learning that is delivered or supported through the use of technology.

Threshold academic standard
The minimum acceptable level of achievement that a student has to demonstrate to be eligible for an academic **award**. Threshold academic standards are set out in the national **frameworks** and **Subject Benchmark Statements**.

Virtual learning environment (VLE)
An intranet or password-only interactive website (also referred to as a platform or user interface) giving access to **learning opportunities** electronically. These might include such resources as course handbooks, information and reading lists; blogs, message boards and forums; recorded lectures; and/or facilities for online seminars (webinars).

Widening participation
Increasing the involvement in higher education of people from a wider range of backgrounds.