Higher Education Review of University of Leicester

February 2016

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at the University of Leicester. The review took place from 1 to 4 February 2016 and was conducted by a team of five reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Alan Bilsborough
- Professor Ann Holmes
- Ms Elizabeth Houghton
- Ms Hilary Placito
- Mr Howard White.

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

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

The themes for the academic year 2015-16 are Student Employability and Digital Literacy,[2] and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

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

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

Key findings

QAA's judgements about the University of Leicester

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

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

Good practice

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

- The inclusive approach to the management of change which will enable the realisation of strategic priorities (Enhancement).
- The commitment to widening participation which promotes student inclusivity (Expectation B2).
- The strategic approach to the professional development of students which enhances their employability (Expectation B4).
- The continuing effective oversight of the postgraduate research student experience (Expectation B11).

Recommendations

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

By September 2016:

- review its regulations to assure itself that all graduates will meet threshold standards in minor subject pathways (Expectation A3.2)
- ensure that departments are fully implementing the Code of Practice for the personal support of students, for all modes of programme delivery (Expectation B4)
- articulate a policy governing the employment of postgraduate research students as teachers (Expectation B11).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The steps the University is taking to ensure that external examiners' reports are shared with students (Expectation B7).
- The work being done to improve the generation, dissemination and application of management information (Expectation C).

Theme: Student Employability

The University of Leicester (the University) is committed to ensuring that its students have every opportunity to maximise their opportunities for employment and career progression on completion of their studies. It has identified employability as a clear priority in its Strategic Plan and in the Learning and Teaching Strategy, placing it at the core of the student experience. In addition it has implemented a new Employability Strategy steered by an Advisory Board of senior graduate recruiters and has transformed the Careers Development Service (CDS) to focus on employability skills. All students have access to professional and personal development activities as well as a wide range of placement opportunities. Employers recognise and value the University's ethos, particularly its commitment to social inclusion, diversity and multiculturalism.

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 Leicester

The University of Leicester (the University) describes itself as a leading UK university committed to international excellence through research and high-quality, inspirational teaching informed by research, and as the most socially inclusive and accessible of the research-intensive universities.

It was founded as Leicestershire and Rutland University College in 1921 and became University College Leicester in 1927, offering external degrees of the University of London. It received its University Charter in 1957, at which time it offered a traditional range of undergraduate programmes in Arts, Sciences and the Social Sciences. Subsequently, other disciplines were added to the provision and it now offers a wide range of taught undergraduate and postgraduate programmes as well as doctoral degrees.

The University had a student population of 24,032 in 2014. Almost half of these are studying for postgraduate awards, many by distance learning. The University is one of the largest distance learning providers in the UK. It also has 1,378 postgraduate research (PGR) students. There are over 3,300 academic and professional services staff.

The University's priorities are set out in its most recent Strategic Plan. Its aim is to be a discovery-led University with a focus on research, teaching innovation and broadening access. It makes a clear commitment to put students at the heart of its decisions about education and the student experience. The University intends to be seen as an elite, but not an elitist, higher education institution.

Following the appointment of a new Vice-Chancellor in October 2014, the University has engaged in a wide-ranging strategic conversation which provided the opportunity for all members of the University community, including students, to comment on the University's mission and future development. There have also been a number of changes in the management structures with a new senior management team and a new post of Provost created to lead on planning and resource allocation, academic career development, communications and regional engagement. The number of Colleges has been reduced from four to three, each led by a Pro Vice-Chancellor/Head of College. A new University Leadership Team has replaced the former Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Committee and comprises the Vice-Chancellor, Provost, Pro Vice-Chancellors, the Registrar and Secretary, the Director of Finance and the Director of Human Resources.

The key challenges and opportunities faced by the University include the impediments to international student recruitment, the sustainability of research excellence, standards and quality of professional services, curriculum renewal and the overall quality and coherence of the student experience. The introduction of new major/minor programme opportunities is

one way in which the University is responding to the changing expectations of students and stakeholders.

The University has an extensive research portfolio including eight Research Centres, with more planned. It is the lead institution in four Doctoral Training Centres and, in addition to traditional full-time MPhil/PhD programmes, offers five Professional Doctorates and the options of part-time and distance learning enrolment. Its flexibility extends to individual split-site arrangements and the incorporation of a practice component in an MPhil/PhD. The University also awards research degrees in partnership with two associated institutions which do not have research degree awarding powers and a university in China.

The University has a strong track record in the management of quality and standards. The last QAA Institutional Audit was conducted in May 2009. The resulting report concluded that confidence could be placed in the soundness of the management of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. The report identified one advisable recommendation, three desirable recommendations and four features of good practice. The University has responded in detail to the recommendations and instigated a number of changes to its regulations and academic procedures. It has also sought to build on and disseminate the features of good practice through its focus on continuing quality enhancement.

Explanation of the findings about the University of Leicester

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

1.1   The University secures threshold academic standards through its regulations, Codes of Practice and associated procedures, referenced against the Quality Code, FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements. Senate has ultimate responsibility for academic standards, and its regulations specify requirements for the positioning of programmes within the FHEQ. Senate devolves detailed responsibility for monitoring and developing academic standards to Academic Policy Committee (APC) and Postgraduate Research Policy Committee (PGRPC) as appropriate, retaining oversight through regular reports. APC has overseen a major review of the University's Codes of Practice, strengthening quality assurance processes and addressing the Expectations of the Quality Code, which are also considered in APC's annual review of each Code of Practice.

1.2   The titles and characteristics of the University's academic qualifications accord with those set out in the FHEQ. Academic credit per module is currently variable, but the University plans to restructure the academic year, standardise hours per credit and make the majority of modules 15 or 30 credits, so aligning with practice elsewhere. The University also plans to provide greater academic flexibility and choice through new major subject (90 credits per year) and minor subject (30 credits per year) programmes based on innovative module combinations. A pilot will run in 2016-17 with full implementation in 2017-18.

1.3   Acting on behalf of APC and PGRPC respectively, College Academic Committees (CACs) and College Postgraduate Research Committees (CPGRCs) are central to the

scrutiny of standards, quality assurance and enhancement in their constituent departments. New programme proposals require reference at an early stage to Subject Benchmark Statements, to any Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) requirements, and to assessment methods. More detailed consideration is then given by CAC/CPGRC and by a Programme Approval Panel (PAP). This includes external specialist member(s) who are required to confirm that the programme is at the correct level in the FHEQ for the proposed award, and contains appropriate material for its title; that proposed content is in line with national benchmarks and comparable with similar programmes in peer institutions; that programme content reflects recent subject developments; and that intended learning outcomes and assessment are appropriate and articulated to allow students to demonstrate their completion and achievement. PAP members are briefed to seek evidence that threshold academic standards have been appropriately set and will be maintained. PAP reports are considered by APC and reported to Senate, who also receive an annual report on the programme approval and development process.

1.4   To explore the effectiveness of the University's processes, the review team met relevant senior, academic and administrative staff and students involved in programme approval and review. They also considered a wide range of documentation, including Senate minutes and regulations; APC, PGRPC, CAC and CPGRC terms of reference, minutes and reports; relevant Codes of Practice, especially on the Development, Approval and Modification of Taught Provision and that for Annual and Periodic Developmental Review (A/PDR) and associated guides; programme and module specifications; minutes of PAPs; and external assessors' and external examiners' reports. The team concludes that the design of new programme and module proposals makes full and informed use of external referents, and that scrutiny of new proposals and monitoring thereafter are thorough and effective, thereby securing threshold academic standards. The review team also considered the potential implications of the introduction from next year of 'with' degrees, based on major and minor subject pathways for the University's schemes of assessment and credit (see paragraph 1.29). The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.5   Senate regulations provide the definitive framework for the University's taught programme structures, and for the award of credit, progression and awards to undergraduates (regulation 5), taught postgraduates (regulation 6), and research students (regulation 9). The Regulations also prescribe the framework for examinations and assessment (regulation 7), and assessment arrangements with academic partners (regulation 8) in accord with FHEQ criteria.

1.6   Following advice resulting from the 2009 Institutional Review, the University has reviewed the regulations for taught postgraduate provision to ensure that intended learning outcomes are met for all awards and to balance the need to limit failed credit for an award with formal recognition of outstanding performance. A single University-wide assessment scheme allowing award and class by either credit accumulation or credit-weighted average, depending upon whichever results in the better outcome for each individual student, is currently in use and its outcomes will be reviewed next year.

1.7   Panels of examiners review marks and achievement on individual modules, making recommendations to boards, who confirm module outcomes from panels, ensure the appropriateness of marking practices, and agree decisions on progression, and award and classification for individual students. Where awards are made, external examiners must be present. Boards of examiners act with delegated powers from Senate.

1.8   Detailed guidance for panels and boards is provided in the Handbook for Panels and Boards of Examiners, the External Examiners' Handbook, briefings for key participants and online training for newly appointed external examiners. Adherence to the Framework and Regulations is monitored by APC and CACs, through the attendance at meetings of an Academic Registrar's representative, and through external examiners' reports and PSRB accreditation visits. ADR and PDR provide opportunities for departmental reflection on assessment design, practice and outcomes. The regulatory framework is underpinned by relevant Codes of Practice providing operational guidance that have been reviewed and formally approved by APC. These include Development, Approval & Modification of Taught Provision; A/PDR; and Managing Higher Education with Partners.

1.9   The University's governance, regulatory and assessment processes would allow the Expectation to be met. To explore their effectiveness, the review team met relevant senior, academic and administrative staff and students involved in programme approval, review and assessment. They also considered a wide range of documentation, including Senate minutes and regulations, especially 5, 6 and 7; APC, PGRPC, CAC and CPGRC minutes and reports; relevant Codes of Practice, especially that on the Development, Approval and Modification of Taught Provision; programme and module specifications; minutes of PAPs; minutes of ADRs and PDRs; Handbook for Panels and Boards of Examiners and minutes of their meetings; and external examiner reports. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A2.2): Degree-awarding bodies maintain a definitive record of each programme and qualification that they approve (and of subsequent changes to it) which constitutes the reference point for delivery and assessment of the programme, its monitoring and review, and for the provision of records of study to students and alumni.

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

Findings

1.10   Programme and module specifications provide a definitive record for each taught programme. Programme approval is a two-stage process: individual CACs consider and approve the proposed academic content of new programmes before referral to a PAP that includes external and student members. The approval process requires appropriate consideration of the FHEQ, European and other reference points, Subject Benchmark Statements and, where relevant, PSRBs, currency of the curriculum, congruence of intended learning outcomes with the range, variety and levels of assessment, and accordance with Senate regulations. PDR, also informed by external perspectives, encompasses a similar range and allows the University to assure itself that the considerations that influenced original programme approval are still being fulfilled.

1.11   Between approval and periodic review, programmes are updated annually through the curriculum review and approval process overseen by CACs which must approve any proposed curriculum and/or regulatory amendments. The Code of Practice on Development, Approval and Modification of Taught Provision provides a template for the programme specification and guidance on whether changes are of sufficient magnitude to warrant (new) programme approval. ADR reports, also considered and monitored by CACs, must respond to any concerns raised by external examiners, and confirm that the department has addressed any issues outstanding from the previous year.

1.12   Information on aims, intended learning outcomes and assessment is available to students through student handbooks, with links to the definitive programme and module specifications, published on the central Student and Academic Services website. These provide detailed information on structure and content, and feed into the student record system for the production of degree certificates, Higher Education Achievement Reports (HEARs) and transcripts.

1.13   The review team tested the Expectation through consideration of a wide range of documentation including University Ordinances and Senate regulations; APC, PGRPC, CAC and CPGRC, minutes and reports; relevant Codes of Practice, especially that on the Development, Approval and Modification of Taught Provision; handbooks for and minutes of PAPs; sample programme and module specifications; minutes of ADRs and PDRs; handbooks for panels and boards of examiners and minutes of their meetings; and external examiners' reports. The team also viewed student handbooks, sample programme and module specifications on the Student and Academic Services website, and sample degree certificates, HEARs and transcripts.

1.14   The review team concludes that the University has appropriate processes in place to ensure the maintenance of definitive records for its programmes of study and for individual student records. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.15   Programme approval procedures explicitly require programme teams to take account of the FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements, other external reference points and, where appropriate, PSRB requirements during the design of new programmes. PAPs test programme alignment with internal and external reference points. They also test whether new proposals are in line with the University regulations and Learning and Teaching Strategy. Programme specifications are the definitive course record and include explicit reference to the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements. Each module has a module specification that demonstrates alignment with level descriptors. Both programme specifications and module specifications are accessible via the Student and Academic Services (SAS) website.

1.16   Development of research degree programmes and arrangements relating to them are approved and monitored by PGRPC in conjunction with Academic Policy Committee (APC) to ensure that they meet the FHEQ. Operational oversight rests with the Quality Office (QO) which has responsibility for supporting the College Academic Director (CADs). The QO also produced the Codes of Practice that make up the quality assurance framework. The Code of Practice for Development, Approval and Modification (CoPDAM) makes clear reference to the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements as part of the process. Any changes to the external reference points, such as Subject Benchmark Statements, are disseminated by the QO to CADs and Heads of Department.

1.17   The committee structure demonstrates that there is oversight within the University that these policies and procedures are being implemented. The CoPDAM is evaluated by APC as part of the annual summary of quality assurance processes and any revisions are approved by APC and reported to Senate.

1.18   The design and application of the process relating to the development, approval and modification of programmes would allow the Expectation to be met. To assess its effectiveness, the review team considered programme approval documentation, including a sample of approval reports and minutes of committees as appropriate. The team also viewed programme specifications and module specifications and met staff responsible for quality assurance.

1.19   Within the process, PAPs are required to confirm that programmes are set at an appropriate standard and align with national frameworks and, where appropriate, Subject Benchmark Statements and reflect the University's Learning and Teaching Strategy and academic regulations. External scrutiny and subject expertise forms part of the process. The PAP produces a report with the actions monitored by CAC. All newly validated programmes are approved by APC and reported to Senate. Collaborative partners are subject to a similar process for programme/provision approval.

1.20   Programme and module specifications seen by the review team confirm that programmes are informed by and meet the requirements of the FHEQ, relevant Subject Benchmark Statements and PSRBs, and in respect of modifications, external examiners.

1.21   Guidance on course design, writing learning outcomes and assessment is provided by Leicester Learning Institute (LLI) and is available on their website. Staff undertaking the PGCert in Academic and Professional Practice are also able to undertake modules which include guidance on curriculum design. Each College is allocated an academic adviser from within the QO who supports Colleges through the programme approval process and other quality assurance processes.

1.22   Academic and professional support staff who met the team confirmed that the programme approval process was effective in ensuring that academic standards are set at an appropriate level and meet the requirements of the University's academic framework and regulations. They also confirmed that appropriate guidance and support were available on the national expectations and associated reference points as well as for curriculum design and assessment.

1.23   Through consideration of the University's policy and processes for the approval of programmes and supporting evidence, the review team concludes that the University has in place an effective process for approving awards and confirming that academic standards are set at an appropriate level. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.24   The University's regulations stipulate that students earn credit and awards through assessment and there are generic criteria for each degree classification band against which student performance is assessed. The programme approval process tests that assessment methods allow demonstration of the intended learning outcomes and PAPs are provided with guidance to do so. This is reported on in the PAP report as is the programme's compliance with University regulations and congruence with the FHEQ and other external reference points. Learning outcomes and assessment methods are articulated in programme and module specifications.

1.25   The University operates a two-tiered examination structure for taught programmes with panels considering individual modules and boards of examiners confirming marks and agreeing progression and awards. Boards of examiners are responsible to Senate for the conduct of their business. Operational guidance for panels and boards is provided in a handbook which provides a comprehensive range of information including guidance on reasonable adjustments. University regulations set out the requirements for doctoral degrees to map to the FHEQ and for the operation of the examination process which includes examination by examining teams which are approved by the Graduate Dean.

1.26   The policies and procedures of the University would allow this Expectation to be met. The team tested the Expectation through meetings with staff and read evidence provided by the University which included regulations, Codes of Practice, committee minutes, programme information and external examiners' reports. The review team saw evidence that programme approvals are carried out in accordance with procedures with due attention paid to academic standards and the design of assessment which allows the achievement of learning outcomes.

1.27   Boards of examiners have discretion within a set of rules prescribed in the regulations to make final decisions on awards. Consistency of application of the regulations is ensured by the presence of an Academic Registrar's Representative and a meeting of a board cannot go ahead if this requirement is not met. The member of staff provides advice on the regulations and can refer matters up to the Academic Registrar for guidance if necessary. The review team saw minutes of boards of examiners which demonstrated that decisions on final awards were being taken in a consistent manner and in accordance with the regulations. External examiners confirm that threshold standards are being met and this is reported in the annual summary report to Academic Policy Committee and upwards to Senate.

1.28   The appointment process for postgraduate research degree examiners ensures that examiners have the appropriate expertise and experience. Examiners are asked to confirm that the thesis makes a distinct and original contribution to knowledge in the discipline, in accordance with University regulations.

1.29   In 2016-17 the University is introducing the pathways programme for undergraduate programmes which will allow choice and flexibility for students in selecting a major worth 75 per cent and a minor worth 25 per cent from a defined list of subjects. This project has been under development for some years and is a key strategic initiative for the University. The review team heard how consideration had been given to the implications of students failing their minor subject in years one and two. However, the University's current regulations would appear to permit a student to proceed to the final year having passed all their minor subject modules only at a level sufficient for the award of credit (35 per cent) and then to graduate with marks below this level in all their final-year minor subject modules. It was not clear to the team that this would give stakeholders confidence that threshold standards had been met. The team **recommends** that the University should review its regulations to assure itself that all graduates will meet threshold standards in minor subject pathways.

1.30   The University has effective policies and procedures that govern the award of credit and qualifications and which allow threshold standards to be met. Therefore the review team concludes that the Expectation is met. The level of risk is moderate because while current policies and procedures are well designed and operate effectively in practice, there is a concern that such policies may not ensure that threshold standards are met for minor pathway subjects in the future.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

Findings

1.31   The University has in place detailed policies and procedures through its Code of Practice on ADR and PDR for the monitoring and review of its programmes, including those delivered by its partners. The implementation of these Codes of Practice is used to ensure ongoing achievement and maintenance of academic standards.

1.32   There is an annual review of programmes informed by a range of data, student feedback and external examiner reports. As part of this process external examiners are expected to confirm that academic standards are appropriate and comparable with the sector. External examiner reports inform both the ADR and PDR processes.

1.33   CACs are actively engaged in the ADR process and undertake a review of all ADR reports for the departments within each College. APC maintains oversight through the review of the summary report arising from the ADR process. PDR takes a broad review by testing and re-affirming that both threshold and University standards are being met. Externals used in the periodic review process are also required to confirm that threshold academic standards are being achieved and maintained.

1.34   The QO maintains operational oversight. However, within the committee structure there is oversight by CAC, APC and Senate with clear reporting lines. APC also identifies strategic themes to be reviewed and/or developed within the new academic year.

1.35   The design and application of the processes relating to the monitoring and review of programmes would allow the Expectation to be met. The review team considered a range of documentation including samples of ADR and PDR reports, minutes of committees and external examiner reports. The team also met a number of academic, professional and support staff and students who had been involved in the ADR and PDR processes.

1.36   The team heard that programme and module leaders play a key role in the ADR process. Module leaders undertake a student evaluation of their modules which informs the ADR report. Programme leaders produce a detailed ADR report following a set template. External examiner reports also confirm that academic standards are met and maintained. Good practice and enhancement are identified as part of the ADR and PDR process. Within the committee structure, ADR reports and their emerging enhancement plan are considered by departmental Learning and Teaching Committees and CAC; actions from the previous year are also considered and signed off as part of the process. A summary report of the ADR process is considered by APC and Senate.

1.37   There is a well-developed process for PDR which has external subject specialists and students involved in the process. Panel members scrutinise a range of documentation including performance data, external examiner reports and ADR reports. The PDR process through the input of external subject specialists is used to confirm that academic standards continue to be achieved and maintained and that Subject Benchmark Statements are met.

1.38   Modifications to modules and programmes may arise out of the ADR and PDR process, and are also informed by external examiner reports. Guidance on making modifications to programmes and modules is provided for staff in the CoPDAM and staff are also supported by the QO. Modifications are approved initially by the department Learning and Teaching Committee, and also considered and approved by CAC. College Academic Directors maintain oversight of the process to ensure that curriculum drift is avoided. The review team heard that proposals for change may also be identified as part of the planning process.

1.39   The review team concludes that the University has in place appropriate processes for the monitoring and review of its programmes which explicitly address the achievement and maintenance of academic standards. Therefore the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.40   The University involves a range of external expertise in its processes for programme approval, monitoring and review, and programme developers are encouraged to make use of externality at an early stage. External assessors sit on PAPs and their specific role is to confirm that the proposed programme is in line with national requirements. The University encourages the use of PSRB and employer representatives as external assessors. Similarly, external assessors affirm academic standards and congruence with national requirements during the process of PDR.

1.41   External examiners are appointed to all programmes. External examiners provide an annual check that standards are appropriate and their reports are considered by departments, Colleges and finally by a subgroup of APC who produce an overview for the Committee and Senate. The criteria for the appointment of external examiners for postgraduate research degrees are set out in the regulations which require appropriate levels of expertise and at least one member of the examining team to be external.

1.42   A significant number of programmes are also subject to PSRB accreditation. Additionally, the University makes use of expertise from PSRBs via accreditation activities and employers through a range of forums including the Employer Advisory Board and the Recruiters Club.

1.43   The policies and procedures of the University would allow this Expectation to be met. The team tested the Expectation through meetings with staff and read evidence provided by the University which included regulations, Codes of Practice, committee minutes, programme information and external examiners' reports.

1.44   The CoPDAM of taught provision and the Code of Practice on ADR and PDR provide clear guidance for the appointment of external assessors which ensures they have the appropriate level of subject expertise and are suitably independent. The review team saw evidence of the process working effectively in practice. The ADR process shows that departments comment on external evaluations and any specific issues raised by PSRBs.

1.45   The University makes effective use of external examiners to verify academic standards and there is detailed consideration of their reports at all levels of the University.

1.46   The University has effective policies and procedures which ensure external input to the setting and maintaining of academic standards. Therefore the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

1.47   In determining its judgement on the setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards at the University, the review team considered the findings against the criteria outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook. Expectations in this area are met and the level of risk is generally considered low. The one exception is the moderate risk linked to the regulations for assessment on the planned new minor pathways.

1.48   The University has comprehensive and transparent academic frameworks and regulations that are effective in securing academic standards. It has in place appropriate processes for the approval and monitoring of taught programmes and research degrees, and for ensuring that threshold standards are met for the award of credit and for all academic qualifications. Scrupulous attention is paid to the role of external examiners in the verification of academic standards and their reports are thoroughly considered and responded to.

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

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1   The University's procedures involve a two-stage process with the first stage providing outline planning approval, including consideration of the business case, to Fee Setting and Programme Development Committee (FSPDC). This leads to approval in principle. The second stage considers the proposals for the programme itself and leads to full approval. There are a number of key documents produced as part of the approval process, including a programme specification, which is the definitive record of the programme, and a module specification for each module. A student handbook provides further information for students about their programme.

2.2   Independent external assessors are an essential part of the process and guidance is provided for them and PAP panel members. There is a clear expectation that students are involved in the approval process. Training for students is provided by the QO. Staff involved in programme design are guided and supported through the process in their Code by the College Academic Directors, the Leicester Learning Institute (LLI) and the QO. The PGCert in Academic and Professional Practice contains a module on curriculum design. There is a distance learning forum for staff involved in the development of distance learning programmes that provides further support and enables the sharing of good practice.

2.3   Within the committee structure, oversight of the process rests with the APC on behalf of Senate. The Programme Development Group reviews planned programme development within each College as a working group of CAC. Following approval by FSPDC, APC establishes a PAP that has responsibility for approving programmes within the Code. A student representative is a member of the PAP and training is provided by the University. However, the Students' Union (SU) would like wider consultation on new programme proposals with, for example, proposals being considered by Student/Staff Committees (SSCs).

2.4   Major changes to programmes as defined in their Code are subject to programme re-approval; the Code contains explicit guidance on major/minor changes. Minor modifications are approved by CAC, following consideration by department Learning and Teaching Committees or equivalent.

2.5   There is also a distance learning task and finish group that is reviewing the development and direction of distance learning provision as part of the University's Strategic Conversation. The approval of the academic provision delivered by the University's academic partners is subject to the process set out in the CoPDAM. The PAP is provided with a copy of the risk assessment report approved by APC. The review team noted that the University has recently required the establishment of Programme Development Groups in each College as a subgroup of CAC, building on existing practice in one College. It is the responsibility of this group to review any planned programme development before referral to FSPDC. There are standard templates for programme development and major modifications.

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

2.7   The team looked at a range of documentation including programme approval documentation, module approvals and modifications as well as committee minutes. The team met a number of students and academic and professional staff with experience of the programme approval process.

2.8   Staff and students who met the review team confirmed that students take part in the approval process. They sit on FSPDC and on the PAP, for which training and guidance is provided by the QO. Briefings are given before students attend their first approval panel. Students seen by the team who had been involved in the process reported that they had not received formal training for the role but still felt supported through the process.

2.9   The planning process undertaken by the Colleges not only identifies new programmes but also proposes changes to programmes. The University has recently published revised guidelines on curriculum change principles to ensure compliance with the Consumer Rights Act 2015 and the Competition and Markets Authority.

2.10   The examples of programme approvals provided to the review team demonstrated that the policy and process are robust with oversight provided through the committee structure. Programme specifications are the definitive record of the programme; they are made available on the SAS webpages along with module specifications. All approved programmes are reported to Senate. There is a set template for reporting on programme approvals and where conditions are imposed, oversight is maintained by CAC. The tracking of programme developments including actions arising from the PAP report is reported in a log which is considered by CAC. The team found that the Code enables a consistent approach to programme development across Colleges through the use of a number of standard templates and a clearly articulated process. There is an annual report on the operation of the Code produced by the QO and considered by Senate.

2.11   The CoP DAM also includes a modified approval process that has been developed to support and expedite the delivery of the Pathways project which is focusing on the development of a range of major/minor programmes. This is part of the strategy to offer a more flexible provision with many of the developments being drawn from existing modules and programmes within Colleges and departments. Guidance for staff wishing to develop a Pathways programme is available on the LLI website, including developing a major award, developing a minor award and a range of FAQs.

2.12   Distance learning programmes also follow the same approval process with additional guidance on the quality assurance of distance learning materials in the Code. The review team heard that there are no specific pedagogic guidelines or expectations for the development of distance learning programmes, although the LLI provide guidance for staff developing such programmes where requested. The distance learning provision therefore currently encompasses a variety of methodologies, both paper-based and online. The team was informed that there is a distance learning task and finish group, which is currently reviewing the development and future position of the University's distance learning provision.

2.13   There is explicit, detailed guidance for the approval of major and minor modifications to programmes and modules. CACs have delegated power to implement the requirements of the Code relating to minor modifications. Minor modifications are considered by departmental learning and teaching committees which make recommendations to CAC. Any modifications are reported as part of the ADR process. Major modifications follow the programme approval process.

2.14   Proposals for the withdrawal of a programme are considered by department Learning and Teaching Committees in the first instance and approved by CAC. APC gives final approval for a programme to be withdrawn if it is satisfied that appropriate arrangements are in place to manage the withdrawal and protect the interests of the students, and reports to Senate. Withdrawal of modules is subject to the minor modifications process.

2.15   The policy and process for the development, approval and modification of programmes and modules are clearly articulated and provide for the detailed consideration of programme proposals and modifications with appropriate oversight within the committee structure. Meetings with staff and consideration of the evidence confirm that the process is systematically and consistently applied across the University. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and the 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   There are robust policies and procedures around admissions at the University, underpinned by a strong ethos towards widening participation. Recruitment and admissions policy is developed and monitored by the Student Recruitment, Admissions and Widening Participation Committee, chaired by the Provost, that reports to the Academic Policy Committee. Departments are required to report on their admissions trends through the ADRs. Summary reports of these trends are monitored by Senate and the University Leadership Team. Monitoring is also undertaken by the Admissions Office. The Code of Practice around admissions is reviewed annually, and supports the work of departmental admissions tutors and the Admissions Office.

2.17   Undergraduate applications are conducted through the University and Colleges Admissions Service. Postgraduate applications are dealt with directly by the Admissions Office, with postgraduate research (PGR) applicants interviewed by academic staff. Partner recruitment is largely managed by partner intuitions. There is a policy in place for applicants to appeal decisions; they are informed of this at the decision stage.

2.18   Information for applicants is available via the University's website, prospectuses and open days. Applicants are able to request both undergraduate and postgraduate prospectuses from the University website. A starting guide to the University is produced for all students and an 'International Welcome Week' held for new international students. PGR students have access to induction resources online via the Graduate School. The University has initiated a 'mystery shopper' scheme for overseas recruitment agents to ensure the quality of information provided to potential applicants.

2.19   The University and the SU organise a variety of events aimed at widening participation throughout the year, including summer schools, outreach work and master classes for school pupils and teachers. Departments may apply to a Widening Participation Impact Fund to support projects aimed at tackling education disadvantage. This work is supported by a dedicated Widening Participation Team within the Division of External Relations.

2.20   The framework of policies, procedures, governance structures and personnel in place at the University would allow this Expectation to be met. The team tested the Expectation through examination of the University's policies, terms of reference for relevant committees, minutes of committees and public information. The team also met students and staff members and held discussions around the admissions experience and culture of widening participation and fair access at the University.

2.21   Widening participation is a strategic priority for the University. They have consistently passed their benchmarks in this area, and have been commended by the Office for Fair Access. This culture lives through the staff and students, with many citing it as the University's key attribute. Employers recognise the social inclusivity of the cohort as one of the strengths of the University's graduate offer. The University is a member of the Realising Opportunity network, and the REACH Partnership for Leicester and Leicestershire,

supporting the progression of under-represented groups into higher education. It works in partnership with other local universities to support care leavers' progression into higher education. The review team considers this commitment to widening participation which promotes student inclusivity to be **good practice**.

2.22   The University reviews and monitors its policies and procedures effectively. The application process is clearly outlined, as are entry requirements, and the University has a rapid procedure of informing prospective students of any course changes. Students feel well informed and supported throughout the admissions process. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.23   The University sets out its priorities and ambitions for learning and teaching in a Strategic Plan. Its pillars include discovery-led learning, internationalisation of learning and enhanced distance learning. These are elaborated in the University's Learning Strategy which aspires to deliver transformative teaching and learning in a highly flexible curriculum developed through the new Pathways Project. Each College is required to develop its own Learning Strategy on the basis of these documents, adding milestones and performance indicators. APC is responsible for the institutional strategy and CACs for local strategies. These committees exercise oversight of provision primarily through the ADR/PDR processes and the results of nationwide student surveys. The Pro Vice-Chancellor for Student Experience, together with the Graduate Dean and the College Academic Directors, provide leadership at the institutional level and ensure coordination and parity of provision across the Colleges.

2.24   To ensure appropriate provision of physical resources, the University has an Estates Strategy (to become a Physical Environment Strategy) and an IT Strategy (to become a Digital Strategy). There is a virtual learning environment (VLE) for which APC has overall responsibility. A Policy and Guidance Statement governs its use.

2.25   Professional development opportunities for staff are provided by the LLI. It runs a Learning and Teaching Conference and a Learning and Teaching Focus Week each year alongside workshops and electronic resources. Staff development is also promoted through peer observation which alternates between teaching and marking. Where appropriate, new staff are required to complete a Postgraduate Certificate mapped against the UK Professional Standards Framework. More experienced staff are offered a Professional Education Excellence Recognition scheme. Both confer accreditation as Fellows of the Higher Education Academy (HEA). Postgraduate students asked to teach must complete a programme in Preparing to Teach in Higher Education. Full-time staff undergo annual appraisal. There is an annual cycle for promotions and merit awards with a 'teaching-dominant' pathway for promotion up to the rank of professor. Excellence in teaching is also rewarded by University Distinguished Teaching Fellowships and Superstar Awards run by the SU. The LLI also offers an accredited leadership programme for staff.

2.26   These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met. To test their operation, the team reviewed strategic and operational documents including the minutes of relevant committees, online resources including module pages on the VLE, and the responses given by students in recent national surveys. The team also met staff with responsibility for the management, oversight and professional support of teaching, along with teaching staff and students from different modes and levels of study.

2.27   The team noted that the Pathways Project and the Strategic Conversation launched in January 2015 have involved thorough and continuing review of teaching and learning. Staff at all levels strongly identify with the University's mission, including social inclusivity, and its learning aims; many have taken an active part in strategic discussions. The minutes of APC and the CACs confirm that they exercise effective oversight of provision. The team

was able to track the implementation and oversight of peer observation of marking, for example through the ADR process. The University is working to improve the intelligibility and granularity of statistical data available to its deliberative committees (see also paragraph 3.12).

2.28   The University continues to develop its teaching resources. It has recently invested in a new postgraduate study centre and medical school complex, and a refurbished centre for student services and the SU. The library was redeveloped in 2008. A review of IT provision is underway. All distance learning modules were reviewed with external input in 2013-14.

2.29   Staff in leadership roles are working to improve the uniformity of the student experience and report that the College structure enables them to ensure that good practice is widely adopted. The shape of the academic year, module weightings and contact hours are being standardised. All lectures will be recorded from 2016-17 and a single system for electronic marking and feedback is being developed. In the longer term the University aspires to a blended approach to learning across its provision, capitalising on its experience in distance learning. It similarly aspires to leverage its research expertise by exposing students to research practice as a learning activity; taught postgraduate students are already confident that the curriculum is research-informed. The 2015 National Student Survey revealed some variety in satisfaction with teaching, to which the University responded by creating Improving Student Experience teams to work with a number of departments, inviting three to report to the University Executive Board to share good practice and help senior management evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention. The team was told by students that some distance learners were also less satisfied than others; a review of distance learning provision was underway at the time of the visit.

2.30   Staff new to teaching feel well prepared and supported and the team heard many favourable comments about the work of the LLI. Staff met by the team felt that their teaching was recognised, although senior staff acknowledge that there is still work to do in establishing equality of esteem for teaching and research. At the time of the visit the University was reviewing its policies on career development with the further aim of creating a culture of ongoing career enhancement which relies less on performance management.

2.31   Students from all levels and modes of study consider teaching to be generally of a high standard and told the team that lecturers like to talk and teach. They report that feedback is usually timely and helpful. They are also positive about the VLE, although they think its potential for interactive learning could be further exploited; distance learners in particular feel that more use could be made of webinars and guided discussion forums.

2.32   Noting the University's efforts to review and enhance its provision, and the largely positive views of students, the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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

2.33   The University's Learning Strategy 2016-20 sets out an aspiration for seamless provision in support for learning, explicitly targeting transitions and promising to recognise excellence in support. It is backed up by a Student Support Strategy, an Employability Strategy, a Code of Practice for Personal Support of Students on Taught Programmes, and a Library Action Plan. To ensure a cohesive approach the Student Support Service, Career Development Service and Sports and Recreation have been merged into a Division of Student Experience under the leadership of the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Student Experience and professional management by a Director of Student Experience. Support staff are professionally qualified. All the professional services monitor their performance using student feedback and other data.

2.34   A wide range of resources for the development of student learning is available on the University website; they are accompanied by a programme of workshops. There are additional resources for postgraduates in the Postgraduate Teaching Centre at Brookfield. The library provides extensive online support for users including distance learning students and students with disabilities. All students are assigned a personal tutor at the start of their programme. Operation of the tutorial system is monitored in ADR and a report is made annually to APC on the basis of returns from Colleges.

2.35   The Student Support Service comprises the AccessAbility Centre, which supports students with disabilities, the Student Welfare Service which deals with finance, housing and so on, Counselling and Wellbeing, and the Healthy Living Service. International students are given a special induction programme and are engaged separately in areas such as visa advice. The Career Development Service was relaunched in 2012 and is recognised nationally for innovation.

2.36   These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met. To test their operation, the team examined relevant strategic and working documents, handbooks and online resources and noted the responses given by students in recent national surveys. The team also met employers and a wide range of students and staff, including those with responsibility for professional services.

2.37   The team found that strategic leadership in the University is effective in promoting enhancement, integration and inclusivity in support for learning. The 2014 Plan for Professional and Corporate Services articulates a culture of professionalism and continuous improvement in which issues are anticipated and with which professional services staff identify strongly. Integrated provision is furthered by representation of professional services staff on academic bodies and by networks of academics such as AccessAbility tutors at departmental level. The University is moving towards a single point of contact approach to the provision of services. In preparation, the activities and online resources provided by Student Services, the library and the LLI are being grouped to enhance awareness and use, for example in induction. The University also encourages students to take a holistic approach to their personal development. Resources for students are designed to engage them in understanding their responsibilities and developing their own potential, using the brand 'Making the Most of You'. The Student Support Strategy is explicitly inclusive, aiming to engage all students rather than just those with specific needs and moving the focus from support to supportive. The University has developed a focus on wellbeing as a means of empowering students to cope with problems.

2.38   The team noted in particular how the Career Development Service exemplifies this approach. Professionalism is assured through close contact with employers and a Transferable Skills Framework commissioned from an occupational psychologist. One of the Service's earliest initiatives was the Leicester Award which recognises extracurricular activities and encourages student awareness of the importance of learning outside the classroom. This has recently been enhanced by an additional tier, the Leicester Award Gold, comprising five programmes of workshops and an assessment centre run by employers. The Service works closely with academic departments through annual Employability Partnership Agreements, often involving employability modules; a checklist for use in module design is built into the Transferable Skills Framework. Its Employability Strategy aims to involve all students and not just those who approach it, and to create seamless provision under the brand of 'Your Career Development Journey'. It plans to track the engagement of all students. The team concludes that the strategic approach to the professional development of students which enhances their employability is **good practice**.

2.39   During induction, students are introduced to the services and resources available to them through the Essential Guide to Starting at Leicester, programme handbooks with standardised content, an induction programme and the Student Charter which contains relevant links. Each of the services has an extensive range of online resources to supplement face-to-face advice; the Student Counselling Service, for example, has 30 self-help guides including one for students worried about a friend, and links to emergency resources. Students from all stages and modes of study told the team that they felt well informed and supported, although distance learning undergraduates felt that induction could have been better managed.

2.40   The Code of Practice for Personal Support of Students on Taught Programmes stipulates that students are assigned a personal tutor at the start of their programme; tutors must undertake training and are required to initiate contact and keep records of meetings; and joint degree students must have access to academic support in both their disciplines. Operation of the tutorial system is monitored in ADR and a report is made annually to APC on the basis of returns from Colleges. However, students met by the team reported significant variation in the quality and practice of tutoring, including staff taking the initiative and support in the second discipline. Some distance learning students met by the team were unaware that they had a personal tutor. The team became aware of distance learning programmes in different departments in which one academic was personal tutor to a large number of undergraduates. In one of these departments student representatives had been told that distance learning students were not able to be assigned to personal tutors for resource reasons.

2.41   The University acknowledges that there is still work to be done on personal tutoring and is currently collaborating on this with the SU. It was made an APC enhancement theme for 2015-16 and a working group had just been created at the time of the review visit. In connection with the Pathways initiative, arrangements are in hand to ensure that students receive tutorial support in minor subjects taken in other departments. Nonetheless, the team concludes that there was evidence of insufficient oversight in this area and **recommends** that the University ensure that departments are fully implementing the Code of Practice for the Personal Support of Students, for all modes of programme delivery.

2.42   Despite this issue for further consideration, the team formed a positive impression of the arrangements in place and the student endorsement of them. It therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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

2.43   The University takes its commitment to student engagement seriously. Recent reviews around Students at the Heart of Our Processes and Working in Partnership with Students reinforce strategic importance given to this area. The Student Charter sets out what students can expect from the University, and what the University expects from students and the SU.

2.44   Through such strategies the University endeavours to create an environment of mutual support and constructive criticism. Students have multiple opportunities to feed into quality processes, and student representatives sit on the majority of the important decision-making boards, including the University Senate and departmental Student/Staff Committees. This ranges from full-time SU officers to course and department representatives. The University provides a Code of Practice for Student/Staff Committees, outlining how it expects such arrangements to take place. There is student representation in significant quality assurance processes, including PDRs and PAPs. Student members of these reviews have access to training provided by the University.

2.45   Academic representation is owned, supported and administered by both the University and the SU. The Union goes to great lengths to administer and organise the running of representative elections, and provides training for student representatives. It offers separate events for undergraduates and postgraduates, a division resulting from student feedback. Student representatives are able to feed back to their departments and the University through formal committee structures.

2.46   Students in general have a variety of means for engaging in the University's quality assurance processes, as well as more tailored feedback to their individual departments. The University expects all departments to provide module evaluation forms, the results of which are monitored in the departments' ADRs.

2.47   Department NSS results are scrutinised at College and University level. The University has established Improving Student Experience Teams, who work with departments falling below the expected levels in their NSS scores. The SU-run initiative, Ideas for Change, allows any students to submit an idea for how to improve the student experience at the University. The SU and its officers then work with the University to implement the idea as far as is practical.

2.48   In the past there have been issues around representation for distance learning students, but work is currently being done to correct this with a new SU part-time officer position for distance learning students, and a pilot scheme for distance learning course representatives.

2.49   The procedures, structures and resources in place at the University would allow this Expectation to be met. The team tested the Expectation through examination of the University's processes, Codes of Practice, student charter and minutes of committees. The team met students at all levels of study as well as staff members, and held discussions around student representation and engagement.

2.50   The University Leadership Team and SU executive demonstrate a common understanding of the need to work together in partnership. The strategic importance placed

on student engagement in the University's guiding policies is supported by practical evidence. The SU executive meets regularly with the University Leadership Team in both formal and informal settings, and the two bodies have researched European partnership models as inspiration for future structures.

2.51   Students report variable practice around module feedback, noting that there is mandatory feedback for some modules but not others. This is supported by the considerations of student feedback in different department ADRs; for example, some departments only ask for module feedback every two years, while others offer annual feedback.

2.52   There is also variable practice around communicating the results of student feedback. Some departments include positive actions resulting from student feedback as part of a You Said, We Did initiative, in some cases included in course handbooks. However, in other departments students reported being unaware of any changes resulting from their feedback, and would be unsure as to where to look to find information on such changes. These inconsistencies existed within Colleges, and sometimes with different practices within the same department depending on the course or level of study.

2.53   Student representatives felt well supported by the training and advice given to them by the SU. Despite the presence of a Code of Practice relating to Student/Staff Committees, some representatives that the team met did not feel their views were given due consideration by their departments. Support given to representatives by departments to facilitate their role varied. The onus on disseminating information regarding departmental changes following student feedback through the representative structures often fell to student representatives, without them having access to the means to effectively communicate with their cohort. This practice again varied by department and course.

2.54   Students met by the team were aware of the representative structures available to them, as well as other means of feeding back to their department. Distance learning students have less opportunity than campus-based students to engage in representative and feedback processes. A pilot scheme for distance learning academic representatives was taking place at the time of the review visit; this was facilitated by the SU. Some departments already had such structures in place prior to the pilot scheme, but their representatives were unknown to the SU. The introduction of distance learning representatives was welcomed by distance learning students spoken to as part of the review visit.

2.55   The review team found that the University takes deliberate steps to engage with the student body. There is a particularly strong relationship between the SU full-time officers and the University Leadership Team which facilitate a strong ethos of partnership and engagement. There is some variation at departmental level around student representation and feedback, but a clear Code of Practice does exist which mitigates against large disparities. Positive action is being taken regarding distance learning student engagement. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.56   Programmes are designed to ensure that intended learning outcomes can be achieved through assessment. The use of a range of assessment methods is encouraged and this is considered at programme approval and then reflected upon as part of ADR and PDR. The policy and procedures for the accreditation of prior learning (APL) set maximum thresholds for APL.

2.57   Marking criteria and schemes of assessment are published in programme handbooks and a Student's Guide to Exams is published on the Student and Academic Services webpage. The University's Policy on the Return of Marked Work specifies that work should be returned within 21 days for campus-based students and 28 days for distance learning students. In addition, from 2015-16 departments are also required to provide feedback on examinations. An AccessAbility cover sheet alerts markers to the need to tailor feedback appropriately to students who have a specific learning disability.

2.58   The policies and procedures of the University would allow this Expectation to be met. The team tested the Expectation through meetings with staff and students, including those studying on-campus and those on distance learning programmes. The team also read evidence provided by the University which included regulations, Codes of Practice, committee minutes, policy documents and programme information, and viewed online resources.

2.59   Evidence from programme approvals shows that appropriate consideration is given to assessment during the approval process. Staff are provided with a range of support mechanisms to assist in designing assessment via the LLI which includes online information, including a set of resources produced as a result of a project on learning outcomes, and specific events such as the focus on assessment and feedback symposium. New staff have a mentoring scheme which helps integration into the department and understanding of University policies and procedures.

2.60   One of the areas that students identify as requiring improvement is in the assessment and feedback methodology. This covers a recommendation that, where practicable, work should be marked anonymously and there should be an improvement in the standard of feedback. This matter is under active consideration by the Assessment and Feedback Working Group. The Group reports to the Student Experience Enhancement Group and reviews practice at institutional level.

2.61   The Group has also been working with the SU to raise awareness among students of how to understand feedback. Students feel well prepared for assessment with information being available in course handbooks and from central services covering topics which support assessment literacy such as study and exams, academic writing and avoiding plagiarism. The review team viewed modules on the VLE and saw a range of information including assessment briefs and generic feedback, although the content and coverage were variable across modules.

2.62   Students on-campus report that, in general, the University's stated feedback turnaround times are adhered to and they are aware that feedback on written examinations will commence this year. Feedback is generally very comprehensive but some taught postgraduate students had not received feedback on their first module assignment before the second one was due. Distance learning students also receive feedback within the stated time although for some students this can take the full 28 days and they would appreciate a faster turnaround. In general, the feedback is helpful, although it can be variable.

2.63   The University is actively pursuing assessment and feedback issues and concerted efforts are being made to improve, although there continue to be some low NSS scores in this area. The 'feed forward' initiative has been developed which involves providing advice to students before assignments are completed and staff are working to provide more structured comments on student work.

2.64   The regulations contain generic criteria for each degree classification band against which student performance is assessed. The University uses a standard marking scale of 1 to 100 but departments have discretion to use different scales within the overall scale. While recognising the permitted variability, it was not always evident from the information provided to the review team that students would know which sub-scale they were being marked against.

2.65   The regulations also specify the weighting of years 2 and 3 in the undergraduate degree classification scheme which is the same across the University apart from one particular subject area. This difference was justified to the review team as being necessary because of the progressive nature of the curriculum and strong advocacy by external examiners when the scheme was introduced in 2006. From the documentation available the review team was unable to identify the basis for the examiners' arguments. While not a concern with regard to academic standards, this is anomalous and may potentially appear to students to be inequitable.

2.66   The review team saw minutes of Boards of Examiners which demonstrate that Boards are operating in accordance with the regulations. The Handbook for Panels and Boards of Examiners is a clear and comprehensive document. External examiners confirm that Boards of Examiners meetings are conducted effectively and that decisions are made in accordance with University regulations and procedures.

2.67   The review team considers the University to operate valid and reliable processes of assessment with appropriate support provided to staff and students. 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 (B7): Higher education providers make scrupulous use of external examiners.

Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External Examining*

Findings

2.68   The criteria for the appointment of external examiners are set out in University regulations and follow the requirements of *Chapter B7* of the Quality Code. Regulations also cover their roles and responsibilities. External examiners are appointed by the APC and prior to this the QO undertakes checks to ensure that all the appointment criteria are met.

2.69   The QO issues the appointment letter and accompanying documentation which includes the external examiner handbook, the programme specification and the previous external examiner's report. The names of external examiners for taught programmes are published on the Student and Academic Services website and are linked to the electronic copy of programme specifications.

2.70   External examiners are asked to report on the coherence and currency of programmes and on good practice as well as standards, outcomes and processes. They are advised on what will happen if they do not endorse outcomes and told they may raise serious concerns directly with the Vice-Chancellor. External examiners sit on Boards of Examiners and an external must be present when awards are being made.

2.71   Reports are submitted to the QO and then to the relevant department and College and are published for staff use on an examinations intranet page. Heads of department are responsible for ensuring that reports are considered at departmental level including Student/Staff Committees and that a response is sent to the external and copied to the QO. CACs consider all reports and responses and follow up issues of concern and disseminate good practice. At University level a group comprising the College Academic Directors, Academic Registrar and Deputy Academic Registrar, chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience), review all reports and responses and produce a report for APC, which is reported to Senate. The University provides a response to external examiners on generic issues that have been raised.

2.72   The policies and procedures of the University would allow this Expectation to be met. The team tested the Expectation through meetings with staff and students, including those studying on-campus and those on distance learning programmes, and read evidence provided by the University which included regulations, Codes of Practice, committee minutes, programme information and external examiners' reports.

2.73   External examiners are provided with a comprehensive range of information, including a handbook as well as access to an online induction and other information and documents via a specific area on the Student Academic Services website. Examiners are kept informed of issues being considered within the University in general and in response to their reports via twice-yearly emails from the QO.

2.74   The appointment of external examiners is robust and carried out in accordance with stated procedures. External examiners' reports viewed by the review team showed that external examiners comment on the setting and achievement of threshold standards and alignment with *Chapter A1* and *Chapter A2* of the Quality Code; the appropriateness of learning outcomes in relation to Subject Benchmark Statements and assessment strategies; the rigour and fairness of the assessment process; and areas of good practice and innovation.

2.75   The review team examined how external examiners' reports are considered at departmental level and noted that, while the nomenclature of the local committees varies, the minutes of such committees evidenced due consideration of the reports. Scrutiny of minutes of CACs also showed that due consideration is given to external examiners' reports, albeit recorded with varying levels of detail. The review team also noted variability in the content and format of responses to external examiners. The University has acknowledged this variability and Senate agreed in July 2015 to the proposal from APC to introduce a standard template for departmental responses.

2.76   The overview reports to APC are succinct and highlight University-level issues and proposed actions; the fact that all reports and responses are considered by the group comprising College Academic Directors, Academic Registrar and Deputy Academic Registrar is a strength as it ensures that there is University oversight of all issues raised by external examiners. There is effective reporting up to Senate. The report to APC notes how many external examiner reports have been received but does not record how many are expected. The University confirmed to the review team that in 2014-15 all but one of the expected undergraduate external examiner reports had been received and there were 11 outstanding for taught postgraduate programmes which were currently being chased up.

2.77   The University acknowledges that, although external examiner reports are published online and are available to students, they have not routinely been shared with students in a systematic way. However, it is a requirement from 2015-16 that they must be considered at SSCs. This requirement is now included in the Code of Practice for SSCs, although the template for the agenda in the appendix does not list this as a specific agenda item. From the meetings with students and notwithstanding the time in the academic year, the review team concludes that there was scope to improve dissemination and student engagement with external examiners' reports and therefore the review team **affirms** the steps that the University is taking to ensure that external examiners' reports are shared with students.

2.78   The University has an effective framework for engagement with external examiners and consideration of their reports. Therefore the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review*

Findings

2.79   The ADR process is managed within departments and Colleges with consideration of reports by department Learning and Teaching Committees, which are then monitored by CACs. There are separate ADR reports for undergraduate and postgraduate taught programmes and for collaborative provision relating to validation, dual and joint degrees; other collaborative provision is captured within the department ADR. Summary reports from the ADR process are considered by APC and then presented to Senate. APC, in considering the summary report, reviews the process and highlights actions to be taken by each College, as well as good practice and enhancement.

2.80   Student representatives have access to ADR documentation through their membership of CAC and APC and are expected to cascade key points to the student body. In some cases ADR reports are considered by SSCs. Although students have expressed reservations about the effectiveness of their input into the ADR process as module evaluations are not perceived to be mandatory, the review team heard that module questionnaires are forwarded to students by email for completion.

2.81   PDR takes place every six years with a focus on academic departments. The PDR process involves the review of the management and standards of academic provision across a department and identification of areas for development as well as good practice. It considers minutes from key committees, such as CAC and Staff/Student Committees, external examiner reports, ADR reports, data from the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education and surveys (National Student Survey, Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey, Postgraduate Research Experience Survey). Departments are required to produce a standard set of documentation including a self-evaluation document. Guidance on writing the document is produced by the QO.

2.82   The chairs of the PDR panel are experienced academics and the list of nominated chairs is approved by APC. All PDR panels have an external assessor. These are nominated by the department and approved by the Chair of APC, with their appointment managed by the QO. Student representatives are also panel members. Guidance on the process and what is expected of them is provided by the QO. The panel also meets students as part of the review process.

2.83   The PDR panel produces a report with recommendations to which the Head of Department responds. These responses are considered by department TLCs, CACs and APC. APC also receives a summary report of the PDR process which evaluates its operation and identifies areas where APC might wish to take further action. The process is evaluated annually against the relevant chapter of the Quality Code and a report made to APC. Senate also receives the report.

2.84   Collaborative partners are subject to the same review process as outlined in the Quality Code. Reports are considered by the Collaborative Partnerships Management Group (CPMG) with a summary report considered by APC and received by Senate.

2.85   The design of the policies and procedures for the monitoring and review of programmes would allow the Expectation to be met. The review team considered a range

of documentation including samples of ADR reports, PDR reports and committee minutes. The team also met staff and students involved in the ADR and PDR process.

2.86   The completion of ADR reports is the responsibility of the programme leaders for both undergraduate and postgraduate taught provision within a scheduled timeline. The reports are informed by a range of data including admissions, retention, outcomes and surveys as well as external examiner reports and module evaluations. Good practice is also identified as part of the ADR process and is shared through consideration of the ADR reports by CACs and summaries by APC. The ADR is expected to report on the previous year's enhancement plan and confirm that all modules have undergone an annual review. Guidance on the ADR process is produced each year for departments following the annual review of the process.

2.87   The University requires the evaluation of all modules although it is the responsibility of the module leader to determine how such evaluations are undertaken and reported. Results of module evaluations go to Heads of Department and module leaders. Students who met the review team were aware that module evaluation took place as they received questionnaires by email. However, they were not aware of what happened to the feedback they provided or that the module report informed the ADR process. The review team was informed that some feedback occurred through the 'You said, We did' approach, adopted in module handbooks, and noted that some SSCs received both external examiner and ADR reports. The ADR reports and supporting documentation including summary reports, minutes of CAC, APC and Senate provided to the review team by the University demonstrate a robust and detailed process, although on occasions there appeared to be some slippage in the production of reports by the due date.

2.88   The periodic review documentation provided by the University demonstrated the comprehensive nature of the process and the role of external specialists in confirming the currency of the curriculum and the appropriate standard of the programme. It also confirmed the role of students in the process. The review panel produces a report which is considered by departmental learning and teaching committees and Student/Staff Committees, although the latter is optional. Any actions arising from periodic review inform the development of an action plan which is monitored at College and departmental level.

2.89   Periodic review panels are drawn from academic staff across the Colleges and departments and include at least one external specialist and a student. Guidance is provided for panel members. Review panels are expected to meet students as part of the process. Feedback is also sought from distance learning students where there is such provision in the department being reviewed. A panel member normally attends a meeting of the SSC.

2.90   The policies and processes for the monitoring and review of programmes are clearly articulated, systematic and consistently applied. They operate effectively and inform the enhancement process. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and the 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

2.91   Rules and procedures for academic appeals and complaints by students are established in Senate regulations which are updated annually. The regulation on academic appeals was revised in December 2014 to take account of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator's Good Practice Framework. In collaborative provision it is a requirement that the partnership agreement specifies procedures, normally involving a local process before those of the University are invoked. There is a separate procedure for complaints and appeals about admissions which is set out in the Code of Practice on Admissions.

2.92   The regulations set out the grounds on which an academic appeal or complaint can be made and, after encouraging informal resolution, provide for a two-stage process with the right to seek review until a completion of procedures letter is issued. They set out timescales for making and appealing decisions and rules regarding confidentiality. In both cases there is provision for invalid, unsubstantiated or vexatious applications to be rejected without formal consideration but a review of such a decision can be requested. If an academic appeal is upheld, the case is returned to the examiners (or research student progression panel) for reconsideration of the academic judgement; in the case of a research thesis, new examiners might be appointed. Since 2011 the University has not offered students the right to appear in person before an appeal panel, arguing that this disadvantages distance learning students and offers less incentive to submit good quality evidence.

2.93   Students receive summary advice on making complaints and appeals in their programme handbook. There is further guidance on the Student and Academic Services webpage alongside the regulations themselves. This includes a brochure entitled Academic Appeals: a Guide for Students. The guidance encourages students to seek support from the SU Education Unit and advice on procedures from the QO.

2.94   An annual report on appeals and complaints is compiled by the QO for CACs and Academic Policy Committee (APC), which also receives annual feedback from the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA).

2.95   These arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met. To test their operation, the team examined the regulations and guidance documents, annual reports and associated minutes of APC, and annual OIA letters. The team also spoke to staff with responsibility for quality assurance and to a wide range of students. They concluded that the regulations are fit for purpose and the accompanying guidance is clear and helpful. The OIA's most recent letter records that the University has appropriate regulations and is fair and reasonable in its practice. Students report that the written information and advice given to them is clear, that timescales are usually observed, and that informal resolution of complaints is effective, not least because of the involvement of the Education Unit. Almost all the students met by the team had a clear understanding of what would be the most appropriate way to raise an informal concern, were aware of the support offered by the SU, and were confident that they would be able to resort to formal procedures if necessary. The SU regards outcomes as fair although it argues that students should be able to attend appeal hearings and that clearer guidance should be given to students on when to escalate a complaint. Senior staff with responsibility for quality assurance told the team that time

limits were interpreted generously and complaints which might be valid were never normally rejected on these grounds.

2.96   The team established that the University paid attention to what could be learned from appeals and complaints, with examples including the revision of regulations involving the probation and progression of postgraduate research students in 2012. Although the number of appeals has been rising, the great majority reflect dissatisfaction with academic judgements and are unsuccessful; neither the University nor the SU considers it appropriate to discourage students from exercising their right to appeal. The University acknowledges a disproportionate number of appeals from distance learning students but is satisfied that this is connected to the nature of their circumstances, with many such students finding it harder to complete within the prescribed time limit or being in a position where qualifications may be financially significant. The number of complaints received each year is in single figures. The most recent OIA letter makes suggestions about handling mitigating circumstances on a 'fit to sit' basis and about developing a policy on bullying and harassment which are currently under consideration by the QO and the Student Disciplinary Committee respectively, and will be presented to APC. Noting that both the OIA and students considered the framework and outcomes to be sound, the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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

2.97   The University currently engages in a variety of collaborative arrangements from progression accords and placements through module delivery to validated programmes, validated research degrees and joint awards. It does not currently operate franchise arrangements nor does Senate permit the establishment of serial arrangements. The range of collaborative provision is set out in the Collaborative Register. Two of its limited suite of validated programmes - a PG Diploma in Diabetes and an MA - are currently being taught out. The University also validates research degrees for Newman University (due to cease in 2017) and Bishop Grosseteste University (due for review in 2017).

2.98   The University undertook a fundamental review of collaborative provision in 2012-14, strengthening its arrangements for managing collaborative partnerships in light of external developments. It introduced a new Code of Practice on Managing Higher Education with Others (CoPHEWO) informed by the publication of *Chapter B10*, and clarified associated management structures by creating the CPMG reporting directly to APC, to scrutinise new collaborative proposals and monitor existing ones. The Group brings together those with particular expertise in collaborative provision, to share and build good practice across the University. The new Code was implemented in full in 2014-15 and a first annual report made to APC in October 2015.

2.99   The University used the review to end a small number of relationships on the basis of academic fit and for business reasons; in each case detailed arrangements to support students in completing their studies are managed by the relevant Board of Studies and overseen by the Director of Postgraduate Taught Programmes for the College of Medicine, Biological Sciences and Psychology.

2.100   The new Code of Practice sets out procedures for developing and managing arrangements for delivering a range of learning opportunities with others, using a flexible, risk-based framework without undermining the assurance of academic standards. It also outlines a typology of different partnerships with indicative risk levels. The process for terminating partnerships and protecting the interests of students on course is also detailed in the Code. APC and, where relevant, PGRPC act on behalf of Senate to oversee the Code of Practice's requirements, while CPMG manages operation of the Code for APC. CACs have delegated power to implement the Code for monitoring and review of collaborative arrangements, including student exchanges, by their constituent departments and to approve new progression accords.

2.101   Proposals for new partnerships require a risk assessment and due diligence checks, involving consideration of the partner's financial stability and resource capacity, legal and regulatory frameworks, reputational and ethical issues as well as academic and educational aspects considered by CPMG and reported to APC. Subject to a positive outcome, this is followed by detailed scrutiny of a business case and a visit to the proposed partner by representatives of APC. Thereafter the proposal is considered by a PAP according to the CoPDAM of programmes. The proposal takes account of wider considerations than for internal proposals that will depend on the nature of the proposed

partnership, and include a draft partnership agreement, the risk assessment report and details for managing the partnership.

2.102   For each partnership a lead academic acts as partnership manager with oversight of partnership arrangements, contributing to the University's management of quality and standards, providing guidance on educational and regulatory matters, serving on Boards of Studies and Examiners and contributing to ADR. Existing programmes are subject to all standard University processes for monitoring quality and standards, to an annual report considered by CPMG and to a full collaborative review by CPMG on behalf of APC at least every five years, when a formal decision is taken on whether to continue or terminate the partnership. In the latter case processes for managing the termination and safeguarding the interests of students are as set out in the Code of Practice.

2.103   Student placements are also governed by the CoPHEWO, with standard documentation for their identification, risk assessment and approval by CPMG. Placements in new programmes or additions to existing programmes are considered by a full PAP as in the CoPDAM of taught provision, testing the processes for managing the placement and the related student learning experience in line with the parameters set out in CoPHEWO. The College of Science and Engineering has also developed a charter for students on placements, guaranteeing them an on-site mentor and schedule of contacts with their University department, and employs two placement officers providing further student support.

2.104   The review team considered a range of documentation, including the CoPHEWO, documentation covering the approval, monitoring and termination of partnership programmes, terms of reference and minutes of CPMG, relevant minutes of CACs and the responsibilities of partnership managers. The team also met a staff member from a partner institution and two University staff acting as partnership managers. The partner representative spoke positively of the link with the University, and was highly appreciative of the support provided to students and the rich learning and research resources made available to them. University staff also spoke warmly of their collaborative experience and commended the arrangements and approach set out in the Code of Practice as facilitating their focus on educational and pedagogic aspects of the partnerships. The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk 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

2.105   PGR provision is governed by a Senate Regulation which sets out admission requirements, supervisory arrangements, progression rules, minimum and maximum periods of registration, assessment arrangements including for the appointment of examiners (to assure expertise and independence), and marking criteria. These are explained further in a Research Student Handbook, which also contains advice for students and draws attention to the University's support services.

2.106   Oversight is vested in the PGRPC which is chaired by the Graduate Dean. Each College has a Director of PGR who chairs a College PGRC and each academic department has a Postgraduate Tutor who monitors the training and progression of students and acts as mediator in the event of problems. The Graduate Dean is Head of the Graduate School which provides administrative support and a reading room in the new Brookfield Postgraduate Teaching Centre and the University Library, as well as extensive electronic resources in the form of a Research Student Zone on its website.

2.107   Admission decisions are made by two members of academic staff, one of whom will normally become the lead supervisor. Up to a year of prior learning can be recognised on the authority of the Graduate Dean. Supervisory meetings are scheduled every month in the first year and every two months thereafter; a written record must be kept. There is a probationary period of one year during which the student must complete research training, agree their research questions and present a written report on their activity to an independent Probation Review Panel; thereafter they must report on progress annually to a panel which must also have at least one independent member. Each student has a supervisory team of at least two academics who between them have supervised three students to completion; limits are set on the number of students an academic may supervise. Examining teams of two, at least one of whom must be an external examiner, submit independent pre-viva reports and conduct the viva; a supervisor may not be an examiner. The University only requires an independent chair in certain circumstances.

2.108   All students are required to undergo training on the basis of an individual needs assessment. The Postgraduate Researcher Development Programme comprises over 50 workshops aimed at students at different stages in their career, including ones aimed at developing enterprise skills and employability in and beyond academia. The programme is informed by the Vitae Researcher Development Framework.

2.109   These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met. To test their operation the team reviewed the regulations, handbooks, online resources including the virtual learning environment (VLE), minutes of relevant committees and results of the national Postgraduate Research Experience Survey. The team also spoke to senior staff with responsibility for PGR, academic staff who act as supervisors, and research students on different programmes and modes of study.

2.110   Rigorous management and oversight of PGR students at Leicester were identified as good practice in the last Institutional Audit in May 2009. Since then there has been a

review of the Senate regulation in which students participated. The University has expanded its training for research students and supervisors, developed a PGR Forum in which supervisors can share best practice, and opened a new Postgraduate Teaching Centre. When the team visited, the University was in the middle of a further strategic review of its provision.

2.111   In the view of the team the regulation fully meets Expectation B11. Minutes of relevant committees show appropriate exercise of oversight at College and University level. The Research Student Handbook is clearly written and accessible. The Guidance for Research Degree Examiners booklet is similarly well designed. Students told the team that they felt they had been well supported from initial inquiry onwards, that feedback on their work was rapid and constructive and that the experience of probation, enhanced by peer support which the University encourages, had helped them to reflect effectively on their progress. A distance learning doctoral student told the team that information on the VLE on matters such as research ethics was extremely helpful, that attending induction and research weeks had created a strong sense of integration into the research community, and that there was considerable interaction among distance learning researchers through social media.

2.112   Training for staff new to supervision comprises eight workshops, five of which have been introduced in 2015-16 to help supervisors foster critical thinking and writing by students. A new member of staff told the team that it had been extremely helpful. The team learned that one academic department had commissioned a session for experienced supervisors and that this was now being made available more widely. Staff met by the team had a good understanding of the special nature of PGR by distance learning. For students, the Researcher Development Programme offers an exceptionally wide range of opportunities, although both staff and students reported that take-up could be improved and students felt that the generic skills modules were time-consuming and taught in over-large groups. Responsibility for this programme has recently transferred from the LLI to the Division for Research and Enterprise, which the team was told had been widely agreed to be more appropriate. The team noted further useful online resources, including recorded material for those who cannot attend the twice-yearly campus induction programme, and a range of cross-campus events promoting a sense of research student identity.

2.113   Postgraduate researchers have access to the same appeals and complaints procedures as other students. Appeal panels are chaired by the Graduate Dean or another very senior member of staff. All students must submit an individual report each year to the Graduate Dean which they are not obliged to share with their supervisors, in which they can raise any issues or concerns in confidence. There are very few appeals or complaints from PGR students. The team concludes that the continuing effective oversight of the PGR student experience is **good practice**.

2.114   Research students who wish to teach must complete a Preparing to Teach in Higher Education programme and are usually eligible to study for a PGCert in Supporting Learning in Higher Education. They receive a Postgraduate Research Learning and Teaching Handbook with useful information and tips, such as engaging with the UK Professional Standards Framework. Students told the team that the opportunity to teach was highly valued but was not available in all departments. Support for teachers after training also varied considerably. The University specifies a limit of eight hours a week on teaching but students often find they exceed this in practice. The team was told of a department which had cut its teaching posts and had then used at least one unpaid student volunteer to fill them. Students confirmed that they did not mark work which contributed to an award but that they were not aware of any restrictions on the level at which they could teach; one student reported acting as an undergraduate dissertation supervisor. To address these concerns and ensure consistency, the team **recommends** that the University articulate a policy governing the employment of PGR students as teachers.

2.115   Taking the view that its reservations about arrangements for research students to teach could be addressed by a fuller articulation of detail in the University's documentation, and was offset by the overall quality of provision for research students, the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.116   In determining its judgement on the quality of student learning opportunities at the University, the review team considered the findings against the criteria as outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All Expectations in this area are met and the level of risk is considered low in all cases.

2.117   The University has in place a set of well-developed practices and procedures to assure the quality of student learning opportunities and the team noted a number of features of good practice with regard to widening participation, student inclusivity, professional development and the experience of research students. The University is committed to encouraging applications from students from a wide range of social and cultural backgrounds and promotes the development of graduate skills and awareness of employment opportunities. There is a strong ethos of partnership and engagement between staff and students and an inclusive and vibrant academic community focused on high standards of teaching and research. The University provides a supportive environment for students to learn and succeed in their transition to the world of work.

2.118   The team makes two recommendations for action in the areas of personal support for students and opportunities for PGR students to gain experience as graduate teaching assistants. The team also affirmed the steps that the University is taking to ensure that students are aware of, and have access to, the reports of external examiners.

2.119   Overall, the review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the University **meets** UK expectations.

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Findings

3.1   The University maintains accurate and timely information for students, applicants and other stakeholders. The Division of External Relations has overall responsibility for corporate publications and for ensuring the accuracy of high-level web communications. Heads of Departments and Divisions are responsible for ensuring the accuracy of their online materials. The responsibilities relating to the upkeep of online information are outlined in the new Web Policy Framework, which makes particular reference to the life-cycle of online information so that applicants are not misinformed.

3.2   Public information is available via the University's website. Its strategy, mission and various governance and policy documents are freely available via its subsites. There are Codes of Practice in place for managing the tone and brand of the University's public information, which cover traditional forms of online media, as well as its growing social media presence. Financial statements are also available to the public via the website.

3.3   The University produces an undergraduate prospectus, postgraduate taught study guide and postgraduate research study guide annually: these are available upon request in both hard copy and PDF format. The information contained in the prospectuses is replicated on the Study with Us webpages, and includes information on programmes details, fees and funding, and the application process. Prospectuses are produced by the Marketing Communications Office, in the Division of External Relations, in collaboration with academic departments. There is a 'View the Key Information Set' (KIS) link on each course page to enable prospective students to access KIS data.

3.4   New undergraduate and postgraduate taught students are provided with the Essential Guide to Starting at Leicester, which includes information on registration, and is sent to campus-based full-time students shortly before they start their studies at the University. PGR students are provided with induction information via the Graduate School website: this ensures parity of information regardless of when they commence their studies. There is a student charter in place that outlines the University and students' mutual responsibilities to each other.

3.5   There are electronic induction resources for new staff and all of the University's main governance documents are available online. Staff can request information from the University Planning Office to measure their department or service's performance in key areas.

3.6   The VLE is run under a managed hosting agreement. Staff from the University's IT Services support the technical side of the VLE. Minimum requirements for course content are outlined in the VLE Guidance Statement.

3.7   Modules and examination timetables are published online and students can access a personalised timetable via MyStudentRecord. This online application also allows students to view their progress throughout their course. On completion of their studies, undergraduate and postgraduate taught students receive a certificate and full academic

transcript. PGR students receive an award letter following successful examination and a degree certificate on conferral. Where appropriate the University also produces a certificate and transcript for any validated programmes undertaken by students registered at another institution.

3.8   External examiners' reports are published for all taught programmes on the University's website and can be accessed by staff and students. However, there are continuing issues regarding the visibility of reports and the team has noted the steps the University is taking to improve the situation (see paragraph 2.77).

3.9   The information provided by the University, and the processes and policies it has in place, make its information fit for purpose, accessible and reliable, which would allow the Expectation to be met. In testing the Expectation, the review team reviewed a number of sources of information, including the University website and VLE, printed material, course handbooks, and examples of information, advice and guidance provided to applicants and students. Policy and procedures relating to these were also reviewed. Meetings were held with staff and students.

3.10   Students met by the team felt they were given adequate and useful information prior to beginning their studies. They were all confident that if they needed to find a particular point of information it would be available on the University's website. Course handbooks include essential information around learning outcomes and marking and progression criteria: these are made available via the VLE. The Graduate School website provides PGR students with relevant information regarding progression and expectations of them as research students.

3.11   VLE course sites include signposting to other University services and key contacts for students within the departments. Students again reiterated that they found the sites easy to use, and the information provided on them relating to their course adequate. It was expressed in some student meetings that distance learning students may not always be aware of their ability to access University services, but the review team found that good signposting existed for distance learning on all of the sites reviewed.

3.12   The University recognises that management information has not been fully used in the past. A recent meeting of the University Executive Board led to the implementation of contribution maps, leading to more informed department profiles, with performance measures based on five key areas departments will commit to improving in line with the University's strategic vision. The review team **affirms** this work being done to improve the generation, dissemination and application of management information by the University.

3.13   Overall, the review team concludes that the University produces information that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The Expectation is therefore 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

3.14   In determining its judgement on the quality of information about learning opportunities at the University, the review team considered the findings against the criteria as outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

3.15   The University makes available a wide range of information about its provision. This information is checked regularly and there are robust procedures in place to ensure its accuracy. Students have confidence in the information available.

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

4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1 The University's strategic approach to quality enhancement is set out in its Strategic Plan which is further articulated in the Learning and Teaching Strategy. Each College is required to develop its own Learning and Teaching Strategy in alignment with the University strategy, adding milestones and performance indicators and setting up improvement projects to address specific areas.

4.2 In January 2015 the newly appointed Vice-Chancellor launched a Strategic Conversation creating 11 task and finish groups to look at all aspects of provision. This led to the development of a new Learning Strategy and a significant number of other changes have already been made. The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience), supported by the Graduate Dean and the College Academic Directors, provides leadership for enhancement matters at institutional level and ensures coordination between academic and service departments and across the Colleges. The new role of Provost provides overall strategic oversight.

4.3 The academic governance structure supports the strategic approach with enhancement built into the terms of reference of the APC and its subcommittees, the Student Experience Enhancement Committee (SEEG) and PGRPC. This is supported at College level by the CACs. Since moving through considerable changes to regulations and quality assurance procedures in recent years, APC now has more time to develop enhancement strategies and does this through the consideration of strategic themes identified at the beginning of each year, which are taken forward in specific ways at College level. Quality assurance processes, in particular A/PDR, provide opportunities to identify enhancement activities and share good practice.

4.4 Representation on core committees and regular opportunities for SU officers to meet senior managers enable students to play an active role in enhancement. The University uses the NSS, PTES and PRES surveys to gather student views, along with feedback on individual modules.

4.5 There are a range of processes and activities that enhance the PGR student experience overseen by the Graduate School and the PGRPC such as the Festival of Postgraduate Research and the Doctoral Inaugural Lectures.

4.6 The policies and procedures of the University would allow this Expectation to be met. The team tested the Expectation through meetings with the senior management team, academic staff, professional services staff and students, including those studying on-campus and those on distance learning programmes. The team read evidence provided by the University which included strategic statements, regulations, committee minutes, policy documents and programme information, and viewed online resources.

4.7 Since the 2009 Institutional Audit, the University has made significant progress in developing and delivering a strategic approach to enhancement which works at all levels from institutional to operational and the review team was able to see many examples of this working in practice. Innovations such as obligatory examination feedback and lecture capture are carefully piloted before full implementation. The review team also heard how there is widespread backing from staff of the University's commitment to widening

participation, multiculturalism and employability and a strong culture of cooperation and relationship with the SU.

4.8   The review team heard how the Strategic Conversation has engaged staff and students across the University and has resulted in demonstrable enhancement such as improvements to learning resources and consolidation of student support services. The 11 task and finish groups cover a wide range of activity including the University structure, academic portfolio development and postgraduate research and have involved a wide range of staff and the SU in their deliberations. Staff confirmed that the University's approach to the management of change was a consultative one and students acknowledge that student engagement is central to this agenda for change. The review team therefore concludes that the University's inclusive approach to the management of change which will enable the realisation of strategic priorities is **good practice**.

4.9   The University Executive Board comprises the University senior management, the President of the SU, the heads of academic departments and professional services. It acts as an important forum for developing new initiatives, discussion and communication, thus aiding enhancement across the University.

4.10   The College structure is an effective vehicle for sharing good practice aided by the role of Provost which promotes cross-College interaction. CACs bring academic and professional services staff together and provide a link with departmental groups. The review team heard of a number of examples of good practice that had been identified in one College being disseminated in the others such as e-assessment methods, online marking and peer observation of marking.

4.11   Likewise, the academic governance structure and quality assurance framework are effective in considering strategic enhancements. The processes for programme approval, ADR and PDR are well designed to allow the identification of enhancement and this is disseminated through the reporting process at CACs, APC and Senate.

4.12   The University describes the Pathway Project as a significant plank of its strategy for enhancement. The aim is to offer a flexible curriculum with the introduction of majors and minors in 2016-17 alongside existing single and joint honours programmes for a specified range of subject areas. The project has been in development for a number of years and has been subject to wide-ranging consultation across the University with staff and students and outside stakeholders. The review team heard how a significant amount of time has been spent in testing the student journey from applicant to graduate. Students note their full involvement in the consultation process for the Project and the positive benefits that they would get from a major/minor model.

4.13   The Leicester Learning Institute plays an important role in quality enhancement. It has recently been reviewed and has now re-focused on student learning, curriculum design and teacher development. Staff are appreciative of the support offered by the Institute. The Institute has representation on CACs and APC to ensure it is aware of curriculum developments and other quality matters. Staff can submit bids to the Teaching Enhancement Fund to fund projects that will enhance the student learning experience. Allocation of the funds is overseen by a Student Experience Enhancement Group approvals group. To foster an ethos of enhancement, the University holds a Learning and Teaching Conference and a Learning and Teaching Focus Week each year.

4.14   Employers are actively encouraged to contribute to enhancement, particularly in the employability of graduates as set out in the new Employability Strategy. Employers have a positive interaction with the University and appreciate how well the University prepares its graduates for employment; they particularly value the transferable skills framework. They also recognise the value of the University's ethos and its approach to social inclusion.

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

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.16   In determining its judgement on the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the University, the review team considered the findings against the criteria as outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

4.17   The team concludes that the University has undertaken an extensive programme of change that has been effectively managed which, aligned to governance and quality assurance processes that are designed to facilitate enhancement, demonstrates that deliberate steps are being taken to improve the quality of student learning opportunities.

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

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1 The University has identified employability as a clear priority in its Strategic Plan and in the Learning and Teaching Strategy, placing it at the core of the student experience. It has implemented a new Employability Strategy steered by an Advisory Board of senior graduate recruiters, transformed the CDS, and has committed to ensuring all students have access to a skills development activity.

5.2 The University aims to embed employability in academic programmes through annual Employability Partnership Agreements between CDS and academic departments; through consideration of employability as an explicit feature of programme development, design, monitoring and review; and with the aim of fostering students' transferable and career management skills. Besides the promotion and identification of transferable skills through programme activities, some departments (for example History, Engineering, Mathematics, History of Art and Film) have embedded employability skills within modules to ensure intended learning outcomes are expressed as subject knowledge and transferable skills. The University has developed a Transferable Skills Framework aligned to graduate selection criteria, and instituted the Leicester Award for students to identify, develop and articulate skills developed through extracurricular activities, with more than 1,000 students now participating. A recent development has been the introduction of a second-tier advanced skills Leicester Award Gold delivered by employers.

5.3 The CDS has focused on increasing student engagement and, reflecting the University's widening participation activities and social inclusivity, on aspiration-raising by ensuring that opportunities to develop employability skills reach those students most likely to benefit. It aims to promote students' professional attitudes and incorporates active preparatory and reflective phases in all CDS activities. The University has progressed alumni involvement in career events and engagement with graduate employers, and has revised its Employability Strategy to improve its quality, capacity and impact to enable students to develop heightened self-awareness and initiative; to acquire life-long career management skills; to promote mutually beneficial relationships with local, national and international employers; and to develop systems and processes to match employer preferences with student profiles. The University's efforts over the last three years have resulted in a significantly enhanced reputation for graduate employment. The University believes that additional initiatives, such as training in entrepreneurship and leadership, together with greater curriculum flexibility through major/minor pathways and the explication of transferable skills and work experience within programmes, will further promote its students' employability and their opportunities for career enhancement.

5.4 It was clear to the review team that students appreciated the engagement opportunities provided by the University to promote their personal development and enable them to acquire and record their transferable and career skills; the two-level Leicester Award was especially well regarded. The review team also met a range of employers, some of whom were members of the Advisory Board. All spoke appreciatively of their engagement with the University, and the progress made by the CDS in recent years, both in engaging with employers and in preparing students for employment. It was evident to the review team that the Leicester Award, especially at Gold level, was highly regarded by employers, and that the range and intensity of student engagement and the quality of Leicester graduates were well appreciated. Employers recognised and valued the University's ethos, especially its commitment to social inclusion, diversity and multiculturalism, and valued their opportunity to contribute to the development of the University's employability strategy through the Employers Advisory Board.

5.5   The review team concludes that the priority accorded to the Employability Strategy and its associated initiatives is a major aspect of the University's strategic approach to the professional development of students which enhances their employability, and which the team judged to be good practice (see Expectation B4).

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 30 to 33 of the Higher Education Review handbook.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

e-learning
See technology enhanced or enabled learning

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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