Higher Education Review of De Montfort University

April 2015

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at De Montfort University. The review took place from 13 to 17 April 2015 and was conducted by a team of six reviewers, as follows:

- Emeritus Professor Richard Allen
- Miss Denise Cooper
- Dr Ian Duce
- Professor Diane Meehan
- Dr Amanda Wilcox
- Miss Alyson Bird (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 5.

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

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

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

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

Key findings

QAA's judgements about De Montfort University

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

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

Good practice

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

- The extent to which the consideration of equality and diversity is explicitly embedded in curriculum design and delivery (Expectations B1, B4 and Enhancement).
- The effective deployment of Teaching Fellows in developing University strategies and delivering enhancement initiatives (Expectation B3 and Enhancement).
- The effective use of data and management information to identify, monitor and evaluate enhancement activities (Enhancement, Expectations B3, B8 and C).
- The #DMUglobal programme, which provides an international experience for students and enhances student employability (Enhancement and Expectation B4).

Recommendations

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

By October 2015:

- update written agreements with collaborative partners to define accurately responsibilities for making admissions decisions (Expectations B2 and B10).

By June 2016:

- ensure that the annual monitoring process for programmes confirms explicitly whether or not academic standards are being maintained (Expectation A3.3)
- ensure that the personal tutoring system achieves its stated objectives (Expectation B4)
- monitor formally and systematically the timeliness of assessment feedback (Expectation B6).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The steps being taken to record and monitor formally the training and development undertaken by staff involved in the admission of students (Expectation B2).
- The action being taken to improve the consistency and effectiveness of student engagement across the University (Expectation B5).

Theme: Student Employability

Employability is a strategic priority for De Montfort University and it employs a number of innovative initiatives geared towards enhancing students' employability skills. These opportunities are embedded both into the curriculum and the broader student learning experience. Innovations in this area include the international learning experiences delivered through the #DMUglobal programme, volunteering opportunities within the local community, internships for current students and recent graduates, and an online service providing comprehensive careers guidance. Students engaged in these initiatives report positive experiences and there have been improvements in employment rates upon graduation.

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

About De Montfort University

De Montfort University (DMU; the University) was originally founded as the Leicester School of Art in 1870, and has since evolved through a number of precursor institutions, coming into existence in its current form in 1992, when it obtained degree awarding powers. DMU's mission is to be a university of 'quality and distinctiveness', and this vision is underpinned by a set of guiding principles operationalised through its Strategic Plan 2011-15.

At the time of the review DMU had some 23,000 students and 2,780 staff. The University now operates from a single campus based in the city of Leicester. It also delivers its awards through a network of 23 UK and international partner organisations.

DMU's academic provision is organised into four faculties, each headed by a Dean (Pro Vice-Chancellor), and supported by a Faculty Executive comprising key roles, including a Head of Studies and Head of Quality. The University operates a model whereby most responsibilities are devolved to faculties, with institutional oversight through a central Department of Academic Quality. The Academic Board is ultimately responsible for all academic matters, carrying out its responsibilities through a number of subcommittees. Equivalent structures exist at faculty level, with oversight through faculty academic committees reporting directly to the Academic Board.

Since its last QAA review in 2009, the University has been through a period of significant change. A new Vice-Chancellor was appointed in 2010, followed by a number of new appointments to the senior management team. Since then, the University has reviewed and subsequently made changes to both its management and deliberative structures, with a view to improving efficiency and ensuring long-term financial sustainability. This includes establishing an Executive Board to shape the University's strategic direction in light of external changes in the higher education environment. In 2011, two faculties were merged to rationalise provision in the areas of art, design and the humanities. The University has withdrawn from a range of distributed campuses and consolidated its provision into a single site in the centre of Leicester. At the time of the review significant investment was underway to redevelop this campus.

DMU has also revised its strategy for collaborative provision, with greater emphasis now being placed on growing regional partnerships in the UK. The latest development in this area is the University's collaboration with Oxford International Education Group to establish Leicester International Pathway College. The College is located on the DMU campus and offers pathway programmes to support international students in gaining entry onto the University's Bachelor's and Master's degrees. In parallel to this new development, the University has withdrawn from some of its existing partnerships.

While many of the changes to DMU's structure and strategies appear to have taken place in fairly quick succession to one another, there is evidence that these were carefully considered and planned, with minimal disruption to the student learning experience. In fact, many of the recent changes, along with newly introduced initiatives for improving employability, have contributed to the enhancement of learning opportunities for students.

DMU recognises the key challenges it faces in continuing to enhance its provision, which include: recruiting students in an increasingly competitive market following the removal of student number controls; strengthening the quality of the intake; and growing its UK and international student numbers.

DMU's previous QAA review resulted in a positive outcome, with four features of good practice and five recommendations. The present review team found that the University has generally taken effective action in addressing the recommendations, and further embedding the areas of good practice, from the previous review. Many of the recommendations related to either the University's postgraduate research degrees or collaborative provision. Since the last review DMU has established a central Graduate School to support students enrolled on a research degree, and improvements continue to be made to this area of its provision (see Expectation B11). With regard to collaborative provision, the various models of operation are now clearly defined and documented and a register of all partnerships is maintained. Changes have also been made to the deliberative committee structure to achieve better oversight of awards delivered through partners (see Expectation B10).

Explanation of the findings about De Montfort University

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

1.1 The qualifications awarded by DMU are aligned to *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) in terms of the level and naming of the qualifications, alignment of programme outcomes to level descriptors and the way in which qualifications are awarded. This information is set out in the University's academic regulations and in the Code of Practice for Research Degree Students.

1.2 DMU uses a range of reference points in the design, development and approval of its programmes of study. These include the FHEQ; Subject Benchmark Statements; Qualification Characteristics Statements; the Higher Education Credit Framework for England (HECF); and professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) requirements. The use of the HECF in the design and development of programmes is highlighted in University regulations and in guidance provided to programme developers. The regulations also articulate the relationship between the HECF and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System.

1.3 The review team reviewed regulations for taught and research programmes, guidance relating to programme development, reports from programme validation, revalidation and periodic review events, and external examiner reports. The team also met a range of staff and students across faculties.

1.4   Adherence to the FHEQ is checked as part of the approval and validation of programmes, the process for which is clearly documented. Validation reports confirm explicitly that programme outcomes are aligned to the FHEQ. Subject Benchmark Statements are used during programme design, development and approval, and this is also recorded at validation. Information regarding external reference points is captured in programme templates, which are the definitive programme record.

1.5   Ongoing alignment with external reference points is achieved through the review and revalidation of programmes. External examiner reports confirm that threshold academic standards have been met and that the achievements of students are comparable with those in other UK higher education institutions; through their reports, external examiners also comment on external reference points and, if appropriate, PSRB requirements.

1.6   DMU has systems in place to consider, communicate and respond to updates to external reference points, and the evidence demonstrates that it keeps up with developments relating to academic standards and regulatory frameworks through its external networks. Staff confirmed that this information is then cascaded down to them via a number of mechanisms, including through committees, by key staff such as heads of schools, and through a number of the guides made available on the DMU website, which they described as useful and up to date.

1.7   The review team found that the policies and procedures in place to ensure alignment with the FHEQ and other relevant external reference points are appropriate and applied effectively. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.8   DMU sets out its approach to quality management in its Academic Quality Policy based on the principle of applying risk-based, transparent and proportionate quality assurance processes. While the Department of Academic Quality retains institutional oversight of quality assurance where appropriate, responsibility for certain processes is devolved to faculties. The University's academic framework comprises regulations for all taught and research programmes, and there is a consistent award calculation system. Additional requirements, such as those of PSRBs, are approved at validation and monitored by University-level management committees for undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes. Regulations are reviewed and reapproved annually by the Academic Board, and are made available on the DMU website.

1.9   Academic Board has ultimate responsibility for setting and maintaining academic standards with specific functions delegated to its subcommittees, including the Academic Quality Committee, University Research and Innovation Committee, and Academic Admissions Committee. Faculty academic committees are directly responsible to the Academic Board for assuring the quality and standards of the faculty's undergraduate and postgraduate taught provision. The Academic Board and its subcommittees are reviewed biannually for the effectiveness of their operation. The academic functions of the University are separate from business and development functions; the latter are governed by the Executive Board and its associated committees.

1.10   The review team reviewed the Academic Quality Policy, the University's regulations for taught and research programmes, and the minutes of relevant committees at both University and faculty levels. The review team also met a range of staff and students who are members of the committees that make up the University's governance structure.

1.11   DMU's comprehensive academic regulations outline its qualifications, the volume and level of credit, assessment processes used to demonstrate the achievement of learning outcomes, mark descriptors, requirements for progression between levels, and the criteria for making an award. A revised degree classification was introduced from the 2011-12 academic year and modified in 2012-13. Staff the review team met commented that the revised system more closely aligned with the rest of the UK higher education sector, but that it was difficult to differentiate its impact from other changes that had been introduced simultaneously, such as revised entry criteria. Some, but not all, students the team met confirmed that they were aware of the changes.

1.12   DMU made changes to its committee structure in 2012-13, when the Academic Quality and Standards Committee was replaced by the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee, and a separate subcommittee for oversight of collaborative provision was reintroduced. From 2014-15, following a further review of the committee structure, the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee was separated into two committees, of which one, the Academic Quality Committee, reports to the Academic Board. The rationale for the latter was to enable better emphasis to be placed on matters relating to learning and teaching, while ensuring the business of each committee is manageable. Staff the review team met considered the new structure to be more effective and efficient in fulfilling the

University's function of quality assurance and enhancement. While the review team is satisfied, through a review of committee minutes, that there is a sufficiently robust framework in place to govern the award of academic credit, it is too early to comment on the impact and effectiveness of these recent changes.

1.13   DMU delegates responsibility for the management of quality, as appropriate, to faculties. The review team explored in meetings with staff how institutional oversight of devolved responsibilities is maintained to ensure consistent application of University processes. Staff cited a number of examples of how this is achieved, including: through the academic framework that defines any permitted flexibility; upward and downward reporting through committees and via key role holders such as faculty heads of quality; and through staff from Student and Academic Services attending, for example, assessment boards.

1.14   The review team found that DMU has in place an accessible and comprehensive academic framework and regulations, which appropriately govern the award of credit and qualifications. A number of mechanisms are in place to ensure oversight of those responsibilities devolved to faculties, and any permitted flexibility in the application of processes is defined. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A2.2): 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

1.15   Programme templates provide DMU's definitive record of programmes for staff, students and other stakeholders. Templates contain information about the available awards as well as programme aims, characteristics, level, structure, learning outcomes, and where applicable information relating to PSRBs. The programme template references the FHEQ and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. Information about the modules that make up a programme is captured in module templates, which outline the credit value, module syllabus, learning outcomes, and assessment methods and weightings.

1.16   Programme and module templates are part of the documentary requirements for approval and validation, and are reviewed through the University's monitoring and review procedures. Templates may also be amended via DMU's curriculum modification process. Minor modifications are considered and approved at faculty level, with more major changes requiring a programme to be revalidated.

1.17   Programme and module templates are stored on a version-controlled database, which feeds into the student records database, populates programme and module handbooks for students, and provides information for the Higher Education Achievement Report.

1.18   The review team scrutinised a number of programme and module templates; considered reports from validation, revalidation and periodic review events; and reviewed the minutes of relevant faculty committees. The team also met senior staff, academic staff and students.

1.19   Staff confirmed that module templates are their first point of reference for delivery and assessment of the module, and that programme templates provide staff and students with the definitive overview of each programme. The information provided in these templates is captured for students in module and programme handbooks. Students the review team met spoke positively about the clarity and usefulness of the information provided, including in relation to learning outcomes and assessment requirements.

1.20   Conventions in the FHEQ are clearly articulated within DMU's academic regulations, confirmed through approval, validation and review processes, and modifications to templates are operated in accordance with stated requirements. However, the review team noted that in a few of the sample programme templates both the old and the more recent nomenclature relating to FHEQ levels are used interchangeably.

1.21   Programme templates provide a definitive record of each programme. Module and programme templates are considered through DMU's approval, validation and review processes, and there is an appropriate process in place for amendments to be made. Templates are made available directly to staff, and for students the information from templates is translated into module and programme handbooks. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

Expectation (A3.1): 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

1.22   DMU adopts a risk-based approach to validation to ensure that the appropriate level of scrutiny is given to each proposal. The criteria for determining the level of risk and the consequent level of scrutiny are defined in the Guide to Validation. This Guide also articulates the processes for programme approval, and sets out the documentary requirements, the criteria against which provision will be tested and the possible outcomes available to approval panels. The approval process includes externality in the form of external panel members selected for their subject expertise.

1.23   The approval process is designed to ensure that programmes are situated at the appropriate level of the FHEQ, that learning outcomes are appropriately articulated and aligned, and that credit is linked to programmes and modules in accordance with the Higher Education Credit Framework for England. Subject Benchmark Statements and level descriptors are referenced throughout the design and approval stages where appropriate.

1.24   Responsibility for validation and revalidation of programmes delivered at DMU is devolved to faculties, with oversight by the faculty Head of Quality. However, the validation of provision delivered by collaborative partners is managed centrally by the Educational Partnerships Team, which is part of the Department of Academic Quality, in recognition of the potential additional risks associated with work of this kind. This team also manages the validation of provision approved through the DMU's Validation Service. This latter is used in situations where DMU does not have provision in a cognate subject area or where there is related provision and the faculty does not wish to collaborate but the University is still willing to validate.

1.25   Strategic oversight for programme approval resides with the Pro Vice-Chancellor (PVC) Teaching and Learning, with committee oversight provided by the Academic Quality Committee, a subcommittee of the Academic Board, in the case of programmes delivered at DMU and the University Collaborative Provision Committee, a subcommittee of the Academic Quality Committee, for collaborative provision.

1.26   The review team tested the operation of approval processes by examining the guidance on programme approval, considering the guidance for validation panels, reviewing the documentation required for programme approval, sampling approval reports, and through dialogue with DMU and partner staff.

1.27   Undergraduate and postgraduate programmes at DMU are modular, and programme and module templates form the basis of documentation presented to validation panels. Templates set out academic structures, including learning outcomes and assessment. An outcome map is also produced for each programme, which explains how the programme level learning outcomes are reflected in the individual modules studied.

1.28   The review team reviewed a range of validation and re-validation submission documents that accorded with the documentary requirements articulated in the Guide to Validation. Documentation presented to validation panels as part of programme approval is

sufficiently detailed in defining threshold academic standards of the award. Subsequently, reports of programme validation events confirm that academic standards are appropriate to the type and level of qualification being considered for approval.

1.29   The review team found that DMU has approval processes that are fit for purpose in securing academic standards, and that there is consistent and effective adherence to these processes. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.30   DMU assures itself that taught awards are made on the basis of appropriate achievement of learning outcomes and matching UK threshold standards through its process for programme approval, which gives due consideration to the design of assessment during the validation stage. Once a programme is offered to students, the University seeks to assure itself that standards are being met and that assessment is appropriate to the learning outcomes through its use of external examiners and through processes of periodic review. The University's regulations stipulate the processes for the award of academic credit, including in relation to reassessment opportunities, progression between levels and the recognition of prior learning.

1.31   Assurance that standards are being met in relation to research degrees operates in a similar way. Generic learning outcomes are set out in the DMU Code of Practice for Research Degree Students, and these determine the direction of a student's study and research. Students are registered initially on the Doctoral Researcher Programme and only after successful further assessment are they transferred registration for a particular award. External examiners are involved in determining the outcome of the final examination.

1.32   In testing DMU's approach to meeting this Expectation, the review team reviewed programme approval documentation, reports of validation events, periodic reviews and of external examiners. The team also met senior, academic and support staff, including both those responsible for quality within faculties and those based in the central Department of Academic Quality.

1.33   New programmes, including those offered through partnerships, are developed in programme teams, but then put forward for approval through a validation process. To gain approval for submission to the validation panel, proposers must set out academic structures, including learning outcomes and assessment in the documents. The thoroughness of documentation in this process, taken with the discussions, ensures that assessment is explicitly linked to appropriate learning outcomes and attainment standards considered by the University as appropriate to the award, and this is endorsed by the external panel member chosen for their subject expertise.

1.34   DMU expects all staff involved in assessment to undergo training and adhere to published procedures for assessment. Teaching and assessment methods figure in initial briefings for staff entirely new to teaching, and inexperienced staff must complete a Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education. There are also regular staff development opportunities linked to teaching.

1.35   Assessment decisions are made in accordance with predefined assessment criteria. Consistency and fairness in marking is achieved through internal and external moderation processes. Decisions on progression and awards are made through the application of a

standard algorithm, and confirmed at assessment boards operating at programme, subject or faculty level. External examiners are involved in assessment decisions to assure that University awards are made appropriately. Their reports and other evidence are used in the annual review of modules and programmes. Periodic review provides a more wide-ranging opportunity to check that learning outcomes remain appropriate and that assessment is linked to those outcomes.

1.36   DMU is similarly scrupulous in assuring that assessment in research degrees is linked to appropriate learning outcomes, and appropriate standards. An independent assessor from within the University is involved in the formal review process. Supervisors must satisfy the University of their competence and undergo training before appointment. Secure processes are in place for the final examination, including the independent judgement of an external examiner.

1.37   The review team found that DMU operates a sufficiently robust framework for managing the assessment of programmes to ensure academic credit is only awarded on the basis of achievement of relevant learning outcomes and the securing of appropriate threshold standards. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3.3): 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

1.38   DMU has in place processes conducted annually and periodically that are designed to ensure that all programmes are delivered according to the approved programme template, and that academic currency and threshold standards are maintained.

1.39   Annual monitoring of modules and programmes is conducted via module enhancement plans and programme enhancement plans. Both elements of annual monitoring use standard reporting templates, which require reflection on key monitoring information and other indicators of quality, including internal data, results of the National Student Survey (NSS), outcomes from the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey, student feedback and external examiner reports.

1.40   Enhancement plans for modules and programmes are completed by module and programme leaders respectively, and reviewed at programme management boards (PMBs). Themes emerging from programme enhancement plans are summarised for upward reporting through faculty summary reports, considered by the Faculty Academic Committee, and an annual institutional-level report considered by the Academic Quality Committee. Programme enhancement plans are also produced by partner organisations for collaborative provision and submitted for review by the relevant PMB or the Validation Service.

1.41   DMU has a periodic review process that considers clusters of cognate programmes on a six-year cycle. This involves a risk-based approach, which is codified in the Guide to Periodic Review, in addition to describing the documentary requirements, panel composition, approval criteria, approval outcomes and follow-up arrangements. The purpose of periodic review is to ensure that intended learning outcomes remain valid, and to assess the extent to which intended learning outcomes are being met and standards attained, taking account of relevant external reference points.

1.42   The review team reviewed the guidance documentation for periodic review, the self-evaluation documents presented to periodic review panels, and a sample of reports of review events. In relation to the annual monitoring process, the team scrutinised a sample of module enhancement plans and programme enhancement plans along with the papers and minutes of associated PMBs. The review team met staff that are involved in annual review, those who had taken a programme through periodic review and those involved in the management and oversight of processes for programme review.

1.43   Programme enhancement plans take the form of a concise action plan, with much of the narrative taking place through PMBs. The review team understood both from a review of programme enhancement plans and from discussions with staff that the annual monitoring process is an enhancement-led exercise with the focus placed on the enhancement of the provision and the identification of good practice. Staff the team met confirmed that the programme enhancement plan is used as a living document that, while providing a snapshot in time of the health of the programme, is supplemented by the holistic view of the

programme provided by the PMB's reflections throughout the year of a variety of quantitative and qualitative information.

1.44   Staff involved in oversight of the annual monitoring process confirmed that the process, while enhancement focused, also served as a quality assurance tool and is instrumental in ensuring threshold standards. Programme enhancement plans require staff to consider external examiner reports and other relevant data, however, there is no explicit statement emerging from the annual monitoring process that either explains that UK threshold standards are being considered or indeed confirmed. While the review team is assured that the University checks it is maintaining academic standards through external examiners and through discussions of the programme enhancement plan at PMBs, the absence of an explicit statement can leave the University without a secure record that UK threshold standards are being considered in annual monitoring. The review team therefore **recommends** that the University ensure that the annual monitoring process for programmes confirms explicitly whether or not academic standards are being maintained.

1.45   Periodic review is undertaken by a panel, which includes an external member selected for their subject expertise. The documentation presented at review includes programme templates, allowing panels to check that programmes are delivered in accordance with these templates. The reports of review events record a confidence statement of quality and standards, and continued alignment with the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements. Programmes delivered by partners are subject to the same processes.

1.46   The review team found that through the operation of its monitoring and review processes DMU checks that academic standards are being maintained. The review team concludes therefore the Expectation is met. However, the lack of an explicit reference to academic standards in the annual monitoring process, poses a moderate risk to this area as there is a potential for threshold standards to be overlooked.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

1.47   DMU's programme approval and review processes allow for external and independent expertise to be taken into account in both the setting and maintenance of academic standards. The Guide to Validation indicates that those preparing proposals are required to consult external opinion, for example PSRBs, industrial liaison committees, and external examiners. Proposals for new programmes are expected to include the advice of an external subject matter expert through membership of the validation panel. External experts are also appointed to periodic review panels. The University has established processes for the appointment and involvement of external examiners in providing ongoing assurance that academic standards are being maintained. Annual and periodic review processes require staff to reflect on the reports of external examiners and respond to identified actions.

1.48   The review team reviewed University guidance on programme validation and review, records of programme validation and periodic review events, programme enhancement plans and a sample of external examiner reports. The team met a range of staff and employers that work with DMU.

1.49   There is evidence that DMU makes appropriate use of external expertise in programme design and approval. Employers the review team met indicated that they felt the University was keen to have their input and ready to develop proposals to match their professional needs. Validation panels include members within DMU but external to the originating faculty, and members external to the University. The sample of documentation submitted to a validation panel also includes external examiner reports from a previous cognate subject area. Similarly, periodic review of taught programmes involves external expertise, both through the appointment of external members to the panel and through evidence from external examiners. In these ways, DMU clearly takes external opinion into account in the development of the curriculum.

1.50   A review of a sample of external examiner reports confirms that examiners are required to comment on academic standards. DMU makes systematic use of the feedback provided by examiners through its annual monitoring process, and actions are responded to with the required degree of urgency. There is also appropriate involvement of external examiners in decisions on awards for taught programmes and research degrees. In the case of taught provision, external examiners are expected to go beyond involvement in the assessment board and engage with more general aspects of the development of their programme, and learning and teaching, and there is clear evidence that the University is successful in achieving this engagement.

1.51   Overall, it is clear that DMU uses external opinion as part of its processes for assuring academic standards in its programmes and its awards. The review team concludes that Expectation is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

1.52   In reaching its judgement about academic standards, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All Expectations in this area are met and the level of risk is low in all but one case. The exception is Expectation A3.3 where a moderate risk was identified, and the team also made a recommendation relating to the need for the annual monitoring process to confirm explicitly whether or not academic standards are being maintained. The review team is fully satisfied that, in practice, academic standards are considered through the annual review of programmes but is of the view that this needs to be clearly documented to reduce the potential risk for academic standards to be overlooked. The risk is considered to be moderate as, while the process for annual monitoring is broadly adequate, there is a lack of emphasis on quality assurance in the resulting documentation. The review team concludes that the setting and maintenance of the academic standards 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 DMU's processes for giving due consideration to the quality of learning opportunities in programme design, development and approval are the same as those described in paragraphs 1.22 to 1.25.

2.2 The review team tested the operation and effectiveness of DMU's processes in meeting this Expectation through a review of documentation from each stage of the programme approval process and minutes of relevant committees. The review team also met senior staff; academic staff, including those from collaborative partners; support staff; students; and employer representatives to explore how these processes are implemented in practice.

2.3 New programme proposals, which are submitted using a standard pro forma are considered first at faculty level via the programme management boards and then by the Faculty Development and Review Committee. Minutes of the latter provide evidence of rigorous consideration of proposals to assess market and financial viability. Proposals are then considered at institutional level via the Undergraduate Management Committee or the Postgraduate Programme Management Committee, both subcommittees of the Academic Quality Committee, that are empowered to consider and approve new programme proposals to proceed to validation.

2.4 DMU also operates a fast-track scrutiny process for provision that allows the University to be swifter in its deliberation of new proposals. Instances where programmes might be considered via this route include provision that is driven by employer requirements or where there is a strategic imperative. Fast-track proposals are considered first within the faculty and signed off by the Dean on behalf of the Faculty Executive, before final permission to proceed to validation is confirmed by the PVC Teaching and Learning following the advice of the Department of Academic Quality. The review team found sufficient evidence to support the University's claim that, while the fast-track process reduces the need for the proposal to go through the usual committee structures, there is no lessening of either the process to scrutinise the initial request or subsequent consideration of the proposal at the validation stage, where DMU's standard criteria apply.

2.5 The Guide to Validation signposts curriculum developers to relevant internal and external reference points. DMU and partner staff described access to a range of online materials and face-to-face support at faculty and institutional level that provided them with the tools to undertake curriculum design and development, including regular updates on external reference points, including the Quality Code.

2.6 Where it is practical DMU will undertake joint events with PSRBs or accrediting bodies. Industrial liaison and stakeholder meetings operate where appropriate and inform curriculum design. The review team met a range of employers who described examples of

active and full contribution to curriculum design that ensured industry, employer or PSRB requirements were explicitly fed into the process.

2.7 During both the planning and curriculum design phases, teams are required to consider the programme against a set of equality prompts, a process designed to act as a tool to ensure that teams explicitly take account of equality, diversity and inclusion when designing programmes and individual components of study. An assessment is undertaken by a trained equality reviewer, who provides written feedback to the curriculum design team, identifying areas for further reflection or enhancement. Validation reports include a statement that the programme and its components show an awareness of equality issues. In some of the reports made available to the review team, this statement was amplified with more detailed discussions that evidenced the panel's engagement with equality and diversity. The review team considers the extent to which the consideration of equality and diversity is explicitly embedded in curriculum design and delivery as **good practice**.

2.8 DMU provides training for chairs and members of panels, and makes available supplementary guidance for both staff and student panel members. Students the team met confirmed that while formal training had not always been available, they were well supported to undertake the role and were made to feel like equal and valued members of panels.

2.9 Validation reports provide a detailed record of approval events, including any conditions and recommendations. The Faculty Academic Committee, and for collaborative provision the Faculty Collaborative Provision Committee, monitors the outcomes of validation. Reports from events are submitted to the Academic Quality Committee and University Collaborative Provision Committee for endorsement. The Department of Academic Quality publishes a Notification of Approval of New Programmes, which is circulated within the University confirming programme approval.

2.10 DMU programmes that are successfully validated are normally granted perpetual approval subject to the normal processes of periodic review and do not require revalidation at fixed periods. In the case of collaborative provision, a fixed term of approval is granted, initially for three years and subsequently for five to coincide with institutional review of the partner.

2.11 An annual Validation Overview Report prepared by the Department of Academic Quality, which includes both data and qualitative reflections on any emerging themes and recommendations for enhancements, is submitted to the Academic Quality Committee. DMU last reviewed its validation process in 2012-13, which resulted in the current risk-based approach to validation.

2.12 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low. The University's priority given to embedding equality and diversity into the curriculum during the design and approval stages is particularly noteworthy.

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

Expectation (B2): Recruitment, selection and admission policies and procedures adhere to the principles of fair admission. They are transparent, reliable, valid, inclusive and underpinned by appropriate organisational structures and processes. They support higher education providers in the selection of students who are able to complete their programme.

Quality Code, *Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education*

Findings

2.13   DMU sets outs its processes for admissions, including for complaints and appeals, in the Student Admissions Policy for taught programmes, and in its Code of Practice for Research Degree Students for postgraduate research provision. The University draws on the guidelines set out by external bodies, including the Supporting Professionalism in Admissions Programme. Applications for admissions are processed in line with DMU's Equality and Diversity Policy and staff involved in decision making are expected to undertake relevant training. Information on admissions and entry criteria is made available to prospective and current students through the DMU website, prospectus, guides and handbooks. There is a process for the regular review of the Student Admissions Policy, via the Academic Admissions Committee (for taught programmes) and the Research Degrees Committee (for postgraduate research programmes). Any amendments to the Policy are approved by the Academic Board.

2.14   The Academic Admissions Committee ensures the consistent application of policy and process across the University and reports directly to the Academic Board. DMU has also recently established the Recruitment, Admissions, Fees and Scholarships Committee, which reports to the Executive Board and is intended to provide a strategic steer and oversight of the annual recruitment strategy. A further subcommittee has been introduced to focus more specifically on postgraduate research recruitment.

2.15   The review team tested the operation and effectiveness of the University's processes for the admission, recruitment and selection of students through a review of its policies and procedures in this area. The team also met academic and support staff involved in admissions, those with oversight of admissions, and with a range of students. These meetings involved both staff and students at DMU and at partner organisations.

2.16   Entry criteria for admission to programmes are approved at the point of validation and then reviewed on an annual basis. DMU maintains a qualification equivalencies database to ensure equitability and consistency in its application of entry criteria. Processes for the recognition of prior learning (RPL) for the purpose of gaining entry to a programme are clearly outlined in the Student Admissions Policy, and there is appropriate reference to the academic regulations for the maximum credit that can be awarded through RPL.

2.17   The DMU website contains comprehensive information about programmes, including information regarding programme structure, content and assessment, and opportunities for work experience and placements. DMU also hosts regular recruitment and selection events, including tailored virtual events for postgraduate and international students through the University website. Arrangements for discontinued programmes and any changes to programmes are detailed within the Student Admissions Policy and students are guided through any available options.

2.18   The Admissions Division is primarily responsible for the operational implementation of the Student Admissions Policy; applications for postgraduate research programmes are

handled separately by dedicated staff in the Graduate School Office, with appropriate oversight at faculty level. Decisions that require additional selection methods, such as interviews, are undertaken by selected admissions tutors in the relevant subject area. Academic staff the review team met commented on the close interaction with centrally based support staff and the helpful guidance available to them in undertaking their role.

2.19   DMU provides both compulsory and ongoing training and briefings for all those involved in recruitment, including overseas agents. The specific programme of training each staff member is required to undertake is determined according to their roles and responsibilities. The review team was assured that there is appropriate oversight of arrangements for training by the relevant line manager to ensure that only those individuals that have completed mandatory training are able to make admissions decisions. However, formal records of training and staff development are less clear and the University is addressing this through the development of a detailed matrix to log activity in this area and to support the identification of individual personal development needs. The review team **affirms** the steps being taken to record and monitor formally the training and development undertaken by staff involved in the admission of students at the University.

2.20   Responsibilities for admitting students through partner organisations are stipulated in the contract for each partner. The review team found two examples where contracts indicate that DMU is responsible for making admissions decisions but in practice these are undertaken by partner staff, but with appropriate oversight by the University. Meetings with staff suggest that as relationships with these long-term partners have matured, staff at partner organisations have been given increased responsibility for admissions. DMU maintains close dialogue with its partners through link tutors and support staff based in central teams to ensure admissions are handled in accordance with University processes. While the review team is satisfied that partner staff are competent to fulfil their role in making admissions decisions, and that they are appropriately supported and monitored by DMU, there is a need to ensure that contracts with partners reflect actual practice. The review team **recommends** that the University update written agreements with collaborative partners to define accurately responsibilities for making admissions decisions.

2.21   The review team found that, overall, DMU's policies and procedures in meeting this Expectation are effective. The team acknowledges the action being taken by the University to maintain better records of training for admissions staff. The single recommendation in this area relates to a need to update documentation, which, in the view of the team, poses a low risk to the quality of learning opportunities. Therefore, 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

2.22   Strategic and operational management of teaching and learning at faculty level is the responsibility of faculty academic committees, faculty learning and teaching committees, and programme management boards (PMBs). DMU maintains effective oversight of these devolved activities through the Academic Quality Committee, reporting to the Academic Board, and the University Learning and Teaching Committee. Through these mechanisms, DMU implements and monitors the delivery of the eight goals defined in the University Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy (ULTAS).

2.23   Tasks which arise through the implementation of the ULTAS requiring management of change are referred to the Strategic Portfolio Management Programme (SPMP) for action through its Teaching and Learning Theme Board. This mechanism enables delivery of projects with specific start and end dates and identified resources. DMU has a clear vision of the relationship between the work of its deliberative committees and the SPMP.

2.24   DMU provides two libraries, as well as group study, quiet study and silent study learning areas managed by the Library and Learning Services (LLS), which have carried out an assessment of current usage and articulated a strategy looking forward to 2020. The LLS also have responsibility for electronic learning resources, including the virtual learning environment (VLE) for supporting teaching and learning, as well as a variety of other resources, many of which are brought together and supported by the Centre for Enhancing Learning Through Technology (CELT). The CELT underpins one of the core goals of the ULTAS, and delivery involves project officers in faculties who are CELT team members and carry out the task of supporting staff and students.

2.25   Academic staff are supported in their professional development through a range of career development activities, with responsibility shared as a partnership between the central Learning and Development Team and each faculty. DMU has recently developed and introduced the Define Scheme, which is a Higher Education Academy accredited career development pathway aligned with the UK Professional Standards Framework. Teaching and learning activities are also addressed for individual teaching staff through their Annual Development Review; explicit criteria are published laying out the levels of performance in teaching activities to enable staff to achieve promotion at all grades including Professor.

2.26   The review team reviewed strategies and strategic projects, action plans, committee minutes and policies, and viewed online resources. The review team also spoke to senior staff, students, academic staff and professional support staff, both at DMU and its partner organisations, as well as a panel of employers.

2.27   DMU has implemented a number of projects through its Teaching and Learning Theme Board, and although many of these are at an early stage, the review team found that staff were aware of their work, and, in particular in the area of enhancing learning through technology, there was evidence that the project approach was able to deliver on key principles of DMU strategy.

2.28   DMU has recently refined its data management systems and now delivers management information to schools through data visualisation software to enable staff in faculties and collaborative partners to monitor student progress and develop their learning and teaching activities more effectively. Staff spoke enthusiastically about the value of reports generated through the new software in facilitating their work, and were complimentary about the training they had received and the opportunities that they had been given to contribute to the design of the interface. Staff at partner organisations were aware of the data reports and expressed a positive view of its potential value when the software becomes fully available to them.

2.29   Students regarded the VLE as an important resource for programme and module information, and in some cases as a vehicle for communication, and DMU regards it as one of its core electronic learning technologies. Although the review team was able to see many examples of VLE module shells with a wide range of useful resources, some students reported that some modules were less well supported than others. The team found that, overall, the University has a well developed electronic learning strategy, which makes good use of the VLE and other related technologies.

2.30   DMU uses several mechanisms to consider the views of students and academic staff with regard to provision of learning resources, including formal questionnaires such as the NSS and library surveys. The review team saw evidence that LLS representatives attend faculty and University academic committees, where they contribute to strategic and operational decisions. The student submission states that the physical learning environment at DMU generally meets their expectations, which was a view also supported by students whom the review team met during the review visit.

2.31   DMU actively promotes opportunities and encourages its staff to apply for Teaching Fellowships, both through the National Teaching Fellowships and DMU Teaching Fellows schemes. The review team learnt that Teaching Fellows: meet regularly to share ideas, and are active in mentoring other staff; are pivotal in developing new initiatives in pedagogy and student support; promote current strategy and procedures; and are engaged by the University in the development of its new ULTAS. In the view of the review team, the effective deployment of Teaching Fellows in developing University strategies and delivering enhancement initiatives is **good practice**.

2.32   Students have the opportunity to engage in the development of their learning through representation on committees at University, faculty and programme level. Students are able to provide feedback through staff student consultative committees, and module and programme level surveys, as well as external surveys such as the NSS. The review team saw clear evidence that this information was reported at PMBs and monitored through programme enhancement plans, ultimately informing planning at University level.

2.33   The review team found that DMU has in place effective arrangements for learning and teaching, and in particular makes good use of staff that are Teaching Fellows in initiatives directed towards enhancing this area further. Consequently, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.34   DMU lays out its principal commitments for enabling student development and achievement in the Student Charter alongside the responsibilities expected of students. The University defines its framework for student support in a number of strategies, policies and guidelines, and describes its implementation as institutionally driven with operational responsibilities devolved to faculties.

2.35   In reviewing the University's approach to meeting this Expectation, the review team examined policy and strategy documents, and tested their operation in meetings with senior staff, academic staff, support staff and students.

2.36   Policies and practices are systematically reviewed to ensure that they meet the needs of the whole student body. The review team regarded the assiduous and transparent use of equality impact assessments of student support services, the application of equality review to new programmes and the application of equality prompts during the validation and review process as exemplary (see feature of good practice under Expectation B1).

2.37   Students access centralised academic and non-academic support via the Library and Learning Services and the Student Gateway, operated by Student and Academic Services (SAAS). DMU has recently launched an impressive online equivalent service, MyGateway, through which students are able to learn about available support, book appointments and access services. Undergraduate and postgraduate students based at DMU spoke positively about the available support.

2.38   A number of student services, including support for disability, work-based learning, employability and careers, are based in faculties but report to SAAS via a hub and spoke model. Students the review team met confirmed that this model was accessible and delivered the support that they expected; students at collaborative partners whom the team met were content with the levels of support they received through the partner institution.

2.39   Information is provided to students throughout their student journey from application, during their programme, and to graduation through a variety of mechanisms, including websites, handbooks and the VLE. The University internal communications plan ensures the quality of this information and examination of materials, and, in discussions with students, the review team found that student information on support services is comprehensive and fit for purpose.

2.40   Students whose learning takes them into a different learning environment such as practice, study abroad or work-based learning are provided with handbooks and other information, and placement providers are also issued with guidance brochures. This support is managed and delivered through the faculty work-based learning units; the review team heard that DMU has implemented a strategic project working towards a standardisation of these activities. and the development and expansion of work-based placements. Students reported satisfaction with the provision of support for placement learning, which was echoed by university staff and employers involved in work-based placements.

2.41   DMU identifies the key academic roles supporting student development and achievement as heads of studies, personal tutors, programme leaders and module leaders. With regard to personal tutor provision, DMU has responded to student feedback and carried

out its own review, which identified that its provision was out of line with QAA and National Union of Students expectations, and had some weaknesses in its practice. A paper summarising the findings of the review proposed to the Academic Board an upgraded university-wide personal tutor support system for introduction in the 2014-15 academic year. Implementation of the new arrangements was supported by staff training and communications to students, and is being followed up by a strategic project. Despite the implementation of the published Principles of Personal Tutoring at the start of the current academic year, students reported that tutor support remained inconsistent. Based on the available evidence, the review team is of the view that the very high student to personal tutor ratios in some areas of the provision are likely to limit the availability and effectiveness of 1:1 support for personal development and pastoral care, and perpetuate the problems of inequality leading from a largely reactive system, which was previously identified by DMU. The review team therefore **recommends** that the University ensure that the personal tutoring system achieves its stated objectives.

2.42   The employability agenda at DMU is driven by the Employability Strategy, which encompasses the work of the careers and employability team based in SAAS, with specialists located in faculties. DMU has carried out an external evaluation of its Strategy and is in the process of initiating a strategic project to take forward the University approach to student employability. As part of its strategic approach DMU has also developed a range of initiatives to develop students' employability skills, including: the Square Mile Project, Frontrunners and Graduate Champions. One particular initiative is the very ambitious #DMUglobal programme, which aims to provide international mobility for up to 50 per cent of students, and, in the view of the team, enhances student employability (see feature of good practice under Enhancement).

2.43   The review team concludes that DMU has appropriate arrangements and resources for supporting students in their personal development and achievement, and the Expectation is therefore met. The team has made a recommendation that relates to the need for some improvements to the personal tutoring system. In acknowledging that this is one of several support mechanisms available to students, and that the University recognises this as an area requiring attention, the review team considers the associated level of risk to be 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

2.44   DMU's commitment to student engagement is set out in the Student Charter. DMU identifies a range of mechanisms through which students, irrespective of their mode or location of delivery, are able to engage in university business. At an institutional level engagement is primarily through the De Montfort Students' Union (DSU) Executive attending senior deliberative committees and joint working groups set up to undertake specific enhancement initiatives. Formal representation structures are also in place to enable the collective student voice to be heard at programme, school and faculty level through elected representatives that are members of relevant committees. Equivalent arrangements exist for students at partner organisations, although the exact nature of these vary according to the size and nature of provision. Programme approval and periodic review panels also include a student member.

2.45   Individual students are able to provide feedback by responding to surveys at module and programme level, as well as sector-wide surveys such as the NSS. Informal opportunities for providing feedback also exist, for example through direct dialogue with staff or through the newly launched online portal, DMUviews. The University considers and responds to student feedback data through its programme review processes and through discussion at relevant committees.

2.46   Information on the range of opportunities available for student engagement is made available through programme and faculty handbooks, verbal briefings and through DSU-organised events. Student sabbatical officers are provided with training on their roles as university committee members as part of their induction; school and programme representatives are trained and supported locally, with guidance also available directly from the DSU and Department of Academic Quality.

2.47   In order to evaluate the consistency and effectiveness of the University's processes for engaging students the review team studied the Student Charter, information made available to students, programme enhancement plans and minutes of committees attended by student representatives. The team also met a wide range of staff and students, including those studying at collaborative partners.

2.48   It is evident that DMU has an established culture of student engagement whereby students feel encouraged and supported to provide feedback. This appears to be most effective at an executive level where the DSU is involved in determining and reviewing the impact of enhancement initiatives.

2.49   Students have representation on all university committees and there is a clearly articulated process for nomination and elections of representatives. Since the 2014-15 academic year, representatives are now nominated at school level rather than faculty level, providing a wider pool of representatives from which available students can attend faculty committees. The process is effective in providing student representation at an institutional level but less so at programme level where a significant number of representative vacancies exist. Where programme representatives are in place their attendance at programme management boards is variable. DMU has recognised this as an area for improvement and initiated a full audit of its student representation systems in the academic year 2014-15. At the time of the review the University was part way through the audit and had already

identified a number of recommendations, which it expected to address by the 2015-16 academic year. The review team **affirms** the action being taken to improve the consistency and effectiveness of student engagement across the University.

2.50　　Training for student representatives at programme and school level is centred around an annual student representative conference with a follow-up event later in the academic year. The event is well structured with relevant and interesting content, although the review team noted that approximately only a half of elected representatives attend. Handbooks are provided for representatives giving student guidance on how to approach their responsibilities and details of support contacts. The support available to representatives is being enhanced further through the development of a code of practice, which is intended to incorporate the outcomes of DMU's review of student representation.

2.51　　The review team found that appropriate arrangements exist for engaging harder to reach students such as those studying at partner organisations. There are sufficient opportunities for local engagement as well as evidence of student feedback being shared with DMU through the annual review of programmes. Postgraduate research students are engaged through the same channels as other students. Additionally, the Graduate School Office initiates regular postgraduate research forums to discuss a wide range of issues. Postgraduate research students the team met considered the channels available for providing feedback to be appropriate and effective, although some lacked awareness of the formal representation structures. The University and DSU are aware of these issues and are addressing them as part of the audit of student representation (see paragraph 2.49).

2.52　　Student feedback obtained through the various channels is used in the ongoing and annual review of programmes, and staff are required to reflect on student survey data when developing action plans for the following year. The outcomes of national surveys inform discussions at University committees. There is good evidence of DMU responding to student views and communicating the action taken in response to feedback. Examples of improvements prompted by student feedback include increased contact time with academic staff and more opportunities to undertake work placements.

2.53　　DMU celebrates student engagement through an annual awards ceremony recognising the efforts of course and school representatives, and through the Vice-Chancellor's Distinguished Students Awards. DSU events and initiatives, such as student elections and awards events, are supported by the most senior members of the DMU leadership team, including the Vice-Chancellor and PVC Teaching and Learning. The contribution of student representatives is formally acknowledged via the Higher Education Achievement Report.

2.54　　The review team found that DMU engages effectively with its student body for the purpose of assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities. DMU has identified that some improvements are needed to student engagement and the team is able to affirm the action being taken to address this. Therefore, 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

2.55   DMU has clear and comprehensive regulations that prescribe the policies and procedures governing assessment, including the recognition of prior learning, penalties for academic malpractice and the conduct of assessment boards. Similarly, regulations for postgraduate research awards are set out in the Code of Practice for Research Degree Students. Assessment design is considered from the earliest stages of the validation process for new programmes and then reviewed throughout the annual monitoring and periodic review processes, and in response to comments by external examiners. Assessment is conducted within individual programmes and modules but must follow DMU rules on, for example, anonymous marking. Processes are subject to review and audit designed to enhance effectiveness.

2.56   The Academic Board has policies and procedures for assessment within its terms of reference, and approves any amendments to University regulations. In faculties, oversight is exercised by faculty academic committees and at individual programme level through programme management boards; this includes collaborative provision managed by faculties. Programmes delivered through the University Validation Service use structures directly equivalent to those in faculties to ensure the security of assessment.

2.57   The review team considered the University's academic regulations, sample assessment briefs, module and programme handbooks, minutes of assessment boards and external examiner reports. The team also held meetings with a wide range of staff and students to explore the operation of assessment in practice.

2.58   DMU has created a strong framework for the management of the assessment of student learning, comprising: strategic plans, regulatory frameworks, and aspects of the governance structure. Thus strategic direction is set in general terms by the University Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy (ULTAS) and in more detail in the Assessment Policy. There is central oversight of assessment in which faculties are permitted a degree of flexibility but expected to devise plans within the framework of the University Strategy.

2.59   Information on assessment is provided to students in programme and module handbooks available on the University's VLE, and in more detail through assessment briefs. Students the review team met confirmed that the information was clear and enabled them to gain a sound understanding of how they would be assessed and what was expected of them to demonstrate the achievement of their learning. Students also confirmed that good academic practice was a regular topic in their teaching. Plagiarism-detection software is widely used, though not uniformly so. Cases of malpractice are dealt with in accordance with stipulated procedures, and students are made aware of these procedures through handbooks.

2.60   Clear and accessible guidance is available to those involved in assessment, including expectations around giving due regard to equality and diversity in assessment design and delivery. While DMU does not prescribe norms for the volume of assessment,

there are clearly understood rules of thumb that create reasonable consistency across modules. DMU ensures that academic staff involved in the development and the practice of assessment are competent to carry out this work by: inducting all new staff on outcome-based assessment; requiring staff without teaching experience or qualifications to study for a Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education; and delivering ongoing and informal refresher training. Recent activity has focused on the development of skills and techniques that make better use of technology.

2.61   The pacing of assessment within a programme is managed through the validation process, when programme teams must provide indicative assessment schedules. The student submission highlights some concerns around the 'bunching' of assessments. DMU is aware of these issues, which it sees as, to a degree, inevitable in the strongly modular framework of its curriculum structure, and advises students of assessment due dates at the beginning of their programmes so that they can plan ahead.

2.62   DMU has agreed principles for feedback on assessment, including a turnaround time of four weeks for providing feedback. The style and format of feedback can vary considerably across programmes and faculties, for example while one programme makes use of standard pro forma for providing feedback on exams this is not University-wide practice. However, students the review team met judged feedback to be useful and effective. The team found that while many students did receive feedback promptly this was not universally the case: for one programme only 45 per cent of graduating students reported that they received prompt feedback, while for another programme 81 per cent said they received prompt feedback. Discussions in meetings indicated that responses to late turnaround of feedback were reactive, and that DMU does not have a formal system for checking adherence to the policy. The review team **recommends** that the University monitor formally and systematically the timeliness of assessment feedback.

2.63   Student results are determined by programme-level assessment boards, which report to faculty academic committees. DMU refers to these as unitary boards, with full authority delegated from the Academic Board. The constitution of assessment boards is defined in University regulations; this includes principles determining membership and a specific quorum (set low with the effect that a board can almost always take place). Beyond that, faculty academic committees define membership as considered appropriate to the subject area. In the example assessment board minutes provided, the faculties set quite large membership, and perhaps because of this, though all prescribed categories were represented at the meeting, overall attendance was less than 50 per cent. Decisions on progression and awards are made using a prescribed algorithm, which ensures the security of assessment. Quality of process is assured by the presence at all boards of staff trained in assessment board processes from Student and Academic Services. DMU is confident of its processes and the review team saw no evidence of inappropriate decisions, however, more regular statistical analysis and a review of trends and oversight by a senior member of the Academic Board would further strengthen this confidence.

2.64   The review team saw evidence of institutional reflection on assessment matters by the University. At the highest level this is embodied in the iteration of the ULTAS and the Assessment Policy. The extension of anonymous marking to coursework provides an example of action as a result of this reflection. DMU has also recently reviewed the basis on which honours degree classification was decided, and as a result is now moving towards a system in which level 6 credit is more heavily weighted and level 5 credit correspondingly less weighted.

2.65   Overall, the review team judges that through developing assessment literacy among staff and students, and through the operation of proper systems for the design, conduct and marking of assessment DMU enables students to demonstrate their

achievement. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met.
The recommendation in this area relates to developing a more formal system for checking the timeliness with which feedback on assessment is provided, and in the view of the team poses a low risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External Examining*

Findings

2.66   DMU sets out the role of external examiners in its academic regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Students, and requires that all assessment and examination boards include at least one external examiner. Full guidance on policy and procedures for external examining are contained in the comprehensive Guide to External Examining, maintained by the Department of Academic Quality and reissued annually. The Guide also sets out the person specification used by DMU, guidance on conflicts of interest, term of office and arrangements for collaborative provision. There is a plain intention in the document to directly match the Quality Code.

2.67   For taught provision, faculties nominate external examiners; these are approved by the External Examiner and Reviewer Appointments Committee, a subcommittee of the Academic Quality Committee. For postgraduate research provision, appointments are approved by the relevant faculty Head of Research Students and the Director of the Graduate School, with oversight from the University Research Degrees Committee.

2.68   External examiners report their findings informally to programme teams, and formally through minutes of assessment boards and the reports they are required to produce. These reports are reviewed (either directly or in summarised form) at a number of levels in faculty and university committees.

2.69   The review team tested the University's system for external examining by reviewing regulations and guidance in this area, external examiner reports, programme enhancement plans, and minutes of committees and assessment boards. Meetings were also held with a range of staff from the University and its collaborative partners.

2.70   External examiner appointment offers follow a set pattern and provide full coverage of what is expected. The review team also saw evidence of DMU exercising its right to terminate an external examiner in accordance with published criteria, which are summed up as involving a lack of engagement with the process. Examiners are fully briefed by DMU and by programme teams on their role in maintaining threshold standards and monitoring the assessment processes. A range of useful information is also available on the DMU website, and the University ensures external examiners are kept up to date with current procedures. Particular attention is given to the appointment of relatively inexperienced external examiners ensuring, for example, that mentoring will be possible by their serving alongside an experienced examiner who can act as a mentor. External examiners are charged specifically with approving module marks, which are thus provisional until the Assessment Board meeting.

2.71   DMU offers some encouragement to its staff to act as external examiners elsewhere but there is no specific policy for this. However, external examining is referenced as potential evidence for pay progression, and professorial and readership appointments.

2.72   The review team saw evidence of consistent and appropriate involvement of external examiners at assessment boards, including one example where DMU moderated the marks of a full cohort on a module in response to the examiner's request. Full information is provided to external examiners either in advance or at the assessment board itself, enabling them to undertake their role effectively. External examiners are required formally to endorse results before they can be released.

2.73   DMU provides external examiners with a standard pro forma for reporting on their findings. For research degrees, external examiners are required to produce an independent 'blind' pre-viva report. For taught provision, examiners are specifically required to scrutinise and advise on a number of areas, including: curriculum development and design; the currency, relevance and coherence of curricular material; the maintenance of academic standards; assessment practice; and collaborative provision. Reports show evidence of conscientious and rigorous work by external examiners.

2.74   Reports are received centrally by the Department of Academic Quality, enabling the process to be tracked and late reports to be chased. Responsibility for responding to reports lies with faculties, and in the first instance they are sent to the Dean of the appropriate faculty and then on to the relevant programme team. This process ensures that recommendations that are of a more serious nature are addressed promptly and with senior level oversight. External examiners are also informed in briefing documents that they have the right to write to the Vice-Chancellor should they have serious concerns.

2.75   There is good evidence that external examiner reports are taken up in annual monitoring discussions in programme management boards, and through the periodic review process. Programme leaders are also required to confirm in programme enhancement plans that external examiner reports have been considered in their end-of-year reflections on the programme. Common themes arising across programmes are captured through faculty-level reports, which are considered by faculty academic committees. This provides a further degree of oversight and allows the sharing of experience and dissemination of good practice. These reports are then submitted upwards through the deliberative committee structure, along with an annual institutional-level overview report to the Academic Quality Committee. Summary reports are comprehensive and there is evidence that they are used for both quality assurance and enhancement purposes.

2.76   The names of external examiners are expected to be included in the programme handbook. This requirement has, however, only recently been agreed and the sample of programme handbooks viewed by the review team indicates the stipulation is still in process of adoption. External examiner reports are expected to be made available to students through the VLE. While the team noted that programme handbooks do not make reference to the availability of the reports, students the team met demonstrated a good awareness of the role of the external examiner and the reports they produce.

2.77   In conclusion, DMU has clear and comprehensive processes for external examining, which align closely to the Quality Code, and are implemented consistently and effectively. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.78   The processes for the annual and periodic review of programmes are described in paragraphs 1.38 to 1.41.

2.79   The review team tested the operation and effectiveness of DMU's processes for meeting this Expectation by examining documentation from each stage of monitoring and review, and minutes of the committees through which programmes are monitored. The review team explored how these processes are implemented in practice by meeting with senior staff, academic staff, support staff, and students, including those from collaborative partners.

2.80   Annual monitoring is an enhancement-led process documented at module level through module enhancement plans and at the programme level via programme enhancement plans. Both module enhancement plans and programme enhancement plans reflect on the delivery of the module and programme respectively, drawing on relevant data and the identification of a set of 'areas of focus', which are essentially an action plan for the module or programme team. Research degree provision is monitored against internal and external indicators through annual reports from the Director of the Graduate School to the Academic Quality Committee and Research Degrees Committee. Programme enhancement plans are approved by programme management boards (PMBs) that receive updates on progress throughout the year via subsequent meetings. The annual monitoring process also applies to awards delivered through partner organisations.

2.81   There is evidence of critical evaluation through the annual monitoring process and of subsequent improvements being made to programmes. Examples of the latter include increased involvement of industry practitioners in programme delivery and the provision of feedback that is more closely aligned to assessment criteria. The review team noted that module and programme enhancement plans are completed to varying degrees in terms of the level of detail, the consideration of progress against the previous year's action and the extent to which the same areas for improvement are rolled on from year to year. Ongoing reporting on the programme enhancement plan at PMBs is likewise variable. However, there is evidence of programme enhancement plans being returned to the programme team for further work. Programme leaders are responsible for confirming to the PMB that all module enhancement plans have been completed, and through the Faculty Summary Report to confirm to the Academic Quality Committee that all programme enhancement plans have been received. Non-receipt of enhancement plans is followed up through appropriate line-management structures. A review of the annual monitoring process has resulted in the issuance of updated and more detailed guidance to staff to support them in undertaking the process and to produce documentation that meets DMU expectations.

2.82   Periodic review is the University's mechanism for evaluating programmes and subjects at least every six years. The Guide to Periodic Review is the definitive reference for the process and is a useful source of guidance both for those preparing for review and panel members. The same periodic review processes are equally applied to provision delivered by collaborative partners, with permitted variations in timing depending on the interval since initial validation. Periodic review reports provide confidence that the process achieves its intended objectives and that actions arising from the review are followed up appropriately.

Student input is sought in depth and at various stages of the process, and ensures that the review of programmes is informed by the student voice.

2.83   Annual monitoring and periodic review is informed by management information, which is comprehensive and readily accessible as a result of investment in new reporting software (see good practice under Enhancement). Feedback from University and partner staff whom the review team met was universally positive on this new data source to support programme monitoring and review.

2.84   A clear curriculum modification process is in place. The process is devolved to the faculty, with consideration first by the PMB and then the appropriate faculty-level committee. Approved modifications are reported to the Department of Academic Quality.

2.85   Standard monitoring and review processes continue for provision that is suspended or closed to ensure the maintenance of academic standards and the student learning experience. The review team saw evidence of programme closures and run-out arrangements that confirmed this approach.

2.86   Annual summary reports of the outputs from programme monitoring at faculty and University level ensure strategic oversight of the process. These reports make recommendations on improvements to the process for consideration by the Academic Quality Committee and also identify common themes across all faculties. Within these reports separate consideration is given to issues that are specific to collaborative provision.

2.87   Overall, the review team found that the process for annual monitoring is applied systematically across all provision and that it encourages improvements to be made at programme, faculty and university level. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B9): Higher education providers have procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints about the quality of learning opportunities; these procedures are fair, accessible and timely, and enable enhancement.

Quality Code, *Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints*

Findings

2.88   DMU's process for handling complaints, which is accessible to applicants, current students and alumni, is set out in the Student Complaints Procedure. Similarly, the process for appeals is documented in University regulations. Information on complaints and appeals is made available to stakeholders through the DMU website, and for current students in programme handbooks.

2.89   Complaints and appeals are processed centrally by dedicated officers located in the Academic Support Office. All staff with responsibility for complaints and appeals are required to undergo training, including bespoke guidance for those involved in complaints or appeals hearings.

2.90   Oversight of the process is through the generation of annual reports on appeals submitted to the Academic Board, and termly reports on complaints submitted to the Executive Board. The Complaints Committee, which deals with individual complaints that progress to the final stage, also oversees the production of an annual overview, which is considered by the Board of Governors. As with other academic regulations, policies on complaints and appeals are reviewed and approved for re-issue by the Academic Board and Board of Governors in advance of each academic session.

2.91   The review team tested the operation and effectiveness of the University's procedures for handling appeals and complaints through a review of the documented policies, minutes of relevant committees and through annual overview reports. The team met academic staff, those involved in processing appeals and complaints, and a wide range of students.

2.92   DMU places a high level of emphasis on the early and informal resolution of complaints. Students are encouraged to raise concerns, either directly with staff, through their staff student consultative committees, or by using the recently introduced online portal DMUviews. The University reports that the latter is proving to be effective in enabling swift action to be taken to address minor issues, while ensuring students are signposted to formal procedures as appropriate.

2.93   Procedures for complaints and appeals are clear, include timescales for resolution, and are equally accessible to all students. Awareness of these procedures is raised during student induction. Students can receive information and support through a variety of methods, including the De Montfort Students' Union (DSU), faculty student advice centres, the Student Appeals and Conduct Officer, or in the case of postgraduate research students through the Graduate School Office. Students the review team met demonstrated a good awareness of where policies were located and the range of support available to them. Those studying at collaborative partners were aware of the routes to escalate a complaint to the University.

2.94   There is provision within the complaints procedure for students to submit a complaint individually or collectively. While the University does not accept anonymous formal complaints there is a Whistle-Blowing Policy, or alternatively students can use DMUviews. There are clear frameworks in place for complaints related to individual members of staff,

and the Dignity and Respect (Students) Policy ensures that complaints related to discrimination and harassment are dealt with separately.

2.95   Academic appeals, including those made by students at collaborative partners, are always handled by DMU. This helps to ensure consistency in the application of the process and to maintain the security of decision making for assessment. Appeals are considered by the Academic Appeals Panel and students have the right to appeal the decision of the panel. To ensure fairness both the Academic Appeals Panel and the University Complaints Committee include representation from the Academic Board or Board of Governors, a member of the DSU Executive, and a senior representative of the university with no connection to either the appellant/complainant or the concerned faculty.

2.96   Appeals and complaints are recorded systematically and this data is used to produce annual overview reports, which allow the University to identify trends and evaluate the effectiveness of its processes. These reports are considered at the most senior level of the University and used to make enhancements to the process. Reflections over recent years are likely to have driven the University's approach towards encouraging quick and informal resolution. Feedback from students has also been used to make improvements, for example the DMUviews initiative developed from comments in the NSS.

2.97   As a final recourse, the University directs students to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator, information for which is included in the Completion of Procedures letter. The Office of the Independent Adjudicator has upheld the University's decision in the majority of cases that have been referred to it

2.98   The review team found that DMU operates sound processes for considering appeals and academic complaints across all its provision. Ongoing review of the processes and their outcomes has informed enhancements to this area, which include an increased emphasis on early and informal resolution. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.99   DMU sets out its strategic approach and framework for delivering its awards through partner organisations in the Collaborative Strategy, which was most recently reviewed and approved by the Academic Board in October 2014. This five-year Strategy places an increased emphasis on high quality long-standing partnerships while retaining a commitment to the local community. As part of its revised Collaborative Strategy, the University is reviewing its current arrangements for collaborative activity: this includes a review of both existing partnerships and the models through which collaborative provision operates. As a result, the University is in the process of withdrawing from a small number of partnerships.

2.100   DMU currently has arrangements with: six UK-based colleges/institutions; a number of alternative providers in the UK; six international providers, including one dual award and one joint award arrangement; and a small number of enhanced progression agreements that recognise a partner institution's programme as appropriate for entry with advanced standing to certain University awards. A recent development includes a partnership with Oxford International Education Group to deliver pathway programmes through Leicester International Pathway College, which allow students direct entry on to certain University programmes. The University maintains a list of its collaborative partners and definitions of these partnership arrangements on its website, with a fuller version in use internally.

2.101   At executive level, the PVC Teaching and Learning has responsibility for collaborative partnerships. The Educational Partnerships Team, located within the Department of Academic Quality, has operational responsibility for the quality assurance and management of academic partnerships. The International Office, under the PVC International, is responsible for international recruitment partnerships and for the oversight of student mobility partnerships, previously coordinated at faculty level.

2.102   Overall responsibility for collaborative provision resides with the Academic Board; operational responsibility is discharged to the Academic Quality Committee through the University Collaborative Provision Committee. There is an equivalent committee in each faculty to monitor partnerships hosted by that particular faculty. These faculty collaborative provision committees have a dual reporting line to faculty academic committees and through membership of and minutes to the University Collaborative Provision Committee. Where there is no corresponding provision at the University or where a faculty does not wish to collaborate with a partner the University uses its Validation Service.

2.103   Processes and procedures for the management of collaborative partnerships are set out in the University's Guide to Managing Collaborative Provision, which is published on the DMU website. An additional operational guide is provided for partners operating under Validation Service arrangements.

2.104   The other type of provision the University offers, which falls under the scope of this Expectation, is work-based learning. All faculties deliver programmes that offer students the opportunity of work placements. Dedicated support teams are based in faculties and overseen through a central work-based learning service to support common quality

standards and working practices. Through the #DMUglobal programme, the University aims to provide an international experience for fifty per cent of its students over the next five years. This includes opportunities to undertake work placements abroad.

2.105   The review team tested the operation of the University's processes for meeting this Expectation through a review of published policies and guidance; full sets of approval and review documentation for a sample of selected partnerships; external examiner reports; and minutes of committees that oversee collaborative provision at faculty and university level. The team also met a range of staff and students, including those from collaborative partners in the UK. The team also held video-conference meetings with two selected partners: Confetti Institute of Creative Technologies and Niels Brock Copenhagen Business School.

2.106   DMU takes a risk-based approach to the development of collaborative provision and in response to a recommendation from the last QAA review has developed a comprehensive taxonomy that sets out the different types of activity and models of operation.

2.107   The approval of partnerships and associated programmes involves multiple stages. Due diligence, which is the responsibility of the Executive Board is completed prior to partner and programme approval. The review team saw evidence of the University applying the full range of outcomes from this process, including turning away a potential partner that was not considered to be of an appropriate academic or financial standing. Approval of a partner and of the programmes to be delivered may be undertaken concurrently but with a clear separation of the two processes. For approval of collaborative provision, the University applies the same processes as for its mainstream provision (see paragraph 1.24), but the difference being that the process is managed centrally by the Educational Partnerships Team rather than by the faculty. This is because the University acknowledges the increased risk involved in collaborative provision; central oversight through the Educational Partnerships Team ensures processes are fully adhered to without any potential bias from the collaborating faculty. The approval process is comprehensive, thoroughly documented and well understood by those that are involved in it, including staff at collaborative partners. Minutes of committees at University and faculty level provide evidence that there is appropriate upward and downward reporting and effective institutional oversight of collaborative arrangements.

2.108   Contracts, set out on standard templates, are put in place for all partnerships; these define the role and responsibilities of all parties. The renewal of contracts is linked to the outcome of collaborative review. The review team noted that while, on the whole, contracts are accurate, there were two examples where the responsibilities for making admissions decisions had not been updated to reflect actual practice (see recommendation under Expectation B2).

2.109   Annual monitoring of collaborative provision is undertaken in a similar way to provision delivered at the University. Collaborative review of the partner takes place after three years of operation and thereafter at intervals of up to five years. Reports from collaborative review events reveal that the process is thorough and includes input from students. Minutes of the University Collaborative Provision Committee demonstrate appropriate consideration and approval of these reports.

2.110   DMU has robust arrangements in place in the event of termination of an academic partnership agreement. An exit strategy is put in place for each closing partnership or programme and the University Collaborative Provision Committee retains direct oversight of quality arrangements.

2.111   The review team explored the recently formalised governance arrangements for the Validation Service. The Validation Service Board replicates the role of a faculty collaborative provision committee and reports to University Collaborative Provision

Committee. An external subject adviser is appointed in addition to an external examiner and the arrangements require that a programme management board is set up. Staff from Leicester College who deliver provision though the Validation Service confirmed the close and supportive links with the University, and the direct and ongoing communication with the external subject advisers, who make a minimum of two visits per year to the College. In the case of this partnership the College's Curriculum Management Board is used to ensure that oversight of the total provision is maintained, and this is attended by relevant University staff. While at the time of the review these revised arrangements were at an early stage of implementation, from the available evidence the review team has confidence that they are able to provide effective oversight of non-faculty based collaborative provision.

2.112   For the one dual award DMU offers there is a comprehensive contract setting out respective roles and responsibilities; both parties use the University's regulations and oversight of the partnership is through a Joint Management Committee.

2.113   Collaborative partnerships and international activity are supported by a number of key roles, including: faculty collaborative coordinators, faculty-based link tutors, and account managers located in the Educational Partnerships Team. The role of the link tutor has recently been formalised and training provided to support those undertaking the role. Partners confirmed that link tutors are a key point of contact and provide helpful operational support. The University offers additional support to partners through a range of briefing events and staff development opportunities.

2.114   Students at DMU are offered a range of work-based learning opportunities. Around one quarter of the University's undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes offer students the opportunity to undertake a year-long sandwich placement and short placement opportunities are provided within other programmes. Some programmes have mandatory placements, for example in the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences. Placement opportunities can be local, national or international. Support is offered through the faculty work-based learning units in relation to applications, interview skills and preparing for placements. Students are provided with handbooks, and placement providers also receive thorough guidance. Students and employers the review team met commented positively in relation to their experiences of placement activity. Some students who met the team had accessed opportunities for study aboard and others had experienced international placements through the #DMUglobal initiative. DMU is working towards a more standardised approach to managing work-based learning across all faculties.

2.115   The review team considers that DMU has comprehensive processes for the management of provision with others and that these are operated effectively across the institution. There has been recent formalisation of some governance structures and roles, which has further strengthened oversight of collaborative provision. Although the review team found minor discrepancies between responsibilities stated in contracts and actual practice, overall, roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and understood both internally within the University and by partners. There are also appropriate mechanisms in place to manage work-based learning opportunities. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Findings

2.116   DMU offers research degree programmes leading to the award of MA/MSc by research, MPhil, the International PhD, Professional Doctorate and PhD. Approximately 750 research degree students are currently registered on these programmes supervised by around 500 academic staff. The regulations and procedural arrangements governing research degree programmes, with the exception of professional doctorates, which have their own dedicated handbooks, are laid out in the Code of Practice for Research Degree Students and enable the University to provide secure academic standards for its research degrees.

2.117   The head of the Graduate School Office is responsible for directing its work in the management of research students, while academic leadership of the Graduate School is the responsibility of its Director appointed for a fixed term of 3 years and reporting to the PVC Research and Innovation. The University maintains oversight of its research degrees through its Research Degrees Committee and Academic Quality Committee.

2.118   The arrangements for management and governance of research degree provision were tested by reading documents, policies and committee minutes and speaking to research students, senior staff, academic staff and support staff.

2.119   Since the QAA review in 2009, DMU has made significant changes to the management of research degree programmes and support for research students. The establishment of the Graduate School, followed by the relocation of faculty-based research degree administrative staff to the Graduate School Office, has significantly changed the landscape for research degree provision and been instrumental in the University's response to the recommendations of the last review. The University carried out a review of the Graduate School in 2013 with external input and is working to implement the recommendations from its report.

2.120   The relationship between the Graduate School Office and academic staff, including research supervisors, is important in the management of research degrees; the review team heard from students and staff that the joint arrangements work well. Students were clear about the appropriate channels for obtaining information and support, and providing feedback. An example of the joint approach is the application and admissions process, where experienced staff in the Graduate School Office and faculty work together to ensure robust decisions on research degree applications.

2.121   Research students have at least two supervisors, and the University requires all supervisors to attend a training course in research supervision with subsequent updates every three years. Supervisors spoke positively about the value of the training provided, newsletters from the Graduate School and the opportunities for mentoring by more experienced supervisors. Students both studying at the University, and abroad on the International PhD programmes, spoke positively about their supervision.

2.122   Student introduction to degree programmes involves both the Graduate School Office and faculties in which the students are based. In meetings with the review team and event evaluations, students confirmed that they were fully informed about their programmes both from induction events and handbooks. Research training is implemented through the University's Researcher Development Programme, coordinated through the Graduate School Office, and including generic and faculty-specific training programmes. All students are required to carry out a training needs analysis, which informs their training profile and determines which compulsory training courses they need to undertake. Students the team met spoke positively about this arrangement. Compulsory training courses are available online and provide the same opportunities for students on the International PhD programme.

2.123   Postgraduate students who carry out teaching are required to take a two-day workshop, which is aligned to the UK Professional Standards Framework. The review team heard that students who are engaged in teaching and assessment valued the opportunity. The University is currently piloting a scheme to provide formal support and mentoring for those involved in teaching, although at the time of the review the impact of this was yet to be evaluated.

2.124   DMU monitors its research degree provision against internal and external indicators through annual reports from the Director of the Graduate School to the Academic Quality Committee and Research Degrees Committee, including statistics on recruitment, completions, withdrawals and non-completions, as well as looking at summaries of external examiner comments. However, minutes indicated that data were not always fully informative. Research students are expected to hold regular meetings with their supervisors and are required to record the main outcomes from these meetings via an online form. The Graduate School Office audits this requirement, but has reported that levels of compliance with the completion of reports are below expectations. Students explained that, although the University has reinforced the requirement for students to complete the process, in some cases the lack of submission lay with supervisors' failure to sign off the student report. DMU has been aware for some time that it required a better system for recording progression information for research degree students, and the internal review in 2013 recommended giving immediate priority to the purchase of research progress software. In November 2014 new monitoring software was introduced and the review team was satisfied that DMU is now in a position to align fully to the Quality Code, *Chapter B11*.

2.125   Feedback from research degree students is gathered through a number of mechanisms, including the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) and in an internal survey conducted by the Graduate School Office in 2013. Both surveys had low response rates, however, the University carried out a full analysis of PRES, defined an action plan and monitored progress through the Research Degrees Committee. The research student voice is also gathered through representation on faculty and university committees, however, the De Montfort Students' Union and University are in the process of improving this further (see paragraph 2.49). Where student representation is lacking, the Graduate School Office intervenes to gather student issues directly by e-mail and raises them at meetings. Students identified the postgraduate research forum held by the Graduate School Office both as a valuable way to meet other research students and a positive mechanism for engagement with DMU; they also identified improved financial support for travel and conference attendance as an example of the University's responsiveness.

2.126   The 2013 PRES identified two areas in which the University performed below its expectations and its benchmarks, namely learning resources and research culture. Research students whom the review team met were content with the support they received from the library and other central student services, however, students in different faculties reported different experiences in terms of access to work spaces, computers and social space. The team read that the action plan identified the need to clarify a minimum

entitlement to working space for full and part-time research students and agreed processes for informing students about their entitlement and channels of communication to resolve problems. DMU sees the Doctoral Training Programme as a primary means of improving student perceptions of a weak research culture, as well as enhancing and improving the promotion of research seminars. Students the team met had mixed views about the strength of the research culture, but identified external research seminars and networking opportunities within Doctoral Training Programme events as a positive step.

2.127   It is evident that DMU has given increased priority to enhancing the quality of its research degree provision in response to both the previous QAA review, which resulted in recommendations in this area, and in response to the outcomes of its own reviews and surveys. Current arrangements meet this Expectation and there is evidence that the University undertakes close monitoring of its research degree provision to ensure planned improvements can be made. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.128   In reaching its judgement about the quality of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All Expectations are met and the level of risk is low in each case.

2.129   The review team has identified three areas for improvement: the accuracy with which responsibilities for admissions are defined in contracts with partner organisations; the operation of the personal tutoring system; and the formal monitoring of the timeliness of assessment feedback. There are also two affirmations in this area where there is evidence of action being taken to address weaknesses that had already been identified by the University itself. The team affirms the action underway to improve student engagement across the University and the formal recording of training and development completed by admissions staff.

2.130   There are two features of good practice, which, in the view of the review team, make a particularly positive contribution to the management of this judgement area. These relate to the involvement of Teaching Fellows in the development and implementation of University strategies and enhancement initiatives, and the detailed consideration of equality and diversity during the validation and delivery of programmes.

2.131   In summary, the University makes available to its students appropriate learning opportunities to achieve the intended learning outcomes of the award for which they are studying. Recommendations relate either to the need to update documentation or to improve the effectiveness of existing systems, which, in their current state, do not pose a significant risk to the quality of student learning opportunities. Through its review processes DMU has itself identified areas for improvement, some of which are in the early stages of implementation and reflected in the affirmations made by the review team. The review team concludes therefore 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 DMU's main vehicle for communicating with its stakeholders is its website, which contains a breadth of information for prospective applicants, current students, alumni, employers and partner organisations. The University Strategic Plan 2010-15, which is published on the website, describes its mission, values, guiding principles and overall strategy. The Student Charter outlines the broad commitments from the University and the De Montfort Students' Union to students, and from students to the university. The University also publishes information about partnerships with other higher education providers.

3.2 Formal procedures apply for checking the accuracy of public-facing material and then maintaining its continued currency through regular review. Policies are reviewed on an annual basis and amendments approved by the relevant committee. The University maintains an internal communications plan, which is designed to provide consistent, regular and robust communications to the University's main stakeholders.

3.3 In reviewing DMU's arrangements for producing information the review team scrutinised a sample of policies, guides, handbooks and award certificates. The team also accessed the VLE and reviewed the information available through the DMU website. Meetings were held with staff, students and employers to explore the quality of the information available to stakeholders.

3.4 Information aimed at prospective students is thorough and readily available through the website. The student submission made reference to some concerns regarding changes to the advertised programme and the transparency of hidden programme costs. However, these concerns were unfounded in meetings and most students the review team met considered the information available to them at the time of application to be trustworthy and useful.

3.5 During their time at DMU, students are provided with module, programme and faculty handbooks, which contain clear and comprehensive information about programme learning outcomes, academic regulations, assessment, learning resources and the wider University environment. To further improve the quality of handbooks, the University has recently introduced revised minimum guidelines for content, which are expected to be fully implemented by the 2015-16 academic year. Minimum standards for the information provided via the VLE also exist and compliance is regularly monitored. External examiner reports are available via the VLE and guidance is provided to students on their purpose and the role of examiners in producing these reports.

3.6 Information provided to staff, on University policy and procedures is also detailed and easily accessible. Staff the review team met confirmed that they were provided with thorough guidance that enabled them to undertake their role effectively and were kept up to date with changes in policies and procedures through regular briefings from the University. Those that are involved in quality assurance processes, such as programme approval and review, receive detailed guidance with standard pro forma, including completed examples of

documentation. Employers were also positive about the information and guidance that they receive from the University in supporting the work they undertake with students.

3.7   Appropriate systems are in place to ensure information produced by DMU are fit for purpose and reliable. Information relating to programmes is produced by faculty staff, and then checked and approved by appropriate individuals prior to publication. Website content can only be modified by authorised staff that have undertaken the University's Data Protection Awareness training. Partner organisations are required to submit material to the University for approval prior to its first use and then following any changes. Random checks are also undertaken of both the University's and partner organisations' publicity material to ensure ongoing accuracy.

3.8   DMU maintains two registers of its collaborative partners and the definitions of these partnership arrangements. The first is available publicly on the University website and is seen by the University as a redacted version, the second is an internal register of partnerships, which contains fuller information. There is a robust system in place for keeping the register up to date and sharing this information with all staff across DMU. There is also oversight through the University Collaborative Provision Committee, which routinely considers and updates the register.

3.9   On completion of their studies students are issued with an award certificate, which cross-references the more detailed Higher Education Achievement Report. For students studying at partner organisations transcripts confirm the name and location of the teaching institution. Secure arrangements exist for producing and issuing certificates, and the University retains authority for awarding certificates to students studying for its awards at partner organisations.

3.10   DMU makes good use of data and management information to promote effective management of academic standards and quality. Investment in new software has enabled staff to make better use of information, such as student achievement and progression data. This information is analysed and considered in meetings, and supports the effective monitoring of programmes and the identification of areas of priority for enhancement (see feature of good practice under Enhancement).

3.11   The review team found that DMU produces a range of information that is readily available and appropriate to the needs of its intended audiences. Appropriate controls are in place to ensure information, including that produced by collaborative partners, is fit for purpose, trustworthy and accessible. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

3.12   In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. There are no recommendations or features of good practice in this area. However, the feature of good practice under Enhancement relating to the effective use of data and management information makes a positive contribution to this area. DMU operates effective mechanisms to ensure the information it produces for its intended audiences is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The review team concludes therefore that the quality of 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   DMU has a dual approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities: continuous improvement embedded in its strategies, governance structures and quality assurance systems; and an explicit change management programme through its Strategic Portfolio Management Board.

4.2   A range of strategies are in place to plan and ensure improvements across strategic activities. Examples of these include the University Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy (ULTAS), the Employability Strategy, the Enhancing Learning through Technology Strategy, and the Information and Communication Strategy. These strategies are owned by relevant university committees, and consultation and feedback on their continued direction of travel and effectiveness is regularly sought.

4.3   The review team tested the University's approach to enhancement through consideration of strategies, minutes of University committees involved in delivering enhancement projects, annual summary reports of quality assurance processes and documentation relating to work of undertaken by theme boards. The team also met staff, students and employers.

4.4   DMU's governance systems, through its committee meetings and its quality assurance framework for programme validation, monitoring and review, have inbuilt mechanisms for the identification of good practice and areas of development, with resulting action plans reviewed by both faculty and University committees. The University's quality assurance processes also have an explicit enhancement focus both at module and programme level through the Module Enhancement and Programme Enhancement Processes. Annual summary reports of processes, such as annual monitoring, periodic review and external examining, enable the dissemination and adoption of good practice across the University, while allowing the identification of areas requiring strategic action. For example, through a summary of external examiners comments, the University has recently identified feedback on assessment as an area for improvement.

4.5   The Strategic Portfolio Management Programme has been established to provide executive management and oversight of the University's change initiatives, which are intended to deliver University-wide improvements. These initiatives are organised into six strategic theme boards, each chaired by a member of the Executive Board. Each of the theme boards oversees a number of related programmes or projects, all of which report monthly. All projects require approval of an initiation document, objectives, milestone, timescales and resources. When projects are completed they are signed off by the board and the activity, where appropriate, is absorbed into business as usual processes with the associated monitoring and reporting. The University has set up a project management network to build internal capacity and share good practice across themes and projects. This approach is effective in delivering enhancement initiatives in a systematic and planned manner without detracting from usual University business, which continues to be managed through the deliberative committee structure.

4.6   There is good involvement of both staff and students in developing strategies and delivering projects that are intended to enhance the quality of learning opportunities. For example, the De Montfort Students' Union Deputy President Education is a member of

the Teaching and Learning Theme Board and the Student Experience and Employability Theme Board. The review and development of the ULTAS was informed by Teaching Fellows, who were able to share their expertise in this area (see good practice under Expectation B3). Staff and students are directly involved in shaping enhancement initiatives and this appears to have been important in creating a shared understanding of the University's strategic direction.

4.7   The enhancement of student learning opportunities is demonstrated through DMU's implementation of the Employability Strategy 2012-15. The Strategy has led to the development of a wide range of initiatives to promote and embed the opportunity for students, from all modes of learning, to gain employability skills. The initiatives range from opportunities for students to undertake internships, international opportunities, placements, part-time work, training programmes, business start-up and volunteering opportunities. The impact of the Strategy has been evaluated externally, and subsequently a strategic work programme is underway to address the recommendations from the review. A wide range of information is available to students regarding these initiatives through the central Careers and Employability Service, faculty employability hubs and a range of bespoke online information. Students the team met highly valued the work-related opportunities available to them and felt that they provided valuable skills that prepared them for employment. Further improvements in this area are planned through more explicit embedding of employability-related skills in the curriculum.

4.8   A particularly noteworthy and ambitious enhancement-related project is the #DMUglobal programme, which intends to offer 50 per cent of University students an international experience by 2020. This project is already underway and the review team was able to meet students that had benefitted from opportunities through this project. This initiative is managed through a strategic theme board and there is evidence of clear monitoring and reporting of progress against identified key performance indicators. Students are provided with comprehensive information through various channels, including social media, to support them in accessing the opportunities presented by the #DMUglobal programme. The review team heard a number of unprompted accounts of the positive experiences of students as a result of the project and the impact it had on developing their employability. Examples of activity undertaken by students include: working with the World Cup Organising Committee in Brazil, attending networking events in Europe, and undertaking an internship with an employer in China. Benefits reported by students include increased intercultural awareness, improved communication skills and the valued opportunity to learn work in a different context. The review team considers the #DMUglobal programme, which provides an international experience for students and enhances student employability, as **good practice**.

4.9   In its approach to making planned improvements, DMU takes particular care in giving consideration to equality and diversity. This has a positive impact in curriculum design, where programme teams are prompted to consider inclusivity and accessibility when designing learning outcomes and assessment tasks (see feature of good practice under Expectation B1). In addition, DMU has undertaken equality impact assessments of a number of different areas of its provision with a view to enhancing the accessibility of its services to the full student body. Areas reviewed include library and learning services, and the accessibility of national surveys such as DLHE and NSS. Reviews are comprehensive and make use of data to identify and address potential inequalities between different groups of students. All resulting reports are published on the University website.

4.10   DMU has recently invested in new reporting software, which has resulted in the provision of accurate, detailed and relevant data that is used at all levels of the University to inform enhancement. Management information is used in a number of ways, including in the annual review of programmes, in the evaluation of programme performance at programme

management boards, and in measuring the success of change initiatives managed through strategic theme boards. Staff are provided with a high level of support and training to encourage the regular use of data in both quality assurance and enhancement. Staff the review team met spoke enthusiastically about the ease of access and use of the new system, as well as the tailored one-to-one support available to them. This has in turn encouraged staff to use information more systematically in their evaluation of both the academic curriculum, student performance and strategic initiatives. To ensure a consistent and uniform approach to generating and using data, the central Strategic Planning Service leads on the delivery of management information. Trends in data are used to identify and prioritise areas for enhancement, and the success of any subsequent activity is also measured against key performance indicators. The review team considers the effective use of data and management information to identify, monitor and evaluate enhancement activities as **good practice**.

4.11   DMU has effective systems and processes in place to ensure that a systematic approach to enhancement is embedded across all of its provision. The University makes good use of data in identifying and delivering evidence-based enhancements. There are also a number of specific projects that the University has undertaken to bring about improvements to student learning opportunities. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.12   In reaching its judgement about the enhancement of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. There are no recommendations for improvement in this area.

4.13   The review team identified two features of good practice in this area. The first recognises the positive impact of a specific enhancement initiative (the #DMUglobal programme) for improving student employability. The second example of good practice relates to the effective use of data in planning and delivering enhancements to the quality of learning opportunities. The two features of good practice identified under Expectations B1 and B3, which relate to the extensive consideration of equality and diversity in programme approval and delivery, and the use of Teaching Fellows in developing strategies and enhancement initiatives, also make a positive contribution to DMU's management of this area.

4.14   DMU is committed to enhancing the quality of student learning opportunities, and it does this in close consultation with both its staff and students. University-wide improvements are undertaken in a carefully planned and systematic manner, making good use of data to evaluate the impact of enhancement projects. Therefore, the review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the University is **commended**.

5   Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1   Employability is a key feature of DMU's Strategic Plan and there is a strong emphasis on embedding relevant opportunities throughout the curriculum and student life. The University aims to enhance student employability through embedding transferable skills into the curriculum, specific University-wide initiatives, and the provision of bespoke one-to-one advice and guidance through the central Careers and Employability Service.

5.2   There are several noteworthy innovations that support students in enhancing their employability skills. These include: the international learning experiences delivered through the #DMUglobal programme; volunteering opportunities within the local community through the Square Mile Project; internships for current students through the Frontrunners scheme and for recent graduates through Graduate Champions; and the online MyGateway service, which enables students to access careers advice and search for job vacancies. Students speak highly of the service and opportunities that specific initiatives provide them with in relation to enhancing their employment prospects.

5.3   Employability skills are also integrated into the curriculum through: employment related content embedded in learning material; the linking of assessment tasks to work-based practice; and the provision of programme-related placement opportunities. The University has also recently launched an Employability Programme focused on embedding employability more explicitly within the curriculum.

5.4   The University has a close relationship with its employers through PSRB partnerships, through their participation in validation panels and as members of industry advisory boards. The review team met employers who spoke positively of their wide-ranging interactions with the University, including direct involvement in curriculum design and review. In some cases this was formal involvement through the joint management of programmes or membership pf a programme validation panel; in other cases it was through informal dialogue with staff members. Employers are also involved in conferences hosted by the University, as guest lecturers on programmes, and in supplying projects and assessment case studies for students.

5.5   It is evident that enhancing student employability is a top priority for the University. While some of the University's initiatives are still in their infancy, students report positively on their exposure to these initiatives, and data from the DLHE survey evidences improvements in employability. It is clear that the opportunities accessed through employability-focused initiatives are also having a positive impact on the student learning experience.

Glossary

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

e-learning
See technology enhanced or enabled learning

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

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

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

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

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