



# Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of QAHE(Ulst) Ltd

September 2016

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## About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at QAHE(Ulst) Ltd. The review took place from 13 to 15 September 2016 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Howard White
- Dr Gwynne Harries
- Ms Cara Williams (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) 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
- 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.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.<sup>2</sup> A dedicated section explains the method for [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).<sup>3</sup> For an explanation of terms please see the [glossary](#) at the end of this report.

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<sup>1</sup> The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code).

<sup>2</sup> QAA website: [www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us).

<sup>3</sup> Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers): [www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Educational-Oversight.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Educational-Oversight.aspx).

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about QAHE(Ulst) Ltd

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at QAHE(Ulst) Ltd.

- The maintenance of the academic standards of the awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

### Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at QAHE(Ulst) Ltd:

- the creation and use of additional learning materials that are contextualised to the location and profile of the student body (Expectation B3)
- the sustained development of study skills, incorporating the use of English for Academic Purposes, for a diverse student body (Expectations B4 and Enhancement).

### Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendation** to QAHE(Ulst) Ltd.

By February 2017:

- ensure that all students are provided with formal opportunities for individual reflection on their progress to further their academic development (Expectation B3).

### Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms** the following actions that QAHE(Ulst) Ltd is already taking to make academic standards secure and improve the educational provision offered to its students:

- the deliberate steps being taken to ensure the successful transition of learners to higher education through extended induction procedures (Expectations B4, B2 and Enhancement)
- the actions taking place to engage students in higher-level committees (Expectations B5 and Enhancement)
- the introduction of structures, policies and procedures to improve the capacity to manage and enhance the provision of learning opportunities (Expectations Enhancement, B2, B3, B4, B5 and C).

## About QAHE(Ulst) Ltd

QA Higher Education (QAHE), formerly the QA Business School, is one of four divisions within the QA group which was founded in 1985. The group offers training and education opportunities involving over 6,000 clients, including 80 per cent of the FTSE 250. In 2011 QAHE established a higher education partnership with Ulster University, which is now named QAHE (Ulst) Ltd. Over the last five years it has also developed links with Roehampton and Northumbria Universities. This review is concerned solely with provision involving QAHE (Ulst) Ltd.

QAHE(Ulst) has two inner city campuses in London and Birmingham offering undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in Business, Management, Marketing, Accounting and Computing. QAHE(Ulst) states that its focus is to make sure their graduates do not just have a degree, but are highly employable and motivated individuals ready to function in a dynamic business environment. In 2015-16 there were 542 full-time student enrolments at QAHE(Ulst); 79 per cent were at the London campus and 29 per cent of all students were studying at postgraduate level. At the time of the review visit there were 25 permanent members of staff involved in delivery, with QAHE(Ulst) also employing associate staff on hourly contracts.

All programmes with the awarding body are franchised, with the longer-term aim of moving towards validation status to enable QAHE(Ulst) to develop its own programmes (validated by Ulster University) and to seek student finance designation. QAHE is also accredited by the British Accreditation Council and the British Council.

Strategic academic oversight of the partnership between QAHE(Ulst) and the awarding body is the responsibility of Ulster University's Affiliate College Executive Board. The management structure of QAHE(Ulst) includes a Senior Management Team (SMT) involving the QAHE(Ulst) Managing Director, the Executive Dean, the Director of Operations, the Director of Finance, the Director of Institutional Relationships and the Director of Marketing and Recruitment. Each programme has a Course Director responsible for local delivery who liaises closely with their Ulster University counterpart. Oversight and coordination of all higher education delivery and support is managed through a recently established Academic Board, with the Learning and Teaching Committee responsible for the development of learning opportunities.

This is the first full QAA review of higher education within the QA group, although in 2014 QAHE(Ulst) was included in the QAA Thematic Review of London Campuses. The review generated a series of enhancement areas and subsequent action plans that have been addressed successfully. They include improvements to the quality and accuracy of website information, the introduction of new admissions procedures, raising awareness among staff and students of unfair practice to reduce plagiarism, and improving student performance while lowering attrition and drop-out rates. In 2015 QAHE(Ulst) was inspected by the British Accreditation Council, who concluded that QAHE has a strong and experienced academic management team, effective administrative systems for monitoring student progression, enthusiastic and well-qualified staff, and robust student welfare procedures. Notable recent awards within the QA Group include the Hortonworks 2016 EMEA Training Partner of the Year and the Microsoft 2015 Learning Partner of the Year.

## Explanation of the findings about QAHE(Ulst) Ltd

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 maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **Findings**

1.1 Under the terms of its partnership agreements, QAHE (Ulst) Ltd delivers programmes designed and approved by Ulster University (the awarding body). The awarding body is responsible for ensuring that these have positively defined learning outcomes which are set at the appropriate level of the FHEQ and reflect the relevant qualification and Subject Benchmark Statements. Procedures which ensure this are set out in its Programme Approval, Management and Review Handbook and Partnership Handbook. External examiners, the Partnership Director and Heads of Partnership appointed by the awarding body are required to confirm their observance of the application of these procedures each year.

1.2 These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met. The review team considered QAHE(Ulst) documentation relating to partnership agreements, awarding body validation and revalidation panel reports, the minutes of awarding body committees responsible for annual monitoring, and a full set of reports submitted by external examiners. The team also met senior QAHE(Ulst) staff and representatives of the awarding body.

1.3 The QAA responsibilities checklist completed by QAHE(Ulst) confirms that it is aware of its responsibilities under its partnership agreements. The team found that QAHE(Ulst) staff were familiar with the national framework and that revised Subject

Benchmark Statements had been consulted in recent revalidation exercises and noted at the Academic Board. In the course of 2015 and 2016 the awarding body revalidated most of the provision by QAHE(Ulst) and validated an MBA and extended master's programmes in International Business and Marketing, indicating its confidence in the capacity of QAHE(Ulst) to manage standards. The team found no concerns about alignment with external reference points in external examiners' reports or in the minutes of awarding body committees.

1.4 Noting QAHE(Ulst)'s understanding of its responsibilities and the opinion of the awarding body and its external examiners, the team concludes that the Expectation for securing threshold academic standards is met and the risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.5 The partnership between QAHE(Ulst) and the awarding body is managed by a Special Purpose Vehicle/Board of Directors. Strategic academic oversight is the responsibility of Ulster University's Affiliate College Executive Board, answering to the University Senate. Operational oversight rests with Department Boards at the awarding body which answer to a University Faculty or School. To strengthen its governance structure, QAHE(Ulst) has recently created an internal Academic Board with specific responsibility for oversight of academic standards.

1.6 Credit and qualifications for QAHE(Ulst) provision are awarded by the awarding body under academic frameworks and regulations approved by its Senate. The awarding body's Assessment Handbook and Regulations Governing Examinations in Programmes of Study establishes procedures for the maintenance of standards. They include assessment decision-making, rules governing credit and award classification, marking guidelines, and policies on aspects of assessment including recognition of prior learning, moderation, extenuating circumstances, unfair practice and appeals. Exam boards are conducted by the awarding body. The awarding body's Partnership Handbook requires QAHE(Ulst) to implement these regulations and the awarding body checks their observance through annual monitoring and reports submitted by its external examiners.

1.7 These arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met. The review team considered a range of QAHE(Ulst) documentation including the minutes of boards of examiners and committees responsible for annual monitoring, along with reports from external examiners. The team also met QAHE(Ulst) staff and representatives of the awarding body.

1.8 The review team found that exam boards are constituted and conduct their business as specified in the awarding body's regulations. Teaching and support staff met by the team displayed good knowledge of the awarding body's assessment procedures. The awarding body's Director of Partnership and Heads of Partnership visit QAHE(Ulst) frequently and are members of the Academic Board. They attend relevant Department Boards at the University, ensuring close cooperation.

1.9 The review team noted that no concerns relating to awards are identified in the external examiners' reports or the minutes of the awarding body committees. The team concludes that QAHE(Ulst) observes the frameworks and regulations of its awarding body. In so doing it establishes transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations, allowing the Expectation to be met with low risk.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.10 The awarding body bears the responsibility for producing and maintaining the definitive programme information. A definitive record of each approved programme and its intended learning outcomes is used as the reference point for the delivery of the programmes by teaching staff at QAHE(Ulst). The awarding body produces and updates the programme specifications, course handbooks and module handbooks.

1.11 Information on the programme of study and its content, including the programme specification, individual module assessment aims and learning outcomes and module descriptors, is provided to students through the course handbooks. Specific module information is provided through module handbooks that are available to students in paper copy and on the virtual learning environment (VLE). The programme specification and the module descriptors are maintained electronically by the awarding body's Curriculum Management System. The Curriculum Management System also records any course revisions.

1.12 The awarding body's validation and revalidation process confirms that the level of study and credit value is in line with the national framework, and that subject content and learning outcomes are appropriately benchmarked. Programmes are validated through the input of external examiners and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) and by reference to relevant national Subject Benchmark Statements.

1.13 The design of these systems and procedures allows the Expectation to be met. To explore evidence further, the review team considered a range of documentation including course and module handbooks and validation/revalidation reports. Details were discussed with students, senior and teaching staff, and awarding body representatives and a VLE demonstration was given.

1.14 The programme specification (contained within the course handbook) provides a clear link to the qualification descriptors in the FHEQ and demonstrates compliance with the academic framework and regulations of the awarding body. More detailed information on the specific learning outcomes, content and structure of the programme and the teaching, learning and assessment methods of each module is included in course and module handbooks. The review team found that the definitive course and module information is fit for purpose, providing students with opportunities to demonstrate that they have achieved the programme learning outcomes at the requisite level.

1.15 The review team heard from students that handbooks are provided in a timely manner during induction. Information about courses and modules is also made available to students and prospective students through the QAHE(Ulst) website and information about assessment is available on the QAHE(Ulst) VLE. Students confirmed their satisfaction with the detailed information contained within handbooks.

1.16 Definitive programme information is accessible, clear and appropriately used by teaching teams in the delivery of programmes. The review team concludes that the Expectation for maintaining a definitive record of each programme and qualification is met, with low risk.

**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**

1.17 The awarding body is responsible for course and module approval processes, and for confirming that programmes meet the qualification descriptors and threshold standards of the FHEQ and associated Subject Benchmark Statements. This formal process involves course planning approval, development of the programme, an evaluation event and finally programme approval. Academic staff within QAHE(Ulst) have responsibilities for producing evaluation documentation alongside module descriptors and regulations plus information about student support. The operational policy approved by the awarding body as part of its own internal processes allows the Expectation to be met.

1.18 The review team scrutinised course approval documentation as well as review reports that considered the validity of assessments. Details were discussed with students and a range of staff involved with course design, delivery and review, in addition to representatives from the awarding body.

1.19 The team noted that while the awarding body has the final authority, QAHE(Ulst) has developed its own course approval and modification procedures. They are overseen by the new Academic Board, which may give approval for additional internal programmes or establish a separate course approval panel to report back with recommendations. The detailed internal process includes consideration of academic themes, marketing and resources.

1.20 Subject to awarding body approval, proposed modifications are ultimately presented to the SMT to include overall rationale for curriculum development, clarification of the category of modification involved (major/minor), and consideration of additional resource requirements.

1.21 The procedures and policies in place for the design, approval, monitoring and review of provision, and strong liaison of QAHE(Ulst) with the awarding body partner, are viewed as appropriate and effective. The team concludes that the Expectation for the approval of taught programmes at the appropriate academic level is met, with low risk.

**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**

1.22 The awarding body has overall responsibility for ensuring that standards are satisfied for the achievement of learning outcomes demonstrated through assessment. QAHE(Ulst) principles of assessment are contained in the Teaching and Learning Strategy. Those of Ulster University are contained in the University's Assessment Handbook, with both documents guiding staff in the operation of assessment processes. The awarding body ensures that student achievement of learning outcomes receives academic credit through moderation, external examination and the operation of awarding body boards of examiners.

1.23 Through its articulation of these processes QAHE(Ulst) states that it ensures credit and qualifications are only awarded where the achievement of relevant learning outcomes has been demonstrated through assessment.

1.24 The design of these policies and procedures for assessment allows the Expectation to be met.

1.25 The review team explored the application of assessment procedures through consideration of a range of external examiner reports, assessment documents and policies, and student feedback. Details were discussed with students and staff involved in assessment practice.

1.26 The team noted that QAHE(Ulst) ensures that students are made aware of what constitutes good academic practice, with particular attention given to plagiarism and its avoidance through the application of plagiarism-detection software. QAHE(Ulst) feedback and review mechanisms are viewed as sufficiently robust for enabling prompt and effective responses to issues raised about assessment. This was evidenced through the active engagement of QAHE(Ulst) with the students in terms of academic misconduct.

1.27 Evidence from meetings, review visits and external examiner reports confirms that the awarding body considers QAHE(Ulst) processes to be resilient and responsive, with credit awarded for the achievement of learning outcomes being in line with UK and awarding body standards.

1.28 Students confirmed that tutors made them aware of learning outcomes and assessment criteria, and that these are clearly set out in the course handbooks. They also noted that they are able to provide feedback on modules through student module evaluation questionnaires and the Staff/Student Consultative Committee (SSCC). Staff gave examples of students who had been supported through reasonable adjustments, articulating the process for internal verification of assignments and marking standardisation. On the basis of this evidence the team concludes that the Expectation for ensuring that the achievement of learning outcomes is demonstrated through assessment is met, with low risk.

**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**

1.29 As detailed in the Partnership Handbook and course handbooks, programmes are regularly monitored and reviewed by the awarding body through annual and periodic review, which explicitly addresses whether the UK threshold academic standards are achieved and whether the academic standards required by the awarding body are being maintained. These procedures are reinforced through the use of an external examiner system for establishing, monitoring and maintaining academic standards. These policies and frameworks for maintaining standards through the monitoring and review of programmes allow the Expectation to be met.

1.30 The review team explored QAHE(Ulst)'s approach to monitoring and review of programmes by examining documents including the Academic Plan, minutes of the Academic Board, course committees, minutes of termly review meetings, programme specifications and external examiner reports. Details were discussed with students as well as academic and support staff and representatives from the awarding body.

1.31 The team noted that monitoring and review processes are outlined clearly in the collaborative partnership agreement. Awarding body representatives reported supportive and close working relationships for a wide range of monitoring and review activities.

1.32 QAHE(Ulst) has developed its own Academic Board. The Academic Board includes attendance by the awarding body Director of Partnership and Heads of Partnership to consider the overall maintenance of the quality of the programmes, including assessment of learning outcomes. These meetings feed into a quality enhancement process, which features a number of levels of review for programme standards and outcomes.

1.33 Periodic reviews are carried out by the awarding body in accordance with their collaborative agreement. Subsequent documentation confirms appropriate course content and the appropriate alignment of module assignments to Subject Benchmark Statements. The team also recognised that these reviews offer evidence for safeguarding the operation of the partnership through the use of detailed external examiner feedback.

1.34 The team concludes that QAHE(Ulst)'s policies and processes address the achievement of UK threshold standards and the maintenance of standards required by the awarding body. The frequent communications that exist between the awarding body and QAHE(Ulst), and the internal processes for programme monitoring and review, ensure that the Expectation is met with low risk.

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

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.35 Responsibilities for assuring standards in the design, approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes delivered at QAHE(Ulst) are set out in the awarding body's Programme Approval, Management and Review Handbook and Partnership Handbook. They require the participation of external experts in programme approval and review and the involvement of external examiners in monitoring and review. These arrangements for the use of external and independent expertise enable the Expectation to be met.

1.36 The review team considered programme approval and review documentation, checking that external examiners' reports, which explicitly monitor standards, were received and consulted. The team also explored senior staff understanding of the role of externality in programme design, based on QAHE(Ulst)'s plans to develop its own programmes for validation.

1.37 Awarding body panel reports on the validation and revalidation of programmes confirm the presence of two external experts and due consideration of standards. A full set of external examiners' reports for the past three years was made available to the team. This information was discussed at QAHE(Ulst) Course Committee levels as well as by the awarding body and during revalidation exercises. The revalidated BSc Computing Systems has been designed to meet the accreditation requirements of BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT.

1.38 The review team noted that QAHE(Ulst) had also sought and gained external confirmation of the quality of its learning resources and of its capacity to manage from the British Accreditation Council. With reference to English-language teaching, the British Council has also been involved. Senior staff told the team of their intention to involve employers as QAHE(Ulst) moves to develop its own programmes. QAHE(Ulst) executive team leaders understand the importance of externality in securing standards, with the awarding body having primary responsibility. On the basis of this evidence the team concludes that the Expectation for ensuring independent expertise for setting and maintaining standards is met with low risk.

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

## The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies: Summary of findings

1.39 In reaching its judgement about the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered by QAHE(Ulst), the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.40 All of the Expectations in this area have been met, with a low level of associated risk in each case. There were no recommendations or affirmations.

1.41 QAHE(Ulst), in partnership with its awarding body, uses appropriate reference points for academic frameworks and regulations associated with the approval and award of academic credit and qualifications. Definitive records are maintained for programmes, and the achievement of learning outcomes is demonstrated through assessment based on the satisfaction of academic standards. Monitoring and review procedures are implemented successfully, including the appropriate use of independent and external expertise to assure the integrity of higher education provision.

1.42 The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards at QAHE(Ulst) **meets** UK expectations.

## 2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.1 The awarding body is responsible for the design, development and approval of franchised programmes delivered by QAHE(Ulst). The addition of more courses to the portfolio is agreed through a formal approval process convened by the awarding body. This is preceded by QAHE(Ulst)'s internal process for evaluating the market and resource implications of potential programmes. Approval documents are presented via the awarding body's Academic Office to the newly created Academic Board for agreement prior to seeking external validation. QAHE(Ulst) manages the programmes in accordance with partnership agreements with the awarding body. These responsibilities and procedures allow the Expectation to be met.

2.2 The review team considered a range of documentation including minutes of meetings and course approval and revalidation documentation. Details were discussed with teaching and professional support staff, awarding body representatives, and students.

2.3 Course approval and modification policies and procedures outline clearly the role of committee structures and the responsibilities of staff for designing new provision. QAHE(Ulst) responds effectively to conditions and recommendations set by the awarding body following reviews exercises.

2.4 Approval criteria are applied consistently using relevant templates, extending to the operation of major and minor changes to courses and modules. QAHE(Ulst) provided examples from a series of recent course approval validations and revalidations involving the BSc (Hons) Business Studies, the Master's of Business Administration, and the MSc International Business and MSc Marketing. This documentation, and subsequent discussions with staff, demonstrated detailed understanding of the procedures used for presenting outcomes of the proposed programmes to relevant committees and panels, and the method for confirming approval by the awarding body.

2.5 As noted in Expectation A3.4, externality within course design and approval is achieved through the presence of external members on the evaluation panel and through links with employers as part of the QA network based on QAHE(Ulst)'s awareness of skills gaps within local employment sectors. Course design and approval processes are also strengthened through individual staff memberships of PSRBs. Resource planning for new and existing courses is managed through QAHE(Ulst)'s resource planning cycle. As courses are presented from the awarding body's portfolio of provision, external reference points are therefore integral to programme design and development and adherence to these is monitored through the validation process.

2.6 The review team also noted the use of effective procedures for minor course modifications through development by QAHE(Ulst) of additional non-accredited modules in Study Skills and English for Academic Purposes. As discussed in Expectation B4, while these are not credit-bearing components, the amendments have also been agreed through

the application of appropriate awarding body procedures for programme design and approval.

2.7 Students are consulted about changes to existing provision. This is achieved through student representation on existing committees, for example the Staff/Student Liaison Committee, and through Course Committee representation. Students confirmed that course and module changes were communicated through induction, course specifications and handbooks, and discussed at Course and Staff/Student Liaison Committees. As discussed in Expectation B5, these procedures will soon be augmented by student representation on the Academic Board.

2.8 The team concludes that the approval process for new or amended courses, including the use of Subject Benchmark Statements and the FHEQ, is implemented effectively. The Expectation for operating effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes is met, with low risk.

**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**

2.9 Responsibility for all admissions rests with the awarding body. Processes are set out in the Admissions Manual for QAHE and the awarding body, and are the same for students attending courses in the London and Birmingham campuses. The Admissions Manual details international entry requirements, admissions interview process, academic procedures, Faculty (Ulster) Assessment, UCAS, Student Finance and English-language assessment. International students are encouraged to apply directly while applications for home and EU students are processed via UCAS. Entry requirements to all programmes are approved by the awarding body and QAHE(Ulst) is bound by these requirements. The awarding body monitors student admissions, retention and completion including a data table showing enrolments and completions in all programmes from September 2013 onwards along with projected enrolments.

2.10 QAHE(Ulst) is responsible for student recruitment. Students are recruited in a variety of ways including digital marketing, recruitment fairs and educational agents. Agents generate applications for consideration but are not directly involved in the admissions decisions.

2.11 The Admissions Policy is owned by the awarding body and adherence to the policy is overseen through periodic audit which includes spot checks of the QAHE(Ulst) admissions process. The policy is fully aligned to *Chapter B2* of the Quality Code, thereby allowing Expectation B2 to be met.

2.12 The review team explored admissions systems and procedures through reading the minutes of meetings and analysing student retention and progression data. Details were discussed with academic and professional support staff, awarding body representatives, and students.

2.13 The Thematic Review of London Campuses (2013-14) highlighted a number of issues concerning the recruitment of international students. In response to these concerns QAHE(Ulst) made enhancements to their recruitment processes, as discussed further within the Expectation for Enhancement. The review team was assured that the awarding body is now confident that these processes are robust and no further action is required. The review team also heard that QAHE(Ulst) has taken a strategic decision to develop its own Admissions Policy aimed at enhancing the admissions processes, involving face-to-face contact with all UK and EU applicants. The awarding body is ultimately responsible for all admissions. To support admitted students, QAHE(Ulst) has developed a new online enrolment system for second and third-year students and intends to roll this out to all first-year students in the near future.

2.14 The team noted that QAHE(Ulst) is now taking a variety of deliberate steps to enhance their approach to supporting the successful transition of learners to higher education; an observation that is also discussed in Expectations B4, C and Enhancement.

For example, admissions include English-language assessments, extended inductions and detailed pre-enrolment information over and above the requirement of the awarding body.

2.15 There are clearly defined processes for the appropriate management of applications to ensure that prospective students are treated in a fair and consistent manner. Staff receive training on recruitment and the awarding body has significant oversight of the application process. QAHE(Ulst) has a robust procedure in place for monitoring individual agent performance after each exam board. If student data suggests underperformance, QAHE(Ulst) will take steps to end that agent relationship.

2.16 All marketing material is signed off by the awarding body. The Institutional Relationships Director is responsible for UK and EU recruitment, working closely with the Marketing and Recruitment Director. Information on how to apply, and entry requirements for both EU and international students, are clearly located on the QAHE(Ulst) website and in the 2016-17 prospectus. Students confirmed that the admissions process was clear and information was adequate to allow them to make informed decisions. The QAHE(Ulst) admission and appeal process is clear and accessible to students. QAHE(Ulst)'s standard letters for offers and rejections are transparent.

2.17 Students confirmed that induction processes, using a variety of methods across programmes, offer a useful introduction to the academic requirements of their programme and support services. These methods are discussed in more detail in Expectation B4. Students appreciate the personalised attention from the admissions staff prior to enrolment. For EU and international students, the induction process also offered opportunities to become familiar with local services. Home and EU students joining the BSc Business Studies complete enrolment after attending a two-week extended induction programme. This attendance is a condition of their offer and was introduced in response to the poor initial engagement of the September 2014 cohort of Business Studies students - a problem that is now resolved.

2.18 The team recognises that recruitment, admissions and selection processes are transparent, fair and clear. They are underpinned by appropriate organisational structures and processes. There are appropriate supporting documents detailing policy for ensuring that students selected are capable of completing their programme of study. The process is monitored by the awarding body and QAHE(Ulst) is taking steps to develop their own policy to incorporate features of best practice. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation concerning adherence to the principles of fair admissions is met, with low risk.

**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**

2.19 Strategic academic oversight of the partnership between QAHE(Ulst) and the awarding body is the responsibility of an Affiliate College Executive Board chaired by a Pro-Vice Chancellor and answering to the University Senate. Operational oversight rests with Department Boards at the University which answer to an Ulster University Faculty or School. Both parties are represented on these Boards. Strategic leadership in learning and teaching is vested in a Director of Partnership and Heads of Partnership from the awarding body, together with the Executive Dean at QAHE(Ulst). Operational leadership at QAHE(Ulst) is the responsibility of the Executive Dean who is a member of the SMT, supported by a team of Associate Deans who meet weekly. Each programme has an awarding body Course Director with a QAHE(Ulst) Course Director responsible for local delivery. Course teams meet in Ulster at the start of the academic year to plan and coordinate teaching, assessment and moderation.

2.20 As a provider of awarding body programmes, QAHE(Ulst) is bound under its partnership agreements to implement the awarding body's Learning and Teaching Strategy and associated policies, including its First Year Undergraduate Teaching Policy, Guidelines on First Year Teaching, and Teaching and Learning Support Charter. They establish basic principles for the development of undergraduate students as independent learners in higher education, including opportunities to engage in personal development planning. Each student is assigned a Studies Adviser for academic support with a Code of Practice setting out their responsibilities.

2.21 The partnership agreements require that all teaching staff be approved as Recognised Teachers by the awarding body. They undertake induction, a staff development module provided by the awarding body and annual appraisals. Recognition is granted for four years at a time. QAHE(Ulst) is also required to encourage and support its staff to engage in further development activities.

2.22 These arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met. To establish how they work in practice, the team reviewed strategy documents and performance statistics, staff CVs, minutes from relevant committees, student survey data, external examiners' reports and teaching materials. Details were discussed with a wide range of staff and students.

2.23 QAHE(Ulst) acknowledges problems with student retention and achievement on some programmes in its first years of operation. As discussed within the Expectation for Enhancement, the team recognised that a largely new and expanded SMT has addressed difficulties under the close supervision of the awarding body. The QAHE(Ulst) Head of Quality Assurance was appointed as part of this effort. The review team was told that this had improved executive capacity and noted acknowledgement of this by the awarding body, in addition to evidence of considerable improvement in student outcomes. A local process for semester-based monitoring of performance including module evaluation was piloted in

2015-16. The team learned that this had enabled rapid and successful intervention to improve performance in a postgraduate programme.

2.24 Over the past year QAHE(Ulst) has also begun to improve its capacity for academic governance. An Academic Board with responsibility for oversight of the quality of learning opportunities has been created. It is to include student members and representatives of the awarding body. A Learning and Teaching Committee had just begun to operate at the time of the visit. The Associate Deans have been given an institution-wide remit as well as responsibility for specific partnerships, and two new posts have been created for Learning and Teaching and Student Experience (although the second position had not been filled at the time of the review visit). A Learning and Teaching Strategy and Staff Development Policy have been drafted, which the new Associate Dean for Learning and Teaching is tasked to develop in 2016-17. An electronic system to trigger and record staff appraisal and a system of peer observation have been introduced.

2.25 The minutes of the Academic Board in its first year of operation record collective deliberation on important issues including programme proposals, student performance and staff development. The Learning and Teaching Committee has set up 11 projects on a wide range of themes including digital literacy, research-enhanced learning and peer learning. The draft Learning and Teaching Strategy articulates an appropriate ethos for higher education with a particular focus on the gradual development of students as independent learners and on employability. The draft Staff Development Policy brings greater ambition and coherence in this area and work is underway on an audit of staff activity. The introduction of structures, policies and procedures to improve the capacity to manage and enhance the provision of learning opportunities is discussed in more detail within the Expectation for Enhancement.

2.26 The team found academic staff at QAHE(Ulst) to be well qualified. It noted that steps had been taken to reduce reliance on part-time Associate Lecturers, although their professional experience was valued by senior staff and students. An Associate Staff Coordinator has been appointed to improve induction and support. Part-time teachers told the team that this was helpful and that they felt able to play a full role in QAHE(Ulst) life, receiving payment for attending staff development events and important committee meetings. Teachers have a good understanding of the ethos of higher education and of the particular characteristics of the QAHE(Ulst) student body, impressing the team with their commitment to widening participation. All full-time staff met by the team reported that they had taken part in appraisal and some form of staff development activity within the past year. Examples included advanced professional training, the presentation of a research paper and attendance at workshops on teaching.

2.27 In the student submission and recent surveys, students at QAHE(Ulst) rate teaching highly. They are particularly appreciative of the friendly and supportive atmosphere created in the classroom. They identify as awarding body students and have a clear understanding of what is required of them in higher education. The team learned that although teaching materials are provided by the awarding body, QAHE(Ulst) staff have been able to develop resources which are more directly relevant to their students. Case studies of international or English businesses had been substituted for those written for students in Northern Ireland, after consultation with teachers at the awarding body, such as an examination of Transport for London in an undergraduate module and case studies of either London or Birmingham retailers, as appropriate, in a postgraduate module. Staff told the team that they had been able to draw on their own professional experience in developing these materials. In revalidating the MSc in International Business, the awarding body noted how QAHE(Ulst) exploited the diversity of its students by organising them into groups with different backgrounds to discuss cases from different perspectives in seminars. QAHE(Ulst) staff had also proposed a number of changes to assessments which had been adopted by the

awarding body, including replacing an early exam for Graduate Certificate students with an in-class test based on a case study, as the students are new to the UK system and still developing their English-language competency. The team concludes that the creation and use of additional learning materials that are contextualised to the location and profile of the student body is **good practice**.

2.28 Personal development planning is built into core modules for most programmes and students understand its nature and purpose, with favourable feedback that rated these personal development opportunities highly. However, in talking to students the review team discovered that awareness of the Study Adviser system is low, as had also been indicated in the student submission. Teaching staff explained that year groups usually had one of their teachers designated as their Study Adviser, in many cases the Course Director. Students might not therefore be aware of the distinction, with staff also pointing out that students had the benefit of frequent small-group or individual interaction in the classroom with some international students preferring this form of support. The team was told that personal tutoring had been identified as a Learning and Teaching Strategy project for 2016-17. It also noted the existence of systems to trigger intervention in response to poor attendance or overall performance. While the team recognised that the current approach might work well, QAHE(Ulst) was not in a position to guarantee that all students were taking advantage of it, particularly in larger cohorts. The team therefore **recommends** that all students are provided with formal opportunities for individual reflection on their progress to further their academic development.

2.29 The review team recognises the evidence for improved governance, good levels of student satisfaction and good practice in learning and teaching. Difficulties with study advice were being targeted, and were offset by other systems and procedures for student support. The team concludes that the Expectation for developing independent, creative and critical learners is met, with low risk.

**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**

2.30 The awarding body's Teaching and Learning Support Charter promises students a supportive learning environment, including pastoral care, support for transition to higher education and careers advice. The partnership agreements state that these are mainly QAHE(Ulst) responsibilities, although minimum standards are stipulated in some areas. In addition, QAHE(Ulst) promises a welfare service tailored to its students including support on health, personal and financial issues. Students are also able to access the careers service. This is elaborated in the draft Learning and Teaching Strategy to include specialist support for learners from different cultural backgrounds, including English-language support, and learners with disabilities. QAHE(Ulst) has adopted the awarding body's Equality and Diversity statement.

2.31 Delivery of support services is managed by the Director of Operations who is a member of the SMT. The Head of Learning Resources attends Course Committee meetings, at which learning resources are a standard agenda item, and the new Academic Board brings together teaching and support staff to facilitate seamlessness in provision. Student feedback on the learning environment is collected through surveys and the SSCCs.

2.32 QAHE(Ulst) has two campuses, in London and Birmingham, each of which comprises a suite of large and small teaching rooms, study areas, offices and a library. The London campus was refurbished in 2015 and more rooms are being added to both campuses for 2016-17. Information technology resources, including laptops for loan, are provided and maintained onsite and students have remote access to the Ulster University VLE which houses general information and teaching materials and allows access to e-books and e-journals. In addition, membership of the Society of College National and University Libraries network allows students access to other local university libraries. Both libraries have been refurbished in the last three years and are managed by professional librarians.

2.33 There is a Welfare and Student Relations team with a qualified Welfare or Wellbeing Officer on each campus. They are the first point of contact for students with disabilities as well as offering general support. They are able to refer students to external services where necessary. QAHE(Ulst) programmes are vocational and preparation for careers in business or computing is built into their design. Individual careers guidance is provided by advisers from the University of London Careers Group who attend each campus at least once a week.

2.34 These arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met. To explore their operation, the review team looked at relevant statistics, policies and statements, the CVs of support staff and study skills materials. Details were discussed with senior staff, teaching staff, staff from the support services and students. A demonstration of the VLE also took place.

2.35 Echoing the student submission, students told the team that they feel welcome and included at QAHE(Ulst), with the diversity of the student body being exploited in teaching and celebrated in social events. They praised counselling and welfare support on issues ranging from bereavement to culture shock. The team noted that the Welfare Officer in

Birmingham had established community support contacts to deal with culturally sensitive issues - such as arranged marriage - and that the Student Relations Officer had created a 10-day festival of different cultures and religions to coincide with Easter. Students still expressed some concerns about library and IT resources but are ready to acknowledge significant improvement. They are generally satisfied with the VLE as well as careers advice and guidance; this is discussed in more detail in Expectation B10.

2.36 As noted in Expectation B3, QAHE(Ulst) acknowledges problems with student retention and achievement in its first years of operation. Resourcing had been identified as a contributing factor and student survey data also recorded concerns about resources. The team was told that the new SMT had taken action to improve planning and strengthen the professional base of Support Services. Better management information had enabled QAHE(Ulst) to develop a live Academic Plan for resourcing by programme and module which is reviewed monthly on the basis of actual and projected enrolments. Information on enrolment and staff resourcing are standing reports to the Affiliate College Executive Board. Student experience surveys which encompass resourcing are conducted three times a year and the Operations Department produces a detailed action plan in response. Each service now has a detailed Operations Manual. Managers are qualified and belong to relevant professional bodies. Service levels are checked against awarding body or national benchmarks.

2.37 The introduction of structures, policies and procedures to improve the capacity to manage and enhance the provision of learning opportunities is detailed within the Expectation for Enhancement. To address its early problems with retention and achievement, QAHE(Ulst) decided to enhance induction activities and increase support through the provision of study skills extending beyond the minimum required set by the awarding body. This was piloted within the BSc Business Studies as the programme most affected by low retention rates.

2.38 Enhanced study skills provision has now been rolled out for undergraduates across QAHE(Ulst) in the form of non-credit-bearing skills modules in the first two years and a refresher programme at the start of the third year. The modules were developed by the English-language staff in close cooperation with Course Directors and student support staff. Activities are sequenced to prepare students for assessments in credit-bearing modules. One of their aims is to develop academic communication skills in a manner inclusive of native and non-native speakers of English. Postgraduate students receive advice at induction on critical thinking, using sources and developing an argument. Additional advice is included in programme handbooks. Students were very positive about the quality of support, with the team being particularly impressed by the materials prepared for the skills modules and also by the Drama and Reading Club. This initiative helps students with oral communication, and includes drop-in support with assignments provided by library staff. The sustained development of study skills for a diverse student body, incorporating the use of English for Academic Purposes, is **good practice**. An extended induction programme piloted on one undergraduate programme has also been successful and is being rolled out across QAHE(Ulst). The team **affirms** the deliberate steps being taken to ensure the successful transition of learners to higher education through extended induction procedures.

2.39 On the basis of the range of evidence provided by QAHE(Ulst) and discussions with students and staff, alongside examples of good practice, the team recognises systematic improvements with student support. The team concludes that the Expectation for monitoring and evaluating arrangements and resources for developing the academic, personal and professional potential of students is met, with low risk.

**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**

2.40 QAHE(Ulst) is responsible for student engagement and provides students with a range of opportunities to engage in the quality assurance and enhancement of their programmes. These include appointing a student representative for each programme, Student/Staff Course Consultative Committees, module evaluations, the Student Engagement Survey, the Student Experience Survey, the National Student Survey, working groups, and student surveys. Student consultation during validation and revalidation events is in place. The awarding body oversees the SSCCs and Course Committees. The Executive Dean receives the analysis relating to the quality of learning and teaching and any concerns are passed on to the appropriate Associate Dean.

2.41 These arrangements are summarised in the Student Handbook that all new students receive on their arrival and confirm QAHE(Ulst)'s intention to monitor, review and continuously enhance student engagement, thereby allowing the Expectation to be met.

2.42 The review team considered minutes from meetings attended by students, reviewed student survey data and analysed the materials used by QAHE(Ulst) to train student representatives. Details were discussed with students at the London and Birmingham campuses, and with a wide range of staff.

2.43 The evidence demonstrates that the QAHE(Ulst) approach to promoting student engagement is working effectively. QAHE(Ulst) maintains an environment within which students and staff engage regularly in both formal and informal ways, including a commitment to formalise student engagement in the new Academic Board and Learning and Teaching Committee. The team noted that no students had actually attended meetings, but were reassured by the recent terms of reference that included student representation, with plans in place to invite student representatives to future meetings. The review team **affirms** the actions taking place to engage students in higher-level committees.

2.44 Students whom the review team met confirmed their involvement in Course Committee meetings, surveys and working groups. Student representatives are appointed and trained to allow them to fulfil their role effectively. A link to the training materials is accessible to students on the VLE. Student feedback at the SSCCs indicated that the students found the training to be helpful.

2.45 Students detailed several cases where QAHE(Ulst) had responded positively to their contributions and feedback. One major example was in relation to the Library, also discussed in Expectation B4. Improvement outcomes include extending the opening hours, increasing the space to encourage group working, purchasing additional key textbooks and making laptops available to students while on campus. During a meeting with London-based students, the team heard that some issues have not yet been resolved, but QAHE(Ulst) have kept students informed of progress and offered reassurance that actions are still underway.

2.46 QAHE(Ulst) is proactive in reporting back to students on actions taken in relation to student feedback. Several methods are used, including via student representatives, and the

minutes of SSCCs are posted on Blackboard Learn. To increase the visibility of feedback a 'You Said, We Did' campaign is being implemented on both campuses.

2.47 QAHE(Ulst)'s approach to monitoring and reviewing student feedback is working effectively, as noted within the Expectation for Enhancement. For example, a formal student survey is conducted at the end of the semester for all programmes. The results are analysed centrally and returned to the relevant Head of Department. Survey data is analysed by the SMT and action plans are developed, with a rolling programme being used for addressing systematic issues. This method is led by the Executive Dean and involves the awarding body.

2.48 The team noted improvements over time with the functioning of the Staff/Student Consultative and Course Committees, with the new Academic Board considering relevant minutes of meetings. Students confirmed that their involvement in module and course-level monitoring was effective.

2.49 It is clear that students are provided with sufficient opportunities to represent the collective student voice within a range of organisational contexts, to be enhanced further by the planned inclusion of students within higher-level committees. The team observed the development of structures, policies and procedures for improving the capacity to manage and enhance the provision of learning opportunities, based largely on student feedback. These processes allow the Expectation for engaging students in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience to be met, with low risk.

**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**

2.50 QAHE(Ulst) follows the awarding body's Assessment Policy which, alongside the course handbooks, outlines the required content for assignment briefs. QAHE(Ulst) is responsible for applying awarding body regulations and assessment procedures to secure valid and reliable assessment outcomes. Each franchised programme sets the assessments for that programme with QAHE(Ulst) staff marking assessments that are subject to internal and external moderation. The QAHE(Ulst) approach to academic misconduct details the processes for preventing, identifying, investigating and responding to unacceptable academic practice. These approaches to assessment arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.51 The review team considered a range of evidence from across a variety of programmes, including programme specifications, material available on the VLE, student handbooks, assessment schedules, examples of moderation, minutes of exam boards and external examiner reports. Details were discussed with students, awarding body representatives and a range of staff.

2.52 The review team noted the alignment of intended learning outcomes with teaching and assessment through the application of the draft Teaching and Learning Strategy as well as module handbooks containing guidance on referencing, layout, bibliographies and avoiding plagiarism.

2.53 The effective operation of examination boards was confirmed by awarding body representatives, with external examiner reports noting the appropriateness of assessment activities and the meeting of intended learning outcomes at appropriate levels. Internal verification and moderation procedures appear thorough with teaching staff clarifying the moderation process in the event of disagreement between assessors. Awarding body staff also participate in the moderation process using agreed procedures and methods. Marked work is consistently reported back to students via the VLE. This feedback includes information about how grades have been reached, accompanied by criteria that have been used for assessment and commentaries on areas for improvement.

2.54 QAHE(Ulst) surveys student views on assessments and modules, and students confirmed that they are formally involved in reviewing the assessment process as members of the Staff/Student Consultation Committee. Details concerning the recognition of prior learning are considered as part of the admissions process which is handled entirely by the awarding body and referenced in the Admissions Manual and flowcharts.

2.55 Students stated that assessment was fair and that assessment feedback was helpful from most assessors, normally being made available within two weeks. Students clarified that in addition to written feedback they were also able to seek additional face-to-face feedback from tutors on an informal basis. They confirmed that feedback was timely to enable them to improve before the next assessment, although there were some instances where delays had been experienced with the provision of feedback on

coursework. The review team confirmed that this was not, however, a significant or recurring feature within student commentaries and survey data. Grading criteria are clear and explained successfully to students, with clear deadlines given for submission. Students advised that for each module the learning outcomes and assessment criteria are clearly set out and presented in the course handbooks and on the VLE.

2.56 The electronic submission of assessments allows effective tracking of submissions, including the use of plagiarism-detection software. This is solely a QAHE(Ulst) procedure which is not an awarding body requirement and one which the team considers to enhance the security of assessment outcomes.

2.57 The review team concludes that the Expectation for operating equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment is met, with 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**

2.58 The awarding body is responsible for appointing and briefing external examiners and organising their work. The procedures are set out in its Assessment Handbook and in a Code of Practice for External Examining of Taught Programmes of Study. These stipulate that each programme must have a minimum of one external examiner who will be a member of the boards of examiners, approve and moderate assessments, confirm progression and award decisions, and submit written reports to the awarding body. They have the right to raise serious concerns directly with the Vice Chancellor. Nomination rules ensure their impartiality. They are sent a handbook and are required to undertake induction when first appointed. Responses to their reports are drafted by the University Course Director and approved by the awarding body Course Committee.

2.59 External moderation is usually carried out at the awarding body with examiners sometimes visiting QAHE(Ulst) campuses. The awarding body sends their reports to the Head of Quality Assurance at QAHE(Ulst) who conducts an initial review and forwards them with comments to the Course Director, Executive Dean and Associate Deans. Course directors liaise with their awarding body counterparts on the response and present the reports to their Course Committee together with an account of actions taken. A cross-QAHE(Ulst) report and action plan is also collated by the Head of Quality Assurance.

2.60 External examiners' reports form part of the dataset consulted in annual monitoring and periodic review of programmes to assure standards and quality and identify possibilities for enhancement. A requirement to reflect upon them is built into the QAHE(Ulst) new semester-based monitoring report. The external examiners' reports are uploaded to the VLE and discussed with students at Staff/Student Consultative Committees and Course Committees. They are also reviewed at Department Boards. Students are informed of the names and role of external examiners in their programme handbooks.

2.61 These arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met. To check their operation, the team reviewed a complete set of external examiners' reports for the past three years, along with minutes of Course Committees and exam boards. A demonstration was provided of relevant information on the QAHE(Ulst) VLE and details were discussed with a range of staff and students.

2.62 The review team established that the procedures are implemented to the satisfaction of external examiners and the awarding body. Discussion of reports in QAHE(Ulst) committees could be traced and there was evidence of action planning and follow-through of responses. Two QAHE(Ulst) staff currently serve as external examiners at other institutions, affording a further opportunity for sharing good practice. Collation and review of reports by the Head of Quality Assurance and the Executive Dean ensures oversight at QAHE(Ulst) level but the creation of the Academic Board and a system of semester-based monitoring at QAHE(Ulst) are enabling QAHE(Ulst) to take greater ownership.

2.63 The review team concludes that QAHE(Ulst) implements the procedures required by the awarding body and that external examiners' reports are properly considered to inform action planning. The Expectation for making scrupulous use of external examiners is therefore met, with low risk.

**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**

2.64 QAHE(Ulst) is required to meet the awarding body's requirements for the monitoring and review of programmes. Arrangements are laid out in the respective collaborative agreements.

2.65 QAHE(Ulst) has also developed its own policies and procedures to assure itself that appropriate quality and academic standards are maintained across all of its higher education provision. The awarding body regulations for awards and the Qualifications and Credit Framework and the Academic Board terms of reference set out the QAHE(Ulst) process for the monitoring and review of its provision and define the roles, responsibilities and membership of the various committees and boards.

2.66 Course committees are held three times a year and semester-based reviews are carried out by each programme team, following an agreed format which results in recommendations for implementation and monitoring actions where required.

2.67 Semester-based monitoring reports summarise the quality of higher education provision by programme across QAHE(Ulst), including the identification of risks, areas for improvement, areas of good practice and enhancement. An action plan in response to external examiners' reports is also produced and both reports are considered by the Academic Board, which also meets three times a year to consider and advise the SMT on all higher education academic matters.

2.68 In addition to committee monitoring arrangements there are a range of opportunities for staff to be observed - formally as part of annual appraisal using a commercial appraisal package and more informally as part of a peer review process. QAHE(Ulst) uses students to feed back on teaching and learning, which includes end-of-module surveys as well as representation on course committees and new positions on the Academic Board.

2.69 These processes for the monitoring and review of programmes at QAHE(Ulst), in association with the awarding body, would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.70 The review team examined a range of documents including minutes from Course Committees, Academic Board and external examiner reports. The team also reviewed evidence of module evaluation and discussed details with staff from QAHE(Ulst), awarding body representatives and students.

2.71 QAHE(Ulst) has developed, and is now operating, an extensive internal process to ensure the complete monitoring and review of its higher education programmes, as demonstrated for example in the recently established Academic Board which is the strategic QAHE(Ulst) body that now considers and approves key higher education documents. It advises on student experience, learning, teaching and assessment, external relations, and the range of academic subjects and developments. In addition to the representatives from the executive and staff with key responsibilities for higher education programmes, the membership also includes central service staff who have welcomed sitting on the board

as it enables them to participate in quality assurance and decision-making. Importantly, staff feel that the Board considers all aspects of the student journey in a holistic sense.

2.72 Scrutiny of the minutes of the meetings of the Course Committees confirmed that standard agendas are in use. As discussed in Expectation B5, there is student representation at some of the meetings but not within the more recently established higher-level committees. Students reported, however, that they had seen minutes from the meetings and felt they could actively input into monitoring activity leading to change, with the example of Library provision being cited in Expectation B4. Students also receive feedback on their monitoring comments via 'You Said, We Did' posters.

2.73 The team confirmed that semester-based monitoring reports are produced by programme teams, which consider feedback from external examiners. In addition, internal data analysis of areas including outcomes, recruitment and progression, student feedback, good practice and enhancement was considered. There is evidence of action planning for the forthcoming period, in addition to reporting on the previous year's action plans.

2.74 The team noted the systematic use of annual planning meetings for teaching, learning and assessment held between QAHE(Ulst) and awarding body teams. Awarding body representatives commented on supportive and close working relationships for a range of activities including an internally published research project based on the work of QAHE(Ulst) that has influenced the work of the awarding body.

2.75 As discussed within Enhancement, the review team confirms the steps taken by QAHE(Ulst) to provide strategic oversight for monitoring higher education provision through the introduction of the Academic Board. There is a coordinated approach to planning processes, with organised feedback to students on actions taken in response to module evaluation and analysis. The team concludes that the Expectation for the operation of effective, regular and systematic monitoring and review of programmes is met, with low risk.

**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**

2.76 QAHE(Ulst) follows awarding body processes as set out in the Complaints Policy for Academic Appeals and Student Complaints. Responsibility for student complaints is shared with the awarding body and student appeals are the responsibility of the awarding body alone. All appeals and formal complaints are made directly to the awarding body. QAHE(Ulst) senior staff are involved in appeal hearings as necessary. However, all administration is the responsibility of the awarding body.

2.77 Information and guidance is provided to students via the online Student Guide, course handbooks, and the Policies and Regulations section of the Student Handbook, and are discussed during induction. Students are encouraged to raise any complaint they have through an informal process in the first instance. This involves them discussing the matter with staff at QAHE(Ulst), which could include the Head of Quality Assurance, their Course Director, the Registrar, or an appropriate member of staff they feel comfortable with. If the complaint cannot be resolved informally, they are directed to the awarding body's formal complaints procedure.

2.78 The availability and design of these processes would enable QAHE(Ulst) to meet the Expectation.

2.79 The review team reviewed documentary evidence including QAHE(Ulst) academic complaints and appeals procedures, student handbooks and complaints reports. Details were discussed with students, academic and support staff, and awarding body representatives.

2.80 Students are able to raise concerns informally in the first instance, resulting in most being resolved in an effective, timely and appropriate manner. Should an individual need to progress to a more formal procedure, the team also found clear and accurate guidance for students, including access to the required forms on the VLE and the online Student Guide. Students were clear about procedures and information to be used.

2.81 QAHE(Ulst) maintains a record of the complaints received. Reports on academic appeals and formal complaints are received and reviewed by the Academic Board. QAHE(Ulst) staff are provided with information on procedures to follow, as outlined in the Ulster University Partnership Handbook. The review team examined the documentation relating to the management of academic complaints and found that they were given suitable consideration. These complaints were found to have been dealt with in a timely and appropriate manner.

2.82 The team concludes that the complaints and appeals procedures outlined are compliant with the awarding body. The Expectation for having fair, accessible and timely procedures for handling student complaints and appeals is met, with low risk.

**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**

2.83 With the approval of its awarding body, QAHE(Ulst) employs the University of London Careers Group to deliver careers support and guidance to its students. It also purchases access to a set of online career development resources from a commercial provider which are presented to QAHE(Ulst) students through a dedicated portal. These are the only responsibilities it delegates to other organisations. Both arrangements are set out in formal contracts. A qualified adviser from the Careers Group attends each campus at least once a week to provide individual guidance, produce materials and deliver workshops. Reports from the Group are submitted to QAHE(Ulst) on a monthly and annual basis. The relationships are managed by the Director of Operations and provision is reviewed by the Staff/Student Consultative Committees, the Academic Board and the Affiliate College Executive Board.

2.84 This would enable the Expectation to be met. To explore its operation, the review team reviewed the contracts, reports submitted by the Careers Group and minutes of the committees at which provision is reviewed. Details were also discussed with students and professional support staff in addition to one of the careers advisers.

2.85 The review team confirmed that there were no other partnerships with organisations delivering learning opportunities, such as employers offering work placements. The team was able to track oversight of the arrangement with the Careers Group by QAHE(Ulst) committees. It learned that the Careers Group was able to tailor its provision to the QAHE(Ulst) student body, most of whom are international students. QAHE(Ulst) is also able to customise the online resources it buys. The review team found the Group's annual report to be thorough and reflective and the range of services delivered to be appropriate. It noted that QAHE(Ulst) has tasked its Student Relations Officer with identifying local careers fairs that students could attend.

2.86 Students who had used the service told the review team that they had found it helpful and the Careers Group's user surveys record high levels of satisfaction. Nonetheless, QAHE(Ulst) and the Careers Group acknowledge the need to improve student engagement. This is to be a task for the Associate Dean for Student Engagement when appointed. A set of employability workshops leading to an award has been piloted for roll-out to both campuses and creation of a Careers and Employability Committee is under consideration.

2.87 Noting the evidence supporting the effectiveness of formal oversight, student satisfaction and active enhancement, the team concludes that the Expectation for managing and monitoring partnerships with other organisations is met with low risk.

**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**

2.88 QAHE(Ulst) does not deliver research degrees, therefore this Expectation does not apply.

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

2.89 In reaching its judgement about the quality of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

2.90 All relevant Expectations in this area have been met, with a judgement of low risk being reached in each case.

2.91 There were two instances of good practice. The first involves Expectation B3, where QAHE(Ulst) has created additional learning materials that are more appropriate for students with widening participation and international profiles and who are living and studying within the London and Birmingham campuses. The second involves Expectation B4, where there has been sustained and extensive study skills support, including the use of English for Academic Purposes.

2.92 There was one recommendation regarding support for learning within Expectation B4. This involved making sure that individual reflection opportunities are provided to all students through a more formalised schedule of meetings between students and tutors to support academic development.

2.93 Two affirmations emerged in Expectations B4 and B5: the steps being taken to develop extended induction procedures to help learners with their move into higher education, and the actions underway to ensure that there is student representation within higher-level committees.

2.94 The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at QAHE(Ulst) **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 QAHE(Ulst) has a variety of mechanisms through which it ensures that information to external stakeholders, students and staff is fit for purpose. The University Services Agreement sets out the process that QAHE(Ulst) must adhere to. The awarding body annually reviews and approves a domestic marketing strategy with QAHE(Ulst) through the Director of Employability and Marketing and the International Marketing Strategy through the PVC (Communication) of Educational Partnerships and International Affairs.

3.2 The awarding body reviews and approves course-level information for marketing through the Heads of Partnerships. QAHE(Ulst) must seek approval in advance for publishing course-level information and for all external and internal communications, working in partnership with the awarding body's marketing department. Course information is provided to students through a course handbook, which is made available on the VLE, and which is given to students at induction. Module handbooks are approved by QAHE Course Directors and course handbooks are approved by the Head of Quality Assurance, and sign-off by the awarding body is provided to QAHE(Ulst) via email.

3.3 In addition to information provided through the prospectus, the website and UCAS, potential students have access to information about courses through educational agents and QAHE(Ulst) staff. The London and Birmingham campuses have their own dedicated micro website which is the first point of contact for many potential students. Ownership of content on this microsite sits with QAHE(Ulst), with oversight provided by the awarding body through programme sheets. Sign-off and update procedures are completed at the University's Student Recruitment and Marketing Subcommittee (SMRSC). The SMRSC is attended by QAHE(Ulst) marketing staff, at which there is a discussion of the awarding body's marketing strategy.

3.4 The design of these processes would allow QAHE(Ulst) to meet the Expectation.

3.5 The review team considered relevant documentation and website information, including the public website for QAHE(Ulst), and course and module handbooks. Details were discussed with senior staff, students, professional support staff, teaching staff and the Head of Partnerships from the awarding body. The review team also analysed the policies and procedures made available through the staff shared drive/intranet and to students through the VLE, with a demonstration of both systems by a member of QAHE(Ulst) staff.

3.6 Current students receive detailed pre-arrival information about their entitlement and access to services, and membership of student representative groups associated with the awarding body. They are also informed of avenues that are open to them for concerns, complaints and appeals, and how these are divided between QAHE(Ulst) and the awarding body.

3.7 Course handbooks provide full information about course objectives, assessment aims, submission deadlines, grading criteria and academic offences. Information is made available to current students primarily through the VLE, and students made positive comments about the pre-course information they had received. They stated that a lot of clear and helpful information was provided. Blackboard was described as very useful and extensively used, with good support. External examiner reports are made available to students, reflecting the general principles of engaging students in quality management processes.

3.8 Students are able to access their individual results via Blackboard Learn and are able to download and print up-to-date transcripts. Final transcripts are provided by the awarding body together with a degree certificate on graduation.

3.9 Policy documentation is made readily accessible to staff through the shared drive/intranet. This includes guidance for staff on issues such as academic malpractice and the conditions governing assessment. Teaching staff were aware of where relevant policy information was kept, and how to access it.

3.10 As noted in the 2015 British Council Report for the Birmingham Campus, no records were kept of actions taken as a result of student feedback. QAHE(Ulst) has since made improvements for letting students know what has been done in response, for example through 'You Said, We Did' procedures. Student survey data is now being more systematically analysed by the Executive and Associate Deans and QAHE(Ulst) is making good use of a rolling action plan based on student experience. Staff are content with the quality of information, confirming that the QAHE(Ulst) shared drive supports effective communication and sharing of good practice. QAHE(Ulst) marketing staff have undertaken training on the latest Consumer Markets Authority (CMA) regulatory guidance.

3.11 As noted within the Expectation for Enhancement, the team was reassured that new procedures introduced by QAHE(Ulst) since 2014 - including the systematic forecasting with Marketing, the earlier generation of management information and better information to students - will help to prevent previous problems from recurring. The evidence from documentation and meetings indicates that QAHE(Ulst) ensures that information about its higher education provision is fit for purpose and accessible to external and internal stakeholders. Students are positive about the information provided by QAHE(Ulst) and are aware of the knowledge and information available to them. QAHE(Ulst) has processes in place to update information given to prospective students, external audiences, and staff and students.

3.12 On the basis of this evidence, the review team concludes that the Expectation for the production of fit-for-purpose, accessible and trustworthy information is met, with low risk.

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

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

3.13 In reaching its judgement about the quality of the information about learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

3.14 The Expectation for this judgement area is met and the associated level of risk is low. There were no recommendations or affirmations.

3.15 QAHE(Ulst) provides information for the public about its higher education provision. Information is accessible, appropriate and accurate for prospective and current students, as well as those with responsibility for maintaining standards and assuring quality.

3.16 The review team concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at QAHE(Ulst) **meets** UK expectations.

## 4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

### Findings

4.1 The awarding body's Affiliate College Executive Board has oversight of franchise operations, including initiatives related to continuous improvement within franchise partners. Within this context the awarding body's Director of Partnership and Heads of Partnerships work with the Executive Dean of QAHE(Ulst), supported by Associate Deans and Course Directors responsible for local delivery.

4.2 QAHE(Ulst) states that internal responsibility for enhancement rests with senior management, who encourage reflection to foster a culture of improvement. This includes developmental initiatives in learning support and teaching at a number of levels within the organisation, including lecturers, professional support staff and students. Reflection on programme performance, including the use of student survey data and feedback on teaching, is in the process of being developed on a semester-by-semester basis to support Course Directors with enhancement activity.

4.3 The Academic Board has a remit to identify and monitor strategic enhancement initiatives, with a new Learning and Teaching Strategy providing a framework for guiding improvement and staff development. These structures, strategies and responsibilities would enable the Expectation to be met.

4.4 The review team analysed a range of documentation including the draft Learning and Teaching Strategy, a commentary on learning and teaching projects, Academic Board and Learning and Teaching Committee minutes, and additional course materials for Study Skills, English for Academic Purposes and extracurricular opportunities. Details were discussed with students as well as senior, academic and professional support staff and awarding body representatives.

4.5 The team noted that in 2014 QAHE(Ulst) instigated revisions to the processes and management of higher education, leading to the QAHE(Ulst) ability to implement more coordinated opportunities for enhancement. QAHE(Ulst) responded to the QAA Thematic Review of London Campuses through generating four areas for enhancement: admissions, plagiarism, the quality of information and attrition. Each area has associated action points brought together within an Action Plan that assisted SMT with the planning of change and improvement.

4.6 QAHE(Ulst) offers self-critical commentary when stating that while in the past some reflection has taken place in response to specific performance concerns, there was a need for an overarching strategy that gives a common framework for encouraging enhancement and flexibility to meet individual student needs. The draft Learning and Teaching Strategy and the creation of the Academic Board and Learning and Teaching Committee emerged as a direct response to this concern from SMT, accompanied by the creation of new Associate Dean positions for Learning and Teaching and Student Engagement as well as the Head of Quality. Enhancement has been reinforced by a system of more frequent semesterly reflections on development and progress at Course Committee level, using robust data from student surveys. In so doing, students are included in the reflective process and contribute to overall annual monitoring.

4.7 The rolling Student Experience Survey Action Plan responding to student surveys is also an important method for supporting reflection on progress. The team noted examples of sustained development initiatives that began in one area and extended to other programmes, as noted in Expectation B4 with the expansion of study skills support incorporating the use of English for Academic Purposes. Over the last academic session there has been a marked growth in the piloting of improvement initiatives extending beyond academic writing. They are linked to the Learning and Teaching Strategy and aim to benefit all of QAHE(Ulst) through a series of 11 Learning and Teaching projects in a range of subject areas and programmes. Each project is led by a team of staff and students with examples including Ghost Writing, the Creative Use of Technology, Peer Learning, Challenges for the Student Demographic, Employability and Guest Lectures, and Measuring Learning and Teaching.

4.8 The team recognises that the SMT have supported and developed strategic change that has been recently introduced and that is gaining momentum, culminating in the draft Learning and Teaching Strategy. One example of recent ongoing work, and discussed further in Expectation B5, involves the planned engagement of students in higher-level committees. Another is taken from Expectation B4, where induction procedures are being strengthened for all students based on reflection about earlier difficulties within Business Studies. On the basis of these deliberate steps that are being taken to develop continuous improvement throughout QAHE(Ulst), the team **affirms** the introduction of structures, policies and procedures to improve the capacity to manage and enhance the provision of learning opportunities.

4.9 Organisational developments and subsequent changes in the processes and management of higher education have led to the identification of key strategic enhancement priorities informed by a range of feedback from student surveys, committees and projects. The team concludes that QAHE(Ulst) is committed to taking deliberate steps to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities and that the Expectation for Enhancement is met. It was noted, however, that some recent initiatives and developments have not been fully tested. Examples include the appointment of students to higher-level committees, the operation of the new Learning and Teaching Committee and the pending appointment of the Associate Dean for Student Engagement. On this basis the team considers the Expectation to be associated with moderate risk.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Moderate**

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

4.10 In reaching its judgement about the enhancement of learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

4.11 The Expectation for this judgement area is met and the associated level of risk is moderate. There were no recommendations, with one affirmation concerning the introduction of structures, policies and procedures to improve the capacity to manage and enhance the provision of learning opportunities. This affirmation and overall risk level is based on the recency of some developments and initiatives introduced over the last academic session, some of which have yet to be fully tested by QAHE(Ulst).

4.12 The review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at QAHE(Ulst) **meets** UK expectations.

## 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 21 to 24 of the [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\) handbook](#).

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

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

### Academic standards

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

### Award

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

### Awarding organisation

An organisation authorised to award a particular qualification; an organisation recognised by Ofqual to award Ofqual-regulated qualifications

### Blended learning

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

### Credit(s)

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

### Degree-awarding body

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

### Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

### Dual award or double award

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

### e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning

### **Enhancement**

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

### **Expectations**

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

### **Flexible and distributed learning**

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

### **Framework**

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

### **Framework for higher education qualifications**

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

### **Good practice**

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

### **Learning opportunities**

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

### **Learning outcomes**

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

### **Multiple awards**

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

### **Operational definition**

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

### **Programme (of study)**

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

### **Programme specifications**

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

### **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.

### **Self-evaluation document**

A report submitted by a higher education provider, assessing its own performance, to be used as evidence in a QAA review.

### **Subject Benchmark Statement**

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

### **Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)**

Learning that is delivered or supported through the use of technology.

### **Threshold academic standard**

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

### **Virtual learning environment (VLE)**

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

### **Widening participation**

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

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