



# Higher Education Review of the University of Portsmouth

March 2015

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## About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at the University of Portsmouth. The review took place from 17 to 20 March 2015 and was conducted by a team of five reviewers, as follows:

- Philip Bassett
- Mary Carswell
- Alan Howard
- Alison Jones
- Matthew Kearns (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by University of Portsmouth 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 the QAA review team:

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

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 6.

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

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

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

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<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> Higher Education Review themes: [www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106).

<sup>3</sup> QAA website: [www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us).

<sup>4</sup> Higher Education Review web pages: [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review).

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about the University of Portsmouth

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

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

### Good practice

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

- The high-quality guidance that enables staff to implement approval, modification and reapproval processes effectively (Expectations A3.1, A3.3).
- The comprehensive and effective student support that contributes to students achieving personal, professional and academic potential (Expectation B4).
- The well coordinated University-wide employability strategy that affords opportunities for all students to develop their employability skills and career potential (Expectation B4).
- The effective operation of the comprehensive policy governing collaborative and placement provision that enhances the learning opportunities and employability skills of students (Expectation B10).

### Recommendations

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

By September 2015:

- ensure arrangements for combined honours students deliver an equitable experience to single honours students (Expectations B4, B6)
- ensure quality assurance meetings are documented fully and actions are clearly identified, recorded and progressed (Expectations B8, B5).

### Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The steps being taken by the University and the Students' Union to involve students on course approval committees and periodic review panels (Expectations B5, B1, B8).

## Theme: Student Employability

The University highlights employability within its Education Strategy with skills for roles in the global workforce included as curriculum design requirements in the Curriculum Framework 2014. All students engage in work-related learning as part of their core programme and have the opportunity to take part in other career-enhancing experiences. A revised vision includes 'ensuring every student takes part in career-enhancing activities, such as placements, exchanges, enterprise, volunteering or work-based learning'.

The University's Curriculum Framework requires that all courses include the development of employability skills and Course Approval and Review Committees are responsible for ensuring this. Advice and guidance to course teams is provided by the Department for Curriculum and Quality Enhancement and the Department of Employability. Wherever courses are eligible for professional body accreditation, the strategy is to secure and retain that accreditation and this has been achieved with approximately 60 such bodies. Campus based full-time undergraduate students also have the opportunity to study the equivalent of 40 credits of a foreign language to enhance their employability.

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

## About the University of Portsmouth

The University of Portsmouth (the University) was established as a University in 1992 and has its origins in the Portsmouth Municipal College which opened in 1908. At the time of the review the University had 24,035 higher education students of whom 3,491 had international status by domicile. 19,565 are full-time and 4,460 part-time. There are 4,042 postgraduate taught students and 808 students registered on postgraduate research programmes. A further 707 students are studying via distance learning and domiciled overseas. 2,141 students are on UK and transnational collaborative programmes.

Since September 2013, the Board of Governors has appointed a new Vice-Chancellor and two additional members to the Senior Executive. In addition, a number of other senior posts have been recently appointed or revised. The appointment of the new Vice-Chancellor set in train the development of a revised mission and new strategic plan, following a University-wide consultation. During 2014-15 strategies and plans for the delivery of a new vision are being developed.

There have been a number of additional significant changes since the last review which have been driven by the University's aim to enhance the student experience across all areas. Changes have taken place as regards learning, teaching and support such as the introduction of a new academic structure, extensive investment in digital learning technologies, the establishment of the Graduate School and a new student charter. In addition significant investment has been made in staff, estates and facilities.

There are a number of key challenges facing the University. This includes the uncertainties surrounding the proposed removal of Student Number Control, although the University saw a 12 per cent increase in Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) applications in 2014. The University recognises the need to diversify income and to develop a course portfolio that meets the needs of employers and the changing markets in subject areas. The University is aware of the continuing need to provide an estate that meets current needs and is also adaptable to future market needs for undergraduate and postgraduate course development, to meet the needs of the local community.

At the previous Audit of Collaborative Provision in December 2010, the review team identified two areas of good practice, and two advisable and two desirable recommendations. In response to this, the University has reviewed its due diligence arrangements and improved the information provided in its Collaborative Provision Policy. External examiner reports are shared with students via the virtual learning environment (VLE) or their partner's equivalent. The University's processes for the collection of student feedback for both programmes and units are outlined in its Policy for listening to and Responding to the Student Voice. However, 43 per cent of students are unaware of the external examining process despite this change. Overall, the responses to the recommendations have been appropriate and effective.

## Explanation of the findings about the University of Portsmouth

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Findings

1.1 The University's Academic Regulations, Curriculum Framework and Credit Bearing Short Course Curriculum Framework stipulate the requirements that all courses taught at the University and at partner institutions must meet. The regulations framework documents are aligned with *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), the Higher Education Credit Framework for England and the Quality Code. Account has been taken of QAA's guidance on qualification characteristics and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements for the design of courses. The University has a detailed process for the approval and modification of courses which includes procedures to ensure that the course meets the curriculum framework requirements and satisfies professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) requirements where appropriate.

1.2 The Periodic Review process ensures that the course remains aligned with the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements, and that learning outcomes continue to be positioned at the appropriate level. External panel members are an integral part of the approval and review processes in ensuring that courses continue to meet the expectations of the relevant University framework.

1.3 Heads of Academic Departments and Chairs of Faculty Research Degree Committees consider applicant proposals for an individual postgraduate research degree programme. Postgraduate Research Degree Programmes are required to meet the Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Degrees, which is overseen by the University Research Degrees Committee.

1.4 The approval process for new courses includes distinct phases: approval first by Curriculum Committee that considers aspects of strategic fit, resource and finance, proposed title and market demand; then by Faculty Curriculum Approval Committee, with an external subject assessor present, to ensure that it is fit for purpose and meets external benchmarks, Academic Regulations and University policy requirements; and ratification of the Faculty Curriculum Approval Committee recommendation by the Quality Assurance Committee. Any conditions set by the Faculty Curriculum Approval Committee are signed off by the Associate Dean (Academic). Sign-off responsibility for collaborative programmes also includes the Deputy Academic Registrar (Quality Assurance and Partnerships), who certifies that financial and contractual agreement arrangements have been completed and approval granted by external accrediting bodies where applicable. Academic Council has the statutory authority to then approve awards for the University and oversees the register of all approved awards. This enables Expectation A1 to be met in theory.

1.5 The review team examined the curriculum framework documents, the Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Degrees, The Approval, Modification and Closure of Academic Provision policy and the Approval Panel Guidance. The review team with senior staff, academic staff and support staff to test the application of this Expectation.

1.6 The review team concluded that the documents were detailed and comprehensive and met the requirements of the University. Meetings with staff confirmed their understanding of the processes, committee structures, programme design requirements and monitoring processes. Minutes of the Academic Council confirmed that course approval and review outcomes were considered.

1.7 The Curriculum Framework is a detailed and comprehensive document that covers the requirements for all taught programmes of the University and sets out qualifications, levels, volume, stages, delivery and workload considerations, and draws upon key national reference points to be addressed in designing curricula. PSRBs, Sector Skills Councils and Occupational Standards are referenced in this Framework where specific courses require PSRB accreditation. Additionally, the Curriculum Framework requires four core principles to be addressed in the design of all taught programmes: a holistic and coherent curriculum, based on academic, subject and research excellence, aligned with relevant external and internal reference points and informed by and benchmarked with internal and external management information; an excellent, inclusive learning experience; skills for roles in the global workforce; and curricular design that incorporates feedback, evaluation and review and engages students as partners in learning. The Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Degrees is equally detailed and comprehensive and establishes a set of principles to ensure that standards of integrity and professionalism are observed in the conduct of research. The document has been informed by and designed to accord with the European University Association (EUA) Salzburg II Recommendations (2010); the RCUK Researcher Development Framework (RDF) (September 2010) and the Quality Code, *Chapter B11*.

1.8 The University has a well defined three stage process for the approval of courses with each stage detailed in supporting documentation. Subject External Assessor(s) are involved in the approval process to ensure subject expertise and adherence with relevant Subject Benchmark Statements, and members and chairs of panels for Course Approval and Periodic Programme Review are trained before undertaking their role.

1.9 The review team concludes that the University has designed its procedures effectively to meet the requirements of the FHEQ and related documents and meets Expectation A1 in both design and operation. The associated level of risk is low.

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



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

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

**Findings**

1.10 The Curriculum Framework is a detailed and comprehensive document that covers the requirements for all taught programmes of the University and sets out qualifications, levels, volume, stages, delivery and workload considerations, and draws upon key national reference points to be addressed in designing curricula. Examination and Assessment Regulations cover all taught programmes and the taught element of the Professional Doctorate and are reviewed annually by Academic Council. Academic regulations for research degrees are documented in Regulations for Professional Doctorates, Regulations for Higher Degrees by Research and Regulations for the Award of Doctor of Philosophy by Publication. Academic Registry maintains and updates the academic regulations and related policies on behalf of the University and collaborative partners.

1.11 The University makes use of a comprehensive credit framework for its undergraduate and taught postgraduate programmes, including those offered by its partners, which are available on the website. Credit is awarded for the achievement of learning outcomes. The University has comprehensive academic frameworks and procedures, which are mapped against the Quality Code and understood by academic staff. External examiners attend award boards and, as part of the external examining process, are required to confirm that the regulations have been met, and that academic standards are appropriate and comparable with similar courses offered at other institutions with which they are familiar. The Quality Management Division within Academic Registry is responsible for the schedule for the periodic review of courses to ensure that they remain fit for purpose and compliant with the University requirements. Courses are reviewed every six years and collaborative partnerships every three years. Therefore, in theory, Expectation A2.1 is met.

1.12 The review team examined the curriculum frameworks of the University, Examination and Assessment Regulations, external examiner reports for both University and partner delivery courses and agreed that these were comprehensive and applied rigorously. The review team also met staff and students who demonstrated a sound understanding of the assessment and examination processes involved in the awarding of qualifications.

1.13 All policy and guidance documents are available via the University's web pages. Support for staff in understanding the University requirements is provided by the Academic Registry which also provides staff development and advice on their application [040]. They are supported in this role at a faculty level by the Associate Deans (Academic).

1.14 The University maintains oversight of the quality and standards of its provision through its committee structure. The Academic Council has ultimate responsibility for ensuring that the academic frameworks are appropriate and a number of committees have delegated authority from Academic Council to support its role in this aspect. The Quality Assurance Committee and the University Research Degrees Committee are senior committees that receive reports from each of the Faculty Boards and the Faculty Research Degrees committees. The Associate Deans (Academic) in each faculty have a pivotal role in the assurance and maintenance of standards and are required to report any issues relating to academic regulations to the Academic Registrar or concerns over standards to the

Deputy Vice-Chancellor, particularly when identified by external examiners. Any issues relating to collaborative provision are also reported to the Deputy Academic Registrar (Quality Assurance and Partnerships).

1.15 The University operates a two-tier system of assessment boards with the first being a Unit Assessment Board to confirm marks at the unit level, and the second tier, or Board of Examiners, recommends awards, including the classification of award, and makes decisions concerning the progression of students. External examiners are present at each of the Board meetings.

1.16 The review team concludes that the University has in place comprehensive curriculum frameworks, procedures and regulations for its undergraduate, postgraduate taught and postgraduate research degrees provision. These are reviewed annually and are accessible to and understood by staff and students. Therefore, Expectation A2.1 is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.17 The course approval process requires a programme specification and unit map which, once approved, act as the definitive record of each course. The programme specification template provides details of the level of the award, relevant Subject Benchmark Statements, intended learning outcomes, course structure and unit assessment strategies. The unit assessment and unit learning outcomes map provide details of how each unit maps onto the outcomes and the assessment types employed at each level of study. A Combined Honours Programme Specification Supplement requires additional information relating to course rationale, aims and employability for the specific combination of subjects. Collaborative Programmes must also have a separate specification from the home-delivered programme specification.

1.18 Programme Specification Documents for all University-delivered and partner-delivered courses are stored on the University's electronic document management system (EDM) and are available to current students through a link from the VLE to the web and to the public via the University's website Course Pages. Unit Descriptors are maintained on the Unit Database and available via the Unit Web Search facility which is accessible to student via the VLE. Unit modifications are reviewed and approved through the Unit Management Approval (UMA) framework, signed off by a Head of Department and approved by the Associate Dean (Academic). New units are considered at approval or through the annual cycle of course structure submissions in the autumn period prior to the next academic year. Course and unit information is entered onto the electronic management database by Academic Registry only after the requirements for course and unit modification have been followed and verified.

1.19 Award parchments and transcripts, detailing academic achievement for units of study, are provided through a secure permanent electronic Student Record System shortly after the Board of Examiners. Given the above, in theory, Expectation A2.2 is met.

1.20 The review team accessed a range of documents associated with the approval, modification and monitoring of course information. Programme specifications for foundation, honours and master's degree courses were considered and judged to be detailed and complied fully with the University's requirements. Course and unit management approval records were reviewed and were considered to be comprehensive in their development and rigorous in the scrutiny applied by the appropriate faculty approval committees and the Academic Registry. Staff were conversant with the processes for the approval, modification and review of courses and students illustrated an awareness of the University's encouragement for them to become engaged as panel members.

1.21 The University has procedures in place to ensure that it has a definitive record for each of its courses and the qualifications approved. Detailed documentation that makes clear the processes to be followed for the approval, modification, monitoring and closure of courses is available in hard copy or via the University's web pages. High-quality guidance on all of these policies and procedures is provided by the Academic Registry, often as further links from the main policies.

1.22 Modifications to the curriculum content of units are managed through normal faculty/departmental procedures. More significant modifications, for example, changes to the academic award or its title, the mode of study or an addition or change to annual intakes, require approval by Curriculum Committee. In defined instances, for example, the addition of a full-time mode of study, a distance-learning version or a new award, or a change to the level of the award, it is normal for the modification to follow some or all of the course approval process. Guidance on the type of event and process to be followed for any change or modification is provided to staff in the Course Approval and Course Modification and Re-Approval – Guidance Notes web pages. Staff are advised to discuss changes and modifications with the Academic Registry to ensure that they follow the correct procedure.

1.23 Programme Specifications must be reviewed annually and updated as necessary to reflect any changes agreed through the annual and periodic monitoring and review processes. The Associate Deans (Academic) are responsible for deciding whether cumulative changes in the Programme Specification require submission of the course for reapproval. Senior managers of the University may also initiate a request for course reapproval if they have concerns about academic standards and/or quality of the overall programme and/or student learning experience.

1.24 The review team concludes that there are processes in place to ensure that definitive records of courses and qualifications are being maintained, and that changes to courses are monitored rigorously. The list of definitive courses is accessible to staff and students. Therefore, Expectation A2.2 is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.25 The University has established committee structures, processes, policies and staff roles to develop and approve new academic provision. Academic Council has ultimate responsibility for the setting of academic standards and is responsible for the approval of new awards. It also has responsibility for the approval of programmes which it delegates to its three sub-committees: Academic Policy Committee, Curriculum Committee and Quality Assurance Committee. Responsibility is shared with the University's Research Degrees Committee where the provision relates solely to research activity.

1.26 The University operates four approval committees: Faculty Curriculum Approval Committee which considers new courses in established areas; University Curriculum Approval Committee which considers new courses in new areas, new awards and professional doctorates; Collaborative Programmes Approval Committee; and Collaborative Research Degrees Approval Committee.

1.27 Approval Committees work to standard requirements outlined within the University's Curriculum Framework, Framework for Maintenance and Enhancement of Academic Standards and Quality and Academic Regulations which reflect the requirements of the FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements, characteristic statements and the Southern England Consortia for Credit Accumulation and Transfer credit guidelines. At least one external assessor attends the course approval event and student representation is encouraged by the University.

1.28 The Approval, Modification and Closure of Academic Provision document sets out the University's policy for the formal approval, modification and closure of award and credit-bearing academic provision. Approval of programmes offered through a collaborative arrangement is subject to the same processes but with additional considerations identified within the Collaborative Provision Policy. Individual proposals for research degree programmes are approved as part of the admissions process by Faculty Research Degree Coordinators and Committees. The University has developed its programme approval policy to include the Credit Bearing Short Course curriculum framework policy to enable credit to be assigned to short courses. The Quality Review Project undertaken to ensure the University's processes meet the Expectation of the Quality Code included wider promotion of student involvement in course approval and improved course approval web pages. In theory, the University meets Expectation A3.1.

1.29 The review team held meetings with staff responsible for the oversight of the processes and those involved in the operation and management of programme design, development and approval. The review team also considered a range of course approval documentation for taught provision and research degrees offered on campus and through collaborative arrangements.

1.30 The University has effective processes working in practice to support the design, development and approval of taught and research degree programmes and for credit-bearing short courses that ensure academic standards are set at a level which meets the

UK threshold standard for the relevant qualification. The detailed and extensive written guidelines and resources provided to staff to support their involvement in the programme design, development and approval processes are available on the University's course approval webpages, which are supported by staff development sessions and advice from the Faculty Associate Dean (Academic) AD(A) and staff from the Quality Management Division of Academic Registry. The University's course approval webpages provide a comprehensive range of forms, document templates, weblinks, guidance notes and recommended further reading. The written guidance and briefing information explicitly draw upon the Quality Code to allow appropriate consideration to be taken of Subject Benchmark Statements, the FHEQ and qualification characteristics. The review team considers the high-quality guidance that enables staff to implement approval, modification and reapproval processes effectively to be **good practice**.

1.31 The team found that completed programme specifications include explicit reference to the FHEQ, relevant Subject Benchmark Statements and PSRB requirements, with unit learning outcomes mapped to the overall learning outcomes of the programme. Approval committee reports also demonstrate consideration of the proposals against internal requirements and national standards.

1.32 Overall, the University has established processes for the approval of taught programmes and research degrees which it consistently applies to ensure academic standards are set at the level to meet UK threshold standards and are in line with its own frameworks. Therefore the review team concludes that Expectation A3.1 is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.33 The University's programme approval and programme monitoring and review processes ensure that credit and qualifications are awarded only when the necessary learning outcomes have been demonstrated through assessment and ensure the maintenance of academic standards. Academic Council is responsible for ensuring and maintaining the academic standards for all programmes.

1.34 The University possesses a clear framework for the management of academic standards which defines the academic standard for the award of individual degrees. The programme design, development and approval process requires that programme learning outcomes are mapped to unit learning outcomes, taking into account Subject Benchmark Statements and any relevant PSRB guidance. Programme specifications define the expectations of the award in accordance with threshold academic standards and are reviewed annually and endorsed by departmental Boards of Studies. Unit Assessment Boards scrutinise unit marks to ensure that all students have met the intended learning objectives and award credit based upon confirmed marks or grades. This enables the Expectation A3.2 to be met in theory.

1.35 The review team tested the operation of these processes by examining relevant documentary evidence, including the University's Curriculum Framework, Academic Regulations, Framework for the Maintenance and Enhancement of Academic Standards and Quality and Assessment Regulations, in addition to meeting with relevant academic and senior staff responsible for assessment.

1.36 The review team confirmed the effective operation of these procedures. At a local level, Departmental Assessment Approval Panels set and approve assessments to affirm they test appropriate learning objectives. External examiners participate in annual monitoring processes to affirm students meet the necessary learning objectives, and qualifications are awarded at constituted Examination Boards with an Award External Examiner present. Guidance notes for writing programme and module aims and learning objectives are included within the Curriculum Framework. Extensive staff development opportunities also exist relating to assessment practice provided by the Department for Curriculum and Quality Enhancement (DCQE).

1.37 Overall, the University has effective processes to ensure credit and qualifications are awarded only when the necessary learning outcomes have been demonstrated through assessment and academic standards have been satisfied. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation A3.2 is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

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



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

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

**Findings**

1.38 The University's Programme Monitoring and Review Policy outlines the processes for the monitoring and review of programmes, supported by the Framework for Maintenance and Enhancement of Academic Standards and Quality, which ensures UK threshold academic standards are achieved and maintained. The Policy covers all taught courses and research degrees, including collaborative provision, and seeks to place the locus of responsibility and ownership for the maintenance and enhancement of quality and academic standards at the appropriate level within the University. The University's processes for monitoring and review of programmes are defined as the Board of Studies, Annual Standards and Quality Evaluation Review (ASQER) and Periodic Review.

1.39 The Boards of Studies for programmes within a department are responsible for the ongoing review of the academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities of these programmes, and for making recommendations for development and improvement. The Boards of Studies consider the reports arising from the ASQER and allow for local needs to be addressed and for cross-University issues and good practice to be considered at departmental level.

1.40 ASQER is an evidence-based process, drawing upon quantitative data provided within the ASQER data report and qualitative information including unit evaluation reports, external examiner reports and programme specifications which are reviewed annually. The ASQER report templates provide the opportunity for departments to consider how effectively academic standards have been maintained during the year and student achievement of the defined programme-level outcomes.

1.41 The University has designed its annual reporting arrangements to encourage proactive management and development of programmes at the appropriate levels to enable the maintenance of academic standards and enhancement of the quality of the student learning experience. Head of Department ASQER reports are scrutinised at faculty and University levels which inform the faculty annual report on standards and quality produced by AD(A) for consideration by the Academic Policy and Quality Group. Following the Academic Policy and Quality Group meeting, the Chair of Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) submits an annual report on academic standards which draws upon evidence from the annual monitoring process for both home and collaborative taught courses and research degree programmes. The QAC approved report is then submitted to Academic Council.

1.42 Periodic Programme Review is also an evidence-based process, the focus of which is the continued validity and relevance of the curriculum, and the effective operation of the annual monitoring and review processes. The University also operates a University-wide review of postgraduate research (PGR) degree programmes which is aligned with the process for taught provision, including involvement of external assessors. The report and outcomes from periodic review are considered by QAC for taught provision and by the University Research Committee for PGR programmes.



1.43 The review team held meetings with staff responsible for the oversight of the processes and those involved in the operation and management of programme monitoring and reviews. The review team considered a range of documentation provided to support the monitoring and review of programmes for taught provision and research degrees offered on campus and through collaborative arrangements.

1.44 The team noted that the Programme Monitoring and Review Policy clearly links the processes to the maintenance of academic standards and defines how this is achieved through the Board of Studies, ASQER and Periodic Review. The review team heard that the enhanced ASQER data reports had improved the quantitative data provided by the University to support consideration of student performance and achievement.

1.45 The University's detailed and extensive written guidelines and resources for staff involved in the operation of programme monitoring and review are comprehensive and effective. Formal staff development sessions are supplemented by advice and support provided by Quality Management Division officers and AD(A). The University's webpages provide an inclusive set of forms, document templates, web-links and guidance notes. This supports the good practice highlighted in Expectation A3.1.

1.46 Overall, the University has established processes for the monitoring and review of taught programmes and research degrees which it consistently applies to ensure academic standards are set at the level to meet UK threshold standards and are in line with its own frameworks. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation A3.3 is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.47 The University uses externality in its programme monitoring and review processes and in its programme design, development and approval processes. Course Approval Panels require an External Assessor Subject Specialist to consider academic standards. Periodic Reviews of programmes also require at least one panel member to be external to the University to monitor and review academic standards.

1.48 The University makes clear and consistent use of external examiners, operating a two-tier system of subject external examiners for modules and award external examiners for programmes, who produce annual reports which are responded to by departments. These processes enable the University to meet Expectation A3.4 in theory.

1.49 The review team tested the operation of these processes by examining relevant documentary evidence including external examiner annual reports, course approval examples, the University's Framework for Maintaining and Enhancing Academic Standards and Quality and Approval, Modification and Closure of Academic Provision Policy. The review team also met relevant academic staff and local employers.

1.50 The team found that these processes operate effectively. The review team saw multiple examples of effective PSRB involvement as external and independent expertise in the setting and maintenance of academic standards in course approvals and effective use of externality in periodic reviews of programmes. PSRB accreditation is sought for all eligible programmes with links to approximately 60 such bodies established. It was confirmed that there is no University requirement to involve employers on course approvals or periodic reviews. However, employers engage in programme development and approval through the use of industry advisory boards and other formal and informal networks. Employers are able to influence curriculum design as appropriate to ensure programmes reflect the needs of the relevant industry.

1.51 Overall, the University makes clear use of external and independent expertise to ensure UK threshold academic standards and its own academic standards are appropriately met and maintained. The review team concludes that the University has effective processes to use external and independent expertise. Therefore, Expectation A3.4 is met in both design and operation, and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

1.52 In reaching its judgement about threshold academic standards, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.53 All seven Expectations have been met and the associated level or risk for all is low. There are no recommendations or affirmations in this area. There is one feature of good practice regarding the high-quality guidance that enables staff to implement approval, modification and reapproval processes effectively (Expectations A3.1 and A3.3).

1.54 There is evidence that the University is fully aware of its responsibilities for setting and maintaining the academic standards of awards. Previous responses to external review activities provide confidence that areas of weakness will be addressed promptly and professionally. The review team concludes therefore that the setting and maintenance of the academic standards of the awards **meet** UK expectations.

## 2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.1 The processes for programme design, development and approval are contained in the University's Approval, Modification and Closure of Academic Provision with supporting documentation for those involved in operating the processes including external assessors and are outlined in sections A1 and A3.1 of this report.

2.2 Curriculum Committee has responsibility for the consideration of proposals for new or modified titles of awards, new courses and closure of courses. Curriculum Committee is also responsible for considering all collaborative provision proposals. An integrated approach is adopted for collaborative courses within core quality assurance arrangements, evaluating collaborative courses alongside home courses, to assure academic standards and the quality of the student learning experience.

2.3 The University's QAC has oversight of the outcomes of all faculty, University and collaborative approval events. QAC provides formal agreement to the decision taken by the approval panels and verifies that due process has been followed. No student may be registered until QAC has approved the Approval Committee's decision and final sign-off has been provided.

2.4 Emphasis is placed on the role played by the Faculty AD(A) and staff in the Academic Registry Quality Management Division (QMD) in programme design, development and approval. The Faculty AD(A) and QMD officers evaluate the processes each year including training requirements.

2.5 All Approval Committees are organised at faculty level. Training events are provided for course approval panel chairs and members, including student panel members. From August 2014, the Students' Union assists faculties in the selection of student panel members for each review and assists with training. Following the revision to the Quality Code, *Chapter B1*, the University introduced a staff development workshop for course leaders and course team members to assist their effective contribution to programme design, development and approval.

2.6 The review team tested the effectiveness of the programme design and approval processes through discussions with academic and support staff, students and local employers. A range of documentary sources was also considered including policy documents, committee minutes, course approval events involving external stakeholders, students, collaborative and research provision.

2.7 The team found that the programme design, development and approval processes are systematically and consistently implemented. The Approval, Modification and Closure of Academic Provision Policy provides clear and detailed guidance, with signposting to relevant policies, regulations and documentation.

2.8 The involvement of employers in programme development and approval is achieved through the use of industry advisory boards and other formal and informal networks. Employers confirmed that they felt able to influence curriculum design as appropriate to ensure programmes reflected the needs of the relevant industry.

2.9 Undergraduate students are aware of the opportunities to become involved in the design and approval of programmes. Students confirmed that training had been provided and they feel confident to contribute to the processes. Staff acknowledged the useful contribution made by student feedback to inform the design of new courses and as members of course approval panels. However, the review team noted the low number of course approval events that include student panel members which had been reflected in the annual review of the processes by the AD(A)s and QMD officers. Therefore this contributes to the affirmation found in Expectation B5 regarding the steps being taken by the University and the Students' Union to involve students on course approval committees and periodic review panels.

2.10 Overall, the University operates effective processes for programme design and approval that are underpinned by clear policies and guidance material. Therefore, the review team concludes that the University meets Expectation B1 in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

**Quality Code, Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission**

**Findings**

2.11 The University has a clear code of practice and procedures for managing its responsibilities for fair admissions. Since 2011-12 taught course admissions have been managed by a University admissions centre. Centre staff make standard offers for entry to taught courses and liaise with department admissions representatives regarding more complex or non-standard applications. Admissions activities are monitored at faculty level by the Associate Dean (Students). Applicants to research degree programmes are interviewed by two academic staff including a prospective supervisor with the formal offer decision signed off by a Faculty Research Degrees Coordinator.

2.12 Recruitment and outreach activities are organised by faculty teams in liaison with central services including marketing. The website includes information on declaration of disabilities and provides access to the admissions complaints policy. In theory the admissions system including policy and procedure enable the University to meet Expectation B2.

2.13 To test this the team reviewed the University's code of practice on admissions and related procedures and considered documentation relating to a recent internal review of admissions activities. The team met a range of senior and professional support staff and current students.

2.14 The University undertook a review of the admissions system in 2013-14 resulting in updates to the staff admissions guide and training programme. Elements of the code of practice (dated 2010) and associated procedure documents pre-date the centralisation of admissions in 2011-12. These documents are due to be updated in summer 2015.

2.15 The University offers a range of outreach activities intended to encourage widening participation in higher education, including a programme of professorial talks at local primary schools and involvement in the creation of a University Technical College. The University actively seeks to liaise with secondary schools and to encourage applications from more deprived areas of the city, both in support of its vision to work in partnership to support and influence the educational life of Portsmouth and to fulfil its access agreement with the Office for Fair Access (OFFA). Staff actively engage with these activities.

2.16 The team found that in general, students praise the information, guidance and support received during application that enabled them to make informed decisions. Students are proactively invited to declare disabilities following application and at admission, with a system in place to agree reasonable adjustments.

2.17 The process for appeal against unsuccessful applications is clearly stated in the admissions procedures and is understood by staff. Relevant staff are also knowledgeable about UCAS guidance to follow in the event of cancellation or other substantive programme change.

2.18 Overall, the team confirms that there is an effective admissions policy which is applied consistently across all programmes. Students are treated consistently and fairly

throughout the selection and application process. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation B2 is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

**Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching***

**Findings**

2.19 The University has a clearly articulated and publicly available strategy for learning and teaching as expressed in its Education Strategy and reflected in the Curriculum Framework 2014 which is the base document used by staff in the design of units and courses. The Education Strategy informs the Faculty Education Strategies and action plans and departmental action plans. The learning and teaching agenda is then monitored through Faculty Learning and Teaching Committees, which include a student member, minutes of which are considered at Faculty Boards.

2.20 The Student Charter makes it clear that students have responsibility for their own learning. Student Handbooks indicate the learning opportunities and support available to students. Additional information is given to new students during Induction Week and there is a comprehensive range of online resources.

2.21 Student feedback on learning and teaching is collected from students at both unit and course level through a variety of feedback mechanisms including standard questionnaires, Student-Staff Consultative Committees (SSCC) and Faculty Fora. The data is analysed and circulated at University, faculty and department levels to enable course leaders and unit coordinators to review and enhance the curriculum, and learning and teaching strategies.

2.22 Students are represented on committees including Faculty Learning and Teaching Committees, and increasingly on course approval and review committees. The University has a Student Attendance and Engagement Monitoring policy which reflects its view that student attendance and engagement are closely linked. Other factors such as the VLE and library usage are also used to indicate levels of engagement.

2.23 The DCQE provides access to a wide range of academic staff development events, including workshops, seminars and conferences. This includes the Academic Professional Excellence Framework (APEX) which is aligned to the UK Professional Standards Framework and leads to fellowship of the Higher Education Academy (HEA). The programme is mandatory for new academic staff and for PhD students working as demonstrators and tutors and is open to staff at collaborative partners. Additional development activities are provided by faculties and departments for development of professional practice and scholarship and the Performance and Development Review (PDR) includes specific guidance for academic staff relating to learning and teaching.

2.24 The review team examined a wide range of documents provided by the University that included the Education Strategy, Curriculum Framework 2014, action plans, policies, committee minutes and papers, and spoke to students, employers, senior staff, academic staff and professional support staff.

2.25 The review team found that academic staff development is comprehensive and effective with the proportion of staff with HEA fellowship well above the sector average. A



route is now available for staff to progress to Professor on the basis of learning and teaching. Online Course Developers and staff development from the Technology Enhanced Learning team in DCQE has encouraged the use of digital technologies to improve practice and enhance the student learning experience

2.26 The Performance and Development Review process pays sufficient attention to learning and teaching aspects of academic staff roles. Prior to undertaking assistant teaching and/or demonstrating postgraduate research, students must attend an induction session and complete an action plan to include further development but no specific definition was available as to what teaching duties were covered by this requirement.

2.27 The University changed its VLE platform in 2012-13 resulting in an improvement to the student learning experience and a significant increase in usage. A range of workshops, guidance and support on technology-enhanced learning is available for staff including devolved support in the faculties through Online Course Developers.

2.28 Use of the new VLE has enabled the University to move towards online submission, marking and feedback, and to respond to student demand. Mobile access is provided to learning materials which ensures they are available to distance learners and students at partner colleges as well as to campus-based students.

2.29 The Student Attendance and Engagement Monitoring policy allows significant variation in practice across the University in relation to the proportion of sessions being monitored and the trigger point for inviting a student to a meeting with their personal tutor.

2.30 The adequacy of contact hours was raised as an institutional-level issue in the 2012 -13 Annual Standards and Quality Review , but there has now been a tightening of the procedure for varying from contact hour norms set out in the Curriculum Framework and this was not raised by students as a current concern.

2.31 Overall, the University has sound learning and teaching policies and procedures that are implemented effectively. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation B3 is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.32 The University Strategy (2012-17) includes a commitment to providing high-quality support for students' academic and personal development and for their preparation for successful and rewarding future careers and this is echoed in the new Mission and Vision and the Way We Work. The University's commitment to equity in ensuring all students can expect an appropriate level of support to realise their ambitions is reflected in key strategies and policies.

2.33 Staff are made aware of the need to alert students to the importance of personal development planning and of the availability of support through the minimum requirements set out for student induction as well as through the Curriculum Framework which includes guidance on personal tutoring. Students have a named personal tutor responsible for overseeing and/or providing general academic and pastoral support which includes meetings throughout the academic year, with combined honours students' personal tutor being from their 'home' subject area. Students on collaborative programmes have personal tutoring in place but this may be achieved through an alternative approved arrangement.

2.34 Students are alerted to the wide range of academic and pastoral support services available to them, including disability support. Faculty Learning Support Tutors are also available to supplement the work of Personal Tutors at a Faculty level. Reasonable adjustments are made for disabled students regarding assessment practices based on advice from the Additional Support and Disability Centre.

2.35 The competence, knowledge and training of staff providing support is reviewed as part of each appropriate staff member's annual Performance Development Review and staff development identified as required.

2.36 The University expresses a strong commitment to employability as a key theme and to delivering work-related learning and employability skills development for all students. Support and direction for employability is provided centrally through the Department of Employability which has Information, Careers, Student Enterprise and Recruitment Teams which work with each faculty. It is visible to students as the Purple Door and has a strong virtual as well as physical presence. Professional body accreditation is sought for all eligible programmes with links to around 60 such bodies.

2.37 Each faculty has its own Careers Officer and Placements Office and works with a range of employers to provide work-based and work-related experience for students.

2.38 The Department of Employability coordinates a range of activities aimed at enhancing career opportunities for students including placements, part-time employment and in partnership with the Students' Union volunteering. The department encourages and supports the use of simulation and real-life learning.

2.39 The Department of Employability and faculties work with employers and the voluntary sector to source opportunities for part-time and full-time employment, internships, work experience and volunteering opportunities. A dedicated Employer Engagement Officer works directly with the larger graduate employers such as IBM and the Royal Navy to provide additional opportunities to students including mentoring.

2.40 The University offers Partnership Degree and Masters Programmes which provide a flexible route to a qualification tailored to the needs of individuals and employers.

2.41 Arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential are monitored through a range of mechanisms including student surveys, annual unit and course evaluations, Annual Standards and Quality Evaluation Review, SSCCs, Boards of Studies and Periodic Review.

2.42 The review team examined a wide range of documents provided by the University that included the Mission and Vision Statement, the Student Charter, annual quality reports, programme reviews, committee minutes and papers, and student handbooks and spoke to students, employers, senior staff, academic staff and professional support staff.

2.43 The review team found that both pastoral and academic support for students was comprehensive and effective. Students were very positive about the support they had received in particular from personal tutors and Faculty Learning Support Tutors. Students on collaborative programmes reported different arrangements but felt well supported in their studies. Staff were readily available through an open-door policy which was highly valued by students and additional support was easy to access and of a high standard. There is also a well-developed approach to equality and diversity to ensure the needs of different students are recognised and supported. Therefore, the review team finds that the comprehensive and effective student support that contributes to students achieving personal, professional and academic potential is **good practice**.

2.44 Combined honours students expressed a number of concerns which they did not feel had been adequately addressed by the University. These included bunching of assessments, lack of communication between their home and away departments and a sense of not being valued by their away department. Some students were unsure as to the title of their degree as they had been advised that they would be awarded a major/minor rather than the joint for which they had enrolled. The team found that systems are in place to ensure a student does meet the requirements for the enrolled award but that advice and guidance to students was sometimes unclear.

2.45 Up until 2010, the Combined Honours Management Board (CHMB) was a formal committee reporting to the Quality Assurance Committee with terms of reference that included the need to monitor student feedback. It was then decided that student issues should be raised through department SSCCs and Boards of Studies and the separate departments should respond to combined honours student issues. The CHMB was kept in existence as an informal mechanism for course leaders of combined honours degrees to liaise and discuss issues of common concern. As the CHMB operated as an operational group rather than a committee, in January 2013 the CHMB decided that although the Student Voice Group had asked that all committees have at least one student representative, it had no need for a student representative as combined honours students were represented on SSCCs. The CHMB meets twice a year. However, with one meeting being cancelled it meant that there was no meeting held between November 2013 and December 2014 with some key student concerns not being progressed during that period.

2.46 The review team felt that the combination of the lack of a formal reporting line, the gap between meetings and the lack of student representation contributed to issues of concern to combined honours students not receiving sufficient attention. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that the University ensures arrangements for combined honours students deliver an equitable experience to single honours students.

2.47 The review team found that support for employability was extensive, well coordinated and effective. Staff at all levels showed a strong commitment to the University's mission in this area and felt it be a high priority. Employers were very positive

about their interaction with the University, reporting that students were well prepared for placements and projects and made a strong and meaningful contribution to their organisations. Students felt their programmes prepared them well for employment and valued the work-related learning opportunities and relevant experience of staff. The Partnership Degree and Masters Programme provides a valuable route for students in employment to achieve an award through a tailored learning contract and assessment grounded in the workplace. Therefore, the review team considers the well-coordinated University-wide employability strategy that affords opportunities for all students to develop their employability skills and career potential to be **good practice**.

2.48 The University has in place, monitors and evaluates arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. Overall, these arrangements and resources are as described and in the main working effectively. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation B4 is met in both design and operation. However, the review team found evidence that combined honours students do not always receive an equitable experience to single honours students. The procedures are broadly adequate but there are some shortcomings in terms of the rigour with which they are applied. Thus, the associated level of risk in this area is moderate.

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

**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**

2.49 The University expresses a commitment to working in partnership with its students to identify and promote a range of opportunities for students and the Students' Union to engage in educational enhancement and quality assurance. It references this in the Student Charter and sets out the detail in its Policy for Listening and Responding to the Student Voice which covers student surveys, student representation and student participation in quality assurance and enhancement. This is reviewed by the Student Voice Group of which the Union are key members.

2.50 The student representation system is a partnership between the University and the Students' Union with over 900 course-based student representatives. These course representatives receive training from the Students' Union and attend SSCCs three times a year, with students being required to act as chairs of the meetings (school representatives) and in a number of areas as minute-takers. Students are also invited to attend Boards of Studies. School representatives meet in a Faculty Forum three times a year with senior faculty staff, normally chaired by the Associate Dean (Students) which reports to Faculty Board.

2.51 One faculty student representative for each faculty together with key Students' Union post-holders and senior University staff meet in the Student Representatives and Senior Management Committee which focuses on generic course-related matters, academic support and guidance, and other matters related to the quality of the student experience. It meets at least twice per academic year.

2.52 Students' Union sabbatical officers and student representatives are involved in various working groups such as the Quality Review Project. Students are also included in relevant consultations such as the Shaping Our Future consultation. They were involved in face-to-face and online discussions and also in project planning and facilitation of the consultation.

2.53 Students are able to feed back on their experience through a range of surveys. Eligible final-year students complete the National Student Survey; campus-based and distance learning students complete the University of Portsmouth Student Experience Survey (UPSES), Unit Satisfaction Questionnaires (USQ) and unit mid-point reviews for year-long units. Collaborative students participate in either the UPSES and USQ, the partner equivalent surveys or the Collaborative Student Survey. Results are considered through the annual monitoring processes in faculties and for professional services through their annual reports to the Student Support and Advice Committee. Research degree students complete the Higher Education Academy Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) which is run biennially and the University's own PRES in alternate years. Results are considered by the University Research Degrees Committee and each faculty produces a PRES Action Plan.

2.54 The opportunities for students to engage as partners in the University's quality assurance mechanisms and to provide feedback on their experience enable Expectation B5 to be met in theory.

2.55 The review team examined a wide range of documents provided by the University that included annual quality reports, survey reports, programme reviews, committee minutes and papers, and spoke to students, senior staff, academic staff and professional support staff.

2.56 A Students' Union survey in 2014 found that 57 per cent of students surveyed did not know the identity of their student representative and lacked understanding of the role. The review team found that understanding of the role, the committee structures available to students and the communication routes varied widely. The Students' Union is, however, working with the University to increase awareness of the student representatives and their role. Arrangements in partners varied to fit with their own quality assurance mechanisms but the team saw evidence that such variations had been approved by the University.

2.57 The review team saw evidence of consideration of student survey data but also heard that in many collaborative partners there is a low response rate. The Student Voice Group is currently considering strategies to improve these response rates.

2.58 The team found that students are being encouraged to become more involved as course approval and periodic review panel members. These opportunities are publicised, although the University has not yet been able to include a student on all appropriate panels. Some consideration has been given to rewarding students for involvement in quality assurance and enhancement processes including a decision to record this in the Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR). The University is now working closely with the Students' Union to publicise these opportunities and supplement the training provided by the University with a Students' Union support package including one-to-one help with preparing for the event. Therefore, the review team **affirms** the steps being taken by the University and the Students' Union to involve students on course approval committees and periodic review panels. See also sections B1 and B8.

2.59 Examination of a range of minutes from relevant meetings, including those held in collaborative partners, showed wide variation in how students were engaged in the process, how well represented they were, how well recorded any issues raised by the students were, and most significantly the identification and follow-through of actions related to issues raised by students. This contributes to the recommendation in section B8 that the University ensure quality assurance meetings are documented fully and actions are clearly identified, recorded and progressed.

2.60 The systems as defined provide a comprehensive range of mechanisms for the engagement of students as partners in the quality assurance of their learning experience and for the student voice to be heard, but operation of the systems is not always effective. Overall, the review team concludes that the Expectation B5 is met in both design and operation. While the procedures are broadly adequate, there are weaknesses as regards oversight. The inconsistencies and often inadequate recording of meetings which play key roles in the student voice process prevented the University from being assured that concerns raised by students had been identified, recorded and progressed. Thus, the associated level of risk in this area is moderate.

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

**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**

2.61 The University's assessment policy is articulated within its Examination and Assessment Regulations. The Policy on Maximum Assessment Loads specifies appropriate volumes of assessment for each level which all modules must conform to unless granted an exemption by the Assistant Registrar. Departments operate Departmental Assessment Approval Panels to manage the timing of assessments, check students have access to assessment criteria and approve assessments to affirm they test appropriate learning objectives, though the process between departments differs considerably.

2.62 The University's policy on accreditation of prior learning (APL) is clearly articulated in its Recognition and Accreditation of Prior Learning Policy, Procedures and Guidance document. The policy clearly outlines how a judgement of equivalence is arrived at and the necessary evidence required. Limits on the amount of credit that can be awarded are specified in the Academic Regulations - Awards of the University of Portsmouth document. Students complete a standard APL claim form which outlines how the criteria against the claim are judged and are entitled to receive appropriate academic guidance and advice about their claim. Departments are responsible for the provision of such advice through a specially trained member of staff. The claim is assessed by trained staff at departmental level with oversight and sign-off from the relevant FDA (Academic).

2.63 Membership, procedures and powers of Unit Assessment Boards and Board of Examiners are clearly defined in the University's Examination and Assessment Regulations. These regulations also define procedures for verification and double-blind marking. Assessment feedback is returned either in a specified session or from a central collection point in the unit coordinator's home department.

2.64 Reasonable adjustments are made for disabled students regarding assessment practices. The Head of Additional Support and Disability Centre in conjunction with the Academic Registrar are responsible for informing the relevant Head of Department of the adjustments that can be made. The views of the Unit Assessment Board or Board of Examiners are also taken into account.

2.65 The team tested the effectiveness of these procedures by examining relevant documentary evidence, including the University's Examination and Assessment Regulations, Recognition and Accreditation of Prior Learning Policy, Procedures and Guidance and minutes of Departmental Assessment Approval Panels. The review team also met academic staff responsible for assessment, professional support staff, local employers and a wide range of students.

2.66 Students confirmed they have access to assessment criteria prior to commencing work on their assessments through their student handbooks and the VLE.

2.67 The review team noted that the University is in the early stages of revising its APL policy to ensure it aligns with new University policies such as the introduction of Credit Bearing Short Courses.

2.68 Feedback on assessments must be returned within 20 working days and any breach of this must be explained to students with the Unit Coordinator informing the Head of Department and the Unit Assessment Board. The University makes widespread use of plagiarism-detection software. To guard against malpractice where a unit does not use plagiarism-detection software, University staff are able to run the assessment through this software themselves and will arrange an interview with the student to discuss any concerns.

2.69 Departments operate internal processes to ensure the quality of feedback provided to students is satisfactory, for example through the mark verification process checking the quality of feedback offered. The Head of Department is responsible for ensuring feedback to students is appropriate and supports their learning. Students expressed broad satisfaction with the quality of feedback received, although some students stated that the quality of feedback was variable across modules. Senior staff confirmed that improving the quality of student feedback is an area for improvement. The review team saw evidence of extensive staff development activities provided by DCQE relating to assessment practices, for example, training opportunities relating to inclusive learning.

2.70 Combined honours programmes have a programme leader in the home department and a Deputy Programme Leader in the away department. Together they are responsible for ensuring assessment timings for combined honours students are equitable and fair. The team heard evidence that academic staff take action to mitigate against the bunching of deadlines for combined honours students, for example, by providing students with assessment criteria early and offering advice on time management.

2.71 The Combined Honours Management Board (CHMB) also functions as an informal mechanism for programme leaders to discuss common issues of student concern including assessment timings. However, evidence provided indicates that the CHMB at times has been ineffective in responding to student concerns. Combined honours students raised concerns regarding the clustering of assessment deadlines and stated that communication between their home and away departments was at times ineffective in preventing assessment bunching. This contributes to the recommendation in Expectation B4 that the University ensure arrangements for combined honours students deliver an equitable experience to single honours students.

2.72 Overall, the University effectively operates equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment, including for the recognition of prior learning. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation B6 is met in both design and practice, and the associated level of risk is low.

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



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

**Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining**

**Findings**

2.73 The University operates a clearly defined two-tier system composed of Unit Assessment Boards and Board of Examiners and this process is detailed in its External Examiner Regulations and Procedures. All external examiners are appointed subject external examiners acting at module level and one external examiner annually is additionally appointed to be an award external examiner for each programme, attending the Board of Examiners. External examiners produce annual reports assessing academic standards and the quality of student learning opportunities.

2.74 There is a clearly defined policy for the appointment of both subject and award external examiners for programmes. External examiners are appointed by and accountable to Academic Council and are appointed via a nominations panel which is scrutinised by the Quality Assurance Committee (QAC). External examiners receive a letter of appointment and a contract from the University when appointed, with their term limited to four years with an exceptional one-year extension possible. The process for the termination of an external examiner's contract is also clearly articulated. The University offers a comprehensive training course for new external examiners twice a year as well as online training via the VLE. In theory, the associated policy and procedures enable this Expectation to be met.

2.75 The review team tested these processes by examining relevant documentary evidence, including the University's External Examiner Regulations and Procedures and external examiner reports. The review team also met with academic and senior staff from the University and a range of students.

2.76 External examiner reports include prompts for detailed comment regarding learning and enhancement opportunities and the team saw effective use of this. External examiners are asked to confirm issues raised in their previous annual report have been addressed to close the feedback loop. The review team saw multiple examples of the University responding effectively to concerns raised by external examiners. External examiner reports and in some cases Head of Department responses are published on the VLE and external examiners are identified to students in module description documents.

2.77 Subject and award external examiners' supporting collaborative programmes are appointed by the University. Separate reports are written for collaborative programmes and the University uses the same external examiner wherever possible.

2.78 Associate Deans (Academic) examine all external examiner annual reports and submit a summary report to the Academic Policy and Quality Group, who reports up to the QAC to ensure any concerns of University-wide relevance are identified and responded to. These summaries also inform the Chair of QAC's Annual Report to Academic Council.

2.79 The University makes consistent and effective use of external examiners to maintain academic standards and the quality of student learning opportunities. Related policy and processes operate effectively. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation B7 is met in both design and practice, and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

**Findings**

2.80 The University operates clear and systematic annual monitoring and periodic review processes which place the student at the centre as outlined in section A3.3. The key processes are the Boards of Studies, Annual Reporting Arrangements and Audit and Periodic Review. An integrated approach is adopted for collaborative courses within core quality assurance arrangements, evaluating collaborative courses alongside home courses, to assure academic standards and the quality of the student learning experience.

2.81 The Programme Monitoring and Review Operational Handbook supplements the Programme Monitoring and Review Policy to provide further guidance to staff, students and external subject advisers, as well as external stakeholders. The University's website provides further guidance, templates and forms for Boards of Studies, Student Staff Consultative Committees, Annual Standards Quality Evaluative and Review (ASQER) and periodic programme review documentation.

2.82 Annual monitoring and review comprises outcomes from Boards of Studies which meet twice a year, SSCCs, Unit Evaluations, ASQER reports, PSRB reports and Annual Faculty Reviews. Boards of Studies are chaired by Heads of Department or a nominee and operate to a standard agenda. Collaborative Provision programmes also report to the University Board of Studies. SSCCs are chaired by student representative, meet three times a year and report to the Board of Studies. Unit evaluation takes place within four weeks of the completion of the Unit from which a brief evaluation report is produced. ASQER reports draw upon standard datasets, survey outcomes, unit evaluations and monitoring reports including external examiners, PSRBs and the review of programme specifications. ASQER reports are produced by Heads of Department, Course Leaders, Faculty Research Degrees Coordinators and collaborative partners for taught and research provision. The University has also produced an ASQER template for the review of the newly established Credit Bearing Short Courses.

2.83 Head of department ASQERs are considered by the Annual Reviews Group and a separate group considers the research ASQERs. Faculty Executive Committees considers summary reports from the Annual Reviews Group. Academic Policy and Quality Group (APQG) considers summary reports from the Faculty AD(A) and Director of Graduate School. Outcomes from the annual reviews groups inform the Chair of Quality Assurance Committee's report to Quality Assurance Committee (QAC), Academic Council and the Quality and Audit Committee of the Board of Governors. A separate report is produced on collaborative provision by the Deputy Academic Registrar (Quality & Partnerships) which is considered by APQG, QAC and Academic Council.

2.84 Periodic review takes place every six years via a schedule drawn up by the Quality Management Division (QMD) and includes external representation and student involvement. The process is managed by QMD officers in liaison with Faculty AD(A) for both on-campus and collaborative provision. A pre-event of documentation scrutiny is undertaken by panel members, followed by the review event which includes a meeting with students. The review report is considered by the Faculty Executive before it is submitted to QAC. There are established procedures for non-approval of continued operation of courses. Collaborative partnerships are reviewed on a three-yearly cycle and collaborative programmes reviewed

every six years. Periodic Programme Review of Research Degrees takes place every six years and includes external involvement.

2.85 Training events are provided for members and chairs of periodic review panels including student panel members. From August 2014, the Students' Union supports faculties in the selection of student panel members for each review and assist with training (SS 3.3.3 and M9). The University reviewed its Programme Monitoring and Review Policy in 2012-13 as part of the Quality Review Project, taking into consideration Chapter B8 of the Quality Code. Outcomes from the Review included a new Programme Monitoring and Review Dashboard to provide a comprehensive set of data to support the process.

2.86 In theory, the review processes enable the Expectation in Chapter B8 to be met.

2.87 The review team tested the effectiveness of the programme monitoring and review processes through discussions with academic and support staff and students. The team considered a range of monitoring and review documentation including a range of ASQER reports, periodic review reports, minutes from SSCCs, Boards of Studies, APQG, QAC and Academic Council.

2.88 Academic staff confirmed the effectiveness of the new dataset to support the production of ASQER. Students confirmed their engagement with the programme monitoring and review processes including participation at SSCCs and Boards of Studies. The review team heard that students had participated in meeting periodic review panel members to provide feedback. However, there had been limited engagement in student participation in the periodic review events as panel members. This contributes to the affirmation of the steps being taken by the University and the Students' Union to involve students on course approval committees and periodic review panels. See sections B1 and B5.

2.89 The review team's scrutiny of sample minutes from SSCCs, Faculty Fora, Faculty Boards and Boards of Studies showed there was little consistency in the way they were presented with a number of shortcomings evident in many of the examples provided such as the status of attendees not being identified, issues being noted but no actions identified, actions being identified but not followed up at the next meeting, no reference to the need for certain actions to be referred to another committee, for example from Faculty Forum to Faculty Board, and no actions being identified even though quite serious concerns of students such as disruptive behaviour had been discussed. No templates or guidance for minutes of faculty committees are provided other than for Faculty Research Degrees Committees, Unit Assessment Boards and Boards of Examiners Therefore, the review team **recommends** that quality assurance meetings are documented fully and actions clearly identified, recorded and progressed. See also section B5.

2.90 The University's processes to support the monitoring and review of programmes are clearly defined. However, there are inconsistencies in the way quality assurance meetings are documented and actions are identified and progressed. Overall, the review team concludes that the University meets Expectation B8 in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.91 The University has a clear policy and procedure in place for handling student complaints. Guidance is provided to students through handbooks and Students' Union information. Local resolution of complaints is encouraged and students are advised to talk to a member of staff or student representative in the first instance. A central complaints team receive and record formal complaints and coordinate their investigation and resolution by a Head of Department or Associate Dean as appropriate. Students may be accompanied during all meetings and support is available from the Students' Union. Following completion of an investigation a student may request a review by the University Secretary if they are not satisfied with the outcome. This is the final stage in the internal complaints procedure and following its completion the University issues a final decision letter to the student. A student may then refer their complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA).

2.92 The University provides clear guidance to students considering an appeal against an academic assessment decision of a Unit Assessment Board or Board of Examiners. Students are encouraged to seek informal advice from a personal tutor, student representative, the Students' Union or their Head of Department prior to submitting a formal appeal to the examination board chair or extenuating circumstances officer. Appeals are considered against a set of criteria set out in the assessment regulations and summarised in the student guide.

2.93 In theory, the University's policies and procedures are appropriate to meet Expectation B9 and enable students to make a complaint or appeal without being disadvantaged.

2.94 The review team evaluated the approach taken to meeting the Expectation by scrutinising documentary evidence including assessment regulations, guidance for students, annual reports concerned with complaints and appeals and relevant minutes of Academic Council. The team also held meetings with students and staff.

2.95 The team found that advice to students considering making a complaint or appeal was easily accessible via publication of guides on the University website and VLE. The team heard that combined honours students feel their home department is more approachable if a concern needs to be raised about an issue in the department of their second subject. However, in general students feel able to raise concerns informally with members of staff or to seek advice from a student representative; they also know that the Students' Union provides advice and support. The published guides clearly describe the process involved in making a formal complaint or appeal and grounds against which they may be considered.

2.96 The number of formal complaints has declined slightly in recent years while informal complaints have increased. Most appeals relate to consideration given to extenuating circumstances and appeals against academic judgement are not admissible. The team saw evidence that deliberative steps are taken to review complaints and appeals through consideration at University-level committees: Academic Council in the case of complaints and the Quality Assurance Committee for appeals as part of the Academic Registrar's annual report. The system of review and oversight potentially enables enhancement in

procedures and guidance. The team noted that the University has revised its procedures to allow students studying with a collaborative partner the right to raise their concerns with the University, even if their complaint concerns the actions of the partner.

2.97 Overall, the University has effective an policy and procedure for handling complaints and academic appeals. The review team therefore concludes that Expectation B9 is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.98 Ultimate responsibility for the maintenance of academic standards and awards granted in a collaborative partnership lies with the University's Academic Council (AC) and by delegation, Quality Assurance Committee (QAC), University Research Degrees Committee (URDC) and Faculty Boards. The University takes a strategic approach to collaborative provision and all collaborative proposals are evaluated against the Collaborative Provision Policy which articulates the expectations the University has of collaborative partners. In addition to the University's approval requirements, collaborative arrangements are supplemented by comprehensive due diligence and risk assessment arrangements. All collaborative partnerships are governed by a comprehensive contract or memorandum of agreement that specifies the requirements of each party, is time limited and is signed by a senior staff member of each institution.

2.99 The University is committed to working with employers and professional bodies to ensure courses meet employer needs and that all students, on both taught and research programmes, have the opportunity to gain work experience. The new Strategic Plan's Vision Statement includes a requirement that every student has the opportunity to take part in career-enhancing activities such as placements, exchanges, enterprise, volunteering or work-based learning. The University of Portsmouth Code of Practice for Work-based and Placement Learning sets out a risk-based approach to establishing arrangements and supporting students and gives comprehensive guidance on definitions, principles and University requirements.

2.100 The University expects standards of student achievement at collaborative partners to be equivalent and comparable to those for similar awards offered at the University. The academic regulations of the University apply to all collaborative partners and external examiners for all collaborative programmes are appointed by the University. Partner and University Annual Standards and Quality Evaluative Review (ASQER) reports are considered at home Boards of Studies, and are included in the Heads' and the Deputy Academic Registrar's (Quality and Partnership) annual report to QAC.

2.101 The University of Portsmouth Code of Practice for Work-based and Placement Learning sets out a risk-based approach to establishing arrangements for placements and for the support of students during their placement. This document gives comprehensive guidance for course staff, sets clear definitions, articulates the principles that underpin the placement experience and makes clear University requirements for all aspects of the placement. Students are supported by a member of staff while completing their placement.

2.102 In theory, the University's policies and procedures enable this Expectation to be met.

2.103 The review team accessed a range of documentation associated with collaborative and placement requirements. The review team viewed the Collaborative and Memoranda Register to review how the collaborative requirements were monitored and read annual monitoring reports from a number of collaborative partners. In all instances, the documentation was judged to be high quality, comprehensive and detailed. The review team

met senior management, academic staff, professional staff, employers, students undertaking learning through working with others and students from collaborative partners.

2.104 Meetings with staff confirmed that the requirements of the University for both collaborative and placement delivery were understood and monitored. Students from a variety of collaborative partners were positive about their experiences, confirmed that the expectations of the University were being met and were aware of or had met the University Contact. Students value the opportunity offered for them to engage with external placements and recognise this as an opportunity to enhance their employability; they spoke positively about the arrangements made and support provided for them. Employers confirmed their support for the development of placement and work-based learning opportunities for the students and confirmed the high-quality information received from the University and the support provided by the course teams.

2.105 Collaborative courses are expected to meet the same policy and procedural requirements as University-based courses. At approval, all collaborative courses must have a separate programme specification. Partner-delivered programmes are considered within Annual Standards and Quality Evaluative Reports which are presented to the appropriate Board of Studies and the Deputy Academic Registrar (Quality and Partnership) produces a detailed annual report that is considered by QAC and the Contact Forum. Faculties and departments are responsible for assuring the day-to-day support of the collaborative partnership, the student learning experience and the standards, quality and enhancement of the academic provision, and must appoint an academic contact and an administrative contact who report to the relevant Head of Department. Partners are visited regularly and are part of the approval and periodic review events. In addition to the course periodic review, periodic partnership collaborative reviews are conducted every three years to scrutinise the partnership arrangements and the student experience, and the effectiveness of annual monitoring and review processes. Where the programme is delivered both at the University and the partner, the Periodic Collaborative Programme Review may be combined with the home equivalent Periodic Programme Review.

2.106 The University oversees the admission of students to its programmes and enables some partners to accept standard-entry applicants who meet the agreed criteria without consultation with the University, but requires all non-standard-entry applicants to be assessed by the University Academic Contact and where relevant, the programme leader. The collaborative partner's academic contact is required to analyse the entry qualifications of cohorts and review these in terms of learning opportunities, progression and completion rates, in the annual monitoring reports.

2.107 The University maintains a register of all collaborative partnerships with key information relating to arrangement type, contract approval and end dates, programme and partnership review dates, current programme status and approved delivery modes, and exercises rigorous control over the partner's marketing materials and reviews all promotional materials before giving approval for publication. As a recent initiative, partners are able to access their students' assessment results via a secure web-enabled system.

2.108 External examiners for collaborative provision are appointed by the University and have the same responsibilities as for home provision. Wherever possible, external examiners examine both the home and franchised programme. External examiners for subject and award boards attend the respective formal examination boards. The External Examiner Report template requires the examiner to comment on any collaborative provision they examine.

2.109 Staff and students value the strategic approach taken to the development of work-based and placement learning. Placement learning is normally included in all courses as

either a core or optional unit and forms part of the course approval requirements, detailed in the programme specification and linked to the requirement for an employability statement. Students value the opportunities provided to enhance their employability skills and view this as a positive feature of their courses. Employers were positive about the students who had undertaken placements with them, indicating that they were generally well prepared for the placement and considered their involvement in their organisations valuable. They confirmed that they were well informed about the placement and were aware of their responsibilities to the student and the University. Placement providers are required to ensure that the student has a work-based mentor and that they provide general feedback to the University on the performance of the student but that they are not involved in any formal assessment of the student.

2.110 Staff confirmed that the requirements of the University for both collaborative and placement delivery are understood and monitored. The University provides very detailed policy and procedural requirements for the selection and approval of partners and placement providers, clear operational documentation and effective support requirements. High-quality guidance documents are available to University and partner staff to assist them in implementing these requirements, many of which are available online. The University also produces a regular newsletter to keep partner staff updated on University news including regulatory changes, senior staff appointments, professional development opportunities, surveys, support and resource updates. The review team considers the effective operation of the comprehensive policy governing collaborative and placement provision that enhances the learning opportunities and employability skills of students to be **good practice**.

2.111 Overall, the University has comprehensive policy requirements to govern its collaborative and placement provision. Excellent support documentation is provided to all stakeholders to assist them in providing opportunities for all students to enhance their learning opportunities and employability skills. All stakeholders are well informed and value the support provided by this information. Senior committees and the Academic Registry provide effective monitoring of all associated processes. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation B10 is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

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



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

### **Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees***

#### **Findings**

2.112 The University has a code of practice and regulations which set out the institutional principles for the management of all types of postgraduate research degrees including professional doctorates. Admissions and quality assurance activities are overseen by Faculty Research Degrees Committees (FRDC), which report to the University Research Degrees Committee. FRDCs are chaired by a Faculty Research Degrees Coordinator and include student representatives and departmental research degree coordinators. An Annual Standards and Quality Evaluative Review (ASQER) report is produced.

2.113 Each research student is allocated a supervisory team consisting of their first supervisor and at least one further supervisor, one of whom is expected to be experienced in the role. Each student has an annual review in which academic progress and engagement with supervisory meetings and training are monitored. The University's Graduate School supports, administers and coordinates research student training through the Graduate School Development Programme.

2.114 In theory, these committees and procedures enable the University to maintain oversight and assure the quality and standards of research degree programmes.

2.115 The review team tested the approach taken by reviewing relevant documents including the University's Regulations for Higher Degrees, its code of practice for postgraduate degrees, reading guidance provided to students and staff and considering outcomes of an internal periodic review of postgraduate research degrees. The team talked to current research students, academic staff involved in the supervision and admission of research students and other senior staff including a representative of the Graduate School.

2.116 Guidance on frequency of supervisory meetings is provided in student and supervisor handbooks and both students and staff have a joint responsibility to ensure they occur. The team found students are satisfied with their access to supervisory staff and feel supported by working in close proximity to other researchers. Supervisory meeting attendance is recorded by the student on a central database called Skills Forge.

2.117 Continuity of supervision is managed by the department research degree coordinator and supervisory workload is overseen by the FRDC chair in consultation with Heads of Department. The team found that progress is being made with addressing an internal periodic review recommendation to enhance the robustness of the supervisory process.

2.118 Full-time research students are expected to undertake the equivalent of 10 days' training each year through the Graduate School's development programme. Feedback from students is mixed about the programme with some aspects considered to be too general or less relevant to their programme area. However, students value wider developmental and training opportunities and attendance at these events can be recorded on Skills Forge for consideration in annual review. Training courses for new and existing supervisors are offered and the University is seeking mechanisms to engage all existing supervisors.

2.119 University-wide resource expectations for research students are outlined in the student handbook. Students note some pressures regarding access to IT and library facilities but those seen by the review team reported good access to study space in their departments. Data from PRES show lower satisfaction than the sector average in the 'Research Culture' category. Senior staff acknowledge resources can be tight but highlight strategic responses including ring-fencing fee income to support publication of a student's first research paper and the establishment of the Graduate School to bring together researchers from across the University.

2.120 Overall, research students have the opportunities and support they need to achieve successful outcomes from their research degree programmes. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation B11 is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

2.121 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.

2.122 Of the 11 Expectations in this area, all are met. Nine have a low associated level of risk and two have a moderate level of associated risk. There are two recommendations, one affirmation and three features of good practice in this area.

2.123 One recommendation relates to the support provided to combined honours students to ensure arrangements deliver an equitable experience to single honours students (B4, B6). The second recommendation relates to the inconsistencies found in the recording of quality assurance meetings and the monitoring of resulting actions (B8, B5).

2.124 The review team affirms the steps being taken by the Quality Management Division and the Students' Union to involve students on course approval committees and periodic review panels (B5, B1, B8).

2.125 The review team found the support that contributes to students achieving their personal, professional and academic potential to be comprehensive, effective and good practice (B4). The well coordinated University-wide employability strategy was also found to be good practice (B4). The third feature of good practice relates to the effective operation of the comprehensive policy governing collaborative provision and placement provision (B10).

2.126 There are no serious risks to the management of this area and the moderate risks collectively do not present serious risks. There is evidence that the University is fully aware of its responsibilities for assuring quality; previous responses to external review activities provide confidence that areas of weakness will be addressed promptly and professionally.

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

### 3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

#### **Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision**

#### **Findings**

3.1 The University recognises the importance of producing accurate and complete information appropriate to its intended audience, including stakeholders as well as prospective and current students. The management and production of information is guided and governed by a number of policies and guidelines, including a web and online communications strategy and policies for staff and student communications. The University website includes information about the University's mission, values and overall strategy, programme specifications, and its student charter. Information for current students, including collaborative students, is provided via the website and the students' VLE.

3.2 In theory, the policies and guidance in place and the use of its website for publication of information for internal and external stakeholders enable the University to meet Expectation C.

3.3 The team tested this by reviewing information published on its website and VLE and scrutinising the associated online communications and media strategies. The team reviewed guidelines provided to collaborative partners and met professional staff involved in information management and a range of current undergraduate and postgraduate students.

3.4 The review team found professional support staff to be knowledgeable about the processes involved in publishing information and the allocation of responsibilities. Access rights to update the website and document stores are appropriately managed and ensure definitive copies of key documents are available. For example, the website and VLE link directly to programme specifications stored in the electronic document management system and policies are publicly available in the document warehouse section of the website.

3.5 Information provided to current students through the VLE includes student handbooks, SSCC minutes, external examiner reports, and general and programme-level information. Guidelines set out expected content requirements for department, course and unit-level VLE sites. Students, including those on collaborative programmes, were satisfied with the level of access and the quality of information made available. Some combined honours students expressed confusion about how their programme registration could be affected by unit choices. The review team tested the formal information provided by scrutinising programme specifications for a number of combined honours programmes and found them to be compliant with QAA's FHEQ guidelines on joint honours and major-minor programme combinations. The team noted the clear guidance provided to staff to support the production of detailed and informative programme specifications.

3.6 Appropriate oversight of information published by collaborative partners is maintained. Partner colleges are expected to follow guidelines on promotional materials and corporate identity. Roles and responsibilities are set out in the agreement and Collaborative Partnership Operational Handbook. Course and marketing information must be submitted to the University for checking at set dates, and interim spot checks are made.

3.7 Overall, the University has in place appropriate systems to ensure that information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. Students confirm that the information provided to them is helpful, accurate and comprehensive. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation (C) is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

3.9 The Expectation in this area is met and the associated level of risk is low. There are no recommendations and no features of good practice. There are limited examples of student engagement in the management of this area.

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

## 4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

### Findings

4.1 The University adopts a multi-stranded approach to facilitate the improvement of students' learning opportunities, through the use of prominent themes which are embedded in its Education Strategy. The Strategy supports the University's commitment to foster a culture of enhancement as reflected in its strategic aims to share responsibility with students for the enhancement of learning. In 2013-14, the University aligned its strategic and financial planning processes to provide focus and enable its strategic aims to enhance student learning opportunities. Planning dashboards provide robust management information to improve University monitoring of key performance indicators and reporting on its strategic performance. Programme Monitoring and Review dashboards were introduced in 2014 following a successful pilot in the previous year to support the production of Annual Standards and Quality Evaluation Review (ASQER) reports.

4.2 The Department of Curriculum and Quality Enhancement: Academic Development (DCQE) play a central role to support the deliberate steps taken at institutional level to enhance provision for students' learning. DCQE works directly with student-facing services and provides support for staff development to enhance the quality of student learning and attainment.

4.3 The University's commitment to working in partnership with students is achieved through its Policy for Listening to and Responding to the Student Voice (Student Voice Policy) which was approved by Academic Council in 2012. The Student Voice Group is responsible for the implementation of the Student Voice Policy and overseeing the operational aspects of the Policy in terms of the management of student surveys, representation and participation in quality assurance and enhancement activities. Membership of the Student Voice Group includes Student Union sabbatical officers, including the Student Voice Coordinator.

4.4 During 2008-09, the University commenced a major curriculum development exercise which aimed to enhance student engagement and achievement, provide a more coherent curriculum and improve the student experience, placing greater focus on graduate employability skills. The Revised Academic Structure Project introduced a de-semesterised structure to the academic year from 2012-13, with a re-configured curriculum framework based upon 20-credit standard modules at undergraduate level and 30 credits at postgraduate level. The University's revised curriculum now includes development of employability skills and increased opportunities for formative assessment and feedback.

4.5 Other strategic enhancement initiatives include investment in buildings and facilities, technology-enhanced learning, learning support, real-life simulated learning and the establishment of the Graduate School.

4.6 The review team held meetings with the Vice Chancellor, students, senior staff, academic staff, professional support staff and employers. The review team also considered evidence provided by the University that included strategies, policies, minutes and action plans.

4.7 The review team found that deliberate steps are taken by the University to further develop policies and procedures in specific associated areas. Formal evaluation and

enhancement of the Student Voice Policy is undertaken through the Student Voice Group which reports to Academic Council on the effective operation of the Policy. Updates include clarification of roles and responsibilities, with improvements made to the process and timescales for surveys. Staff confirmed that the Student Voice Group is reviewing the process in the Student Voice Policy to ensure development of clear mechanisms across faculties for communicating course representative achievements and actions resulting from student feedback.

4.8 Through its revised Programme Monitoring and Review Policy, the Boards of Studies provide local consideration of cross-University issues and dissemination of good practice. The ASQER reports include an action plan, with timescales, of up to three changes or enhancements proposed to both taught and research programmes each year. The standard ASQER template also provides an opportunity for schools and departments to identify any enhancements for wider dissemination across the University. The Chair of the QAC's annual report draws upon Head of Departments' ASQER reports and includes a separate section on the quality enhancement agenda for the next year for consideration by QAC and Academic Council. The Periodic Review of Research Programmes emphasised the importance of the establishment of the Graduate Research School to the enhancement of research degrees, particularly the Graduate School Development Programme.

4.9 The review team found various mechanisms exist for disseminating or sharing good practice such as staff development programmes, support staff association, formal networks for school, and department or faculty managers to meet regularly with other professional staff including Human Resources and Finance. The Academic Professional Excellence Framework (APEX) programme is now accessible to the wider, non-academic community, to enable staff such as library staff and Learning Support Tutors to benefit from this development. The University Learning and Teaching Committee also provides an opportunity for sharing good practice and enhancement initiatives to be shared across faculties.

4.10 Overall, the University makes effective use of its quality assurance processes to identify opportunities for improving the students' learning experience. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation (Enhancement) is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

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



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

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

4.12 The Expectation in this area is met and the associated level of risk is low. There are no recommendations, affirmations or features of good practice in this area.

4.13 The University takes a strategic approach to the enhancement of learning opportunities. Quality assurance mechanisms are used to identify opportunities for enhancement. Enhancement activities are embedded within established policies and procedures and there is a systematic process for listening to and responding to the student voice to support opportunities for enhancement. There is an ethos which expects and encourages enhancement and there are mechanisms for the identification and dissemination of good practice.

4.14 Therefore, the review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the University **meets** UK expectations.

## 5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

### Findings

5.1 The University highlights employability within its Education Strategy with skills for roles in the global workforce included as curriculum design requirements in the Curriculum Framework 2014. All students engage in work-related learning as part of their core programme and have the opportunity to take part in other career-enhancing experiences. A revised vision includes 'ensuring every student takes part in career-enhancing activities, such as placements, exchanges, enterprise, volunteering or work-based learning'.

5.2 The University's Curriculum Framework requires that all courses include the development of employability skills and Course Approval and Review Committees are responsible for ensuring this. Advice and guidance to course teams is provided by the Department for Curriculum and Quality Enhancement and the Department of Employability. Wherever courses are eligible for professional body accreditation, the strategy is to secure and retain that accreditation and this has been achieved with approximately 60 such bodies. All home full-time undergraduate students also have the opportunity to study up to 40 credits of a foreign language to enhance their employability.

### Innovations in promoting the employability of students

5.3 Different approaches exist across the faculties for career enhancement activities beyond the curriculum. As an example, the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences offers a Learning from Experience (LiFE) unit which allows credit to be gained from activities such as work experience and volunteering. All undergraduate courses provide opportunities for a sandwich year for exchanges and/or placements. All students can undertake a work-related learning dissertation or project as an alternative to a traditional dissertation. Good practice is shared between staff through a range of formal and informal networks.

5.4 Support and direction for employability is provided centrally through the Department of Employability which has Information, Careers, Student Enterprise and Recruitment Teams which work with the faculties. It is visible to students as the Purple Door and has a strong virtual as well as physical presence. Each faculty has a dedicated faculty-based Careers Adviser and a detailed Service-Level Agreement with the Department which is regularly monitored, reviewed and revised. Faculties also each have their own Placements Office and work with a range of employers to provide work-based and work-related experience for students. Facilities include an Innovation Space housing up to 20 student and graduate start-ups.

5.5 The Department of Employability coordinates a wide range of activities aimed at enhancing career opportunities for students and works with employers and the voluntary sector to source part-time and full-time employment, internships, work experience and in partnership with the Students' Union volunteering opportunities. It encourages and supports the use of simulation and real-life learning and provides an online tool for Personal Development Planning which includes access to an e-portfolio, and guidance for tutors. The Recruitment Team works with over 2500 employers, predominantly small and medium-sized enterprises, in the South East with a focus on placing graduates in jobs. A dedicated Employer Engagement Officer works directly with the larger graduate employers such as IBM and the Royal Navy to provide additional opportunities to students including mentoring.

5.6 Student destinations as measured by the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) Survey are a key performance indicator for the University, with the target being for progression to employment or further study and graduate employment to be at least equal to sector average. This was achieved in 2013 and the target is now being reviewed.

5.7 Students entering in 2014-15 will receive a Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR) on graduation which will include a record of extra-curricular activities that can be audited and verified by the University. It will be made available to students at the end of each year of study to help them monitor evidence of their skills development.

5.8 The University offers part-time courses aimed at those already in employment in the areas of Health & Safety and Property. It also offers a Partnership Degree and Masters Programme which provides a flexible route to a qualification through a tailored learning contract and assessment grounded in the workplace.

5.9 The University has a number of partnerships with employers to deliver career enhancement opportunities for students including Portsmouth Guildhall, New Theatre Royal, the National Museum of the Royal Navy and a contract with Portsmouth City Council to run the Big Screen Portsmouth where students from Television, Film and Broadcasting courses gain relevant experience.

**Employer involvement in the delivery and development of the curriculum**

5.10 Employers were very positive about their involvement with the University and reported a wide range of activities including live projects, placements, mentoring, design work, events, guest lectures and graduate recruitment. These have included a design project with Anglepoise leading to an exhibition in London, recording and streaming of concerts at Portsmouth Guildhall, placement students then progressing into graduate jobs, student visits to employment settings, and 25 IBM staff providing mentoring to students.

5.11 Students felt they were well prepared and then gained significantly in terms of their career potential through their involvement with employers. Employers were impressed with the quality of student work and agreed their businesses benefited enormously from student involvement. The use of employer advisory boards is widespread and there is evidence of employers being involved in curriculum design and development. This ranges from advising in general on the needs of employers through to specific input at the course level. Examples include commenting on new course proposals and module content, helping design and deliver specialist medical physics modules, and advising on the inclusion of ethics in the workplace.

5.12 Support for employability is extensive, well coordinated and effective. Staff at all levels show a strong commitment to the University's mission and vision in this area and consider it a high priority.

## Glossary

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

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

### Blended learning

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

### Credit(s)

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

### Degree-awarding body

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

### Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

### Dual award or double award

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

### e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning

### **Enhancement**

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

### **Expectations**

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

### **Flexible and distributed learning**

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

See also **distance learning**.

### **Framework**

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

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

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

### **Good practice**

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

### **Learning opportunities**

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

### **Learning outcomes**

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

### **Multiple awards**

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

### **Operational definition**

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

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

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

**Programme specifications**

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

**Public information**

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

**Quality Code**

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

**Reference points**

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

**Subject Benchmark Statement**

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

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

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

**Threshold academic standard**

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

**Virtual learning environment (VLE)**

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

**Widening participation**

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

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Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB

Tel: 01452 557 000  
Email: [enquiries@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@qaa.ac.uk)  
Website: [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)

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