



# Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of St Mellitus College Trust

November 2017

## Contents

<b>About this review .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Key findings.....</b>	<b>2</b>
Judgements .....	2
Good practice.....	2
Recommendations .....	2
Affirmation of action being taken.....	2
<b>About the provider .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Explanation of findings.....</b>	<b>4</b>
1 Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations .....	4
2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities .....	17
3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities.....	41
4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities .....	44
<b>Glossary.....</b>	<b>47</b>

## About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at the St Mellitus College Trust. The review took place from 14 to 16 November 2017 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Ann Holmes
- Professor Jethro Newton
- Mr Rhys Jenkins (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) the QAA review team:

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

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

---

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

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

<sup>3</sup> Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers): [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education).

## Key findings

### Judgements

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision.

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

### Good practice

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

- The comprehensive arrangements for personal, academic and professional support provided to students through the Formation Group system, which is integral to the College's ethos (Expectation B4).
- The tiered approach to the provision of study skills, which supports effective student transition and development (Expectation B4).
- The comprehensive and systematic use made of the virtual learning environment to ensure highly effective College-wide access to institutional information (Expectation C).

### Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations**.

By June 2018:

- put in place mechanisms and measurable targets, with timescales, to facilitate implementation of the recently developed College Learning and Teaching Strategy (Expectation B3)
- implement a robust system for the recording of student complaints to ensure transparency for all stakeholders (Expectation B9).

By September 2018:

- develop further a more strategic and deliberate approach to enhancement through clearly articulated links to initiatives in support of student learning opportunities (Enhancement).

### Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms** the following actions already being taken to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to students:

- the measures being taken by the College to ensure consistency in the marking and moderation process and to improve the timing and effectiveness of feedback (Expectation B6)

- the steps being taken to implement the revised arrangements for the management of youth ministry placements and the support provided to students and supervisors (Expectation B10).

## About the provider

St Mellitus College (the College) is the operating arm of the St Mellitus College Trust, which is a charitable company limited by guarantee. The College was established in 2007, and was named after the first Bishop of London. Its vision is to resource and revitalise the mission of the church in the UK through the provision of training in theology and ministry. It was formed from the merger of the North Thames Ministerial Training Course and St Paul's Theological Centre, and delivers non-residential part-time and full-time training in theology and ministry, preparing students for ordained, Reader (LLM) and lay ministries in the Church of England, and for leadership in other churches.

The College is the largest of the Church of England's Theological Educational Institutions, training approximately 20 per cent of its clergy. It currently has over 250 ordinands in training and over 150 additional undergraduate and postgraduate students on accredited programmes. The College currently delivers theological education and ministry training across four teaching centres in London, Chelmsford, Liverpool and Plymouth.

The College established its main centre at a dedicated site in a converted church in Collingham Road, in central London, in 2012; this was a significant development in its recruitment of students, enabling them to travel from across the country for weekly teaching. The College is a partner institution of Middlesex University, which validates the BA in Theology and Youth Ministry and the MA in Christian Leadership. Following a major review of curriculum in 2014, the College moved to Common Awards in partnership with Durham University, which now validates the Certificate, Diploma, BA and MA in Theology, Mission and Ministry. The College is also subject to the Church of England Formation Criteria for ordained Ministry and Selection and Formation Guidelines for Readers.

The College was reviewed by QAA in November 2013, as a result of which the team considered that confidence can be placed in how the College manages its responsibilities for academic standards, and for the quality and enhancement of the learning opportunities offered, and that reliance can be placed on the information that the College produces for its intended audiences. The review team identified good practice in student support, the effective integration of placement supervisors in enhancing student learning opportunities, and the wide range of communication mechanisms employed between the College and its stakeholders, which underpins the whole student experience.

The review in 2013 also identified six recommendations related to: reviewing the terms of reference for committees; engaging staff in the development and use of the Quality Code; developing a formal policy for approving and monitoring public information; fully implementing the peer review and staff appraisal process; reviewing the College website to fully reflect the relationship with the awarding body; and to negotiate with the University to make external examiner reports available to all students. The College was visited by QAA for monitoring visits in March 2015 and March 2016, and it was concluded that the College had maintained the three areas of good practice and demonstrated good progress with the recommendations, with further work to do in some areas. The review team examined the continued progress on these recommendations and concludes that the College has fully addressed them.

There have been several major changes since the last review, which include a restructure of the senior management, the growth in student numbers, the launch of a new centre in the South West, and the move to the Common Awards validated by Durham University. All of these have been managed effectively by the College.

## Explanation of findings

This section explains the review findings in greater detail.

### **1 Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### **Findings**

1.1 All awards are made in accordance with the regulations of, and agreements with, the College's university partners. The academic partnership link with Durham University is through the Common Awards scheme, organised in conjunction with the Ministry Division of the Church of England, a body that serves as the equivalent of a professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) for the purposes of ensuring alignment with requirements for theological training. The partner awarding bodies are responsible for the naming and titling of qualifications, and for securing alignment of awards and qualifications with the FHEQ and the relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. This is achieved through the validation, revalidation and periodic review processes of these awarding institutions. The College has in place its own internal arrangements at a senior level for securing oversight of regulatory matters and academic standards. These include the role of the Academic Director, supported by the Academic Coordinator, who manage regulatory and academic policy matters and act as the main focal point for liaison with university partners.

1.2 The College uses the regulatory guidance provided by its awarding bodies, together with established validation and review procedures. These ensure that programmes are positioned at the appropriate level of the FHEQ, that credit values are assigned correctly, and that programme learning outcomes align with the relevant qualification descriptor. These arrangements and processes would enable Expectation A1 to be met.

1.3 The review team examined a range of documentation to test the use made by the College of the regulatory guidance provided by its awarding bodies. To assist their enquiries, the team met senior staff, teaching and support staff, and representatives from the awarding bodies.

1.4 Steps have been taken to address a recommendation from the 2013 review, which focused on the need to engage staff with the Quality Code and to strengthen the use made of the Code in the context of College policies and procedures. The team confirms that senior level appointments have since been made to secure improved oversight of academic standards and quality assurance; additionally, a comprehensive process has been completed to review College policy and practice in relation to each chapter and section of the Quality Code. The team notes that this review process secured the involvement of a wide range of College staff.

1.5 The College staff confirm their understanding of arrangements for regulatory oversight as exercised both by the awarding bodies through their liaison officers and internally at the College by the Academic Director and other senior and academic administrative staff. Staff understand the procedures for engaging with the Ministry Division of the Church of England in the context of meeting the regulatory requirements for ordinand training. External assessors are appointed for validation and revalidation events, at which consideration is given to programme learning outcomes and FHEQ levels, and qualification descriptors at the design and development stage. This was illustrated for the team through the recent revalidation of an MA programme by Middlesex University. For Durham-approved Common Awards, equivalent scrutiny is undertaken under the awarding body's processes for the validation of all awards made available to Theological Education Institutions (TEIs) such as the College. Staff are aware of both Durham University's Common Award requirements and the regulatory requirements of Middlesex University.

1.6 For Durham University Common Awards, programme specifications for programmes delivered by the College are prepared by the Ministry Division and approved by the University. For Middlesex University validated programmes, the College uses the University's template, and the Link Tutor verifies that relevant external reference points have been addressed. Staff understand the processes through which reference is made to external reference points and benchmarks in the design, validation and revalidation of awards, and the use they are required to make of the learning outcomes that are contained in validation documentation such as programme specifications.

1.7 Established processes are in place to ensure that programmes are designed in accordance with the academic regulations of the awarding bodies. The College makes rigorous use of the regulatory guidance provided by its awarding bodies, thereby ensuring that programmes are positioned at the appropriate level of the FHEQ, and that programme learning outcomes align with the relevant qualification descriptor. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.8 The regulatory frameworks for each of the awarding bodies are publicly available on the websites of each university. These academic regulations provide the College with regulatory frameworks and guidance on the award of academic credit and qualifications. Academic governance arrangements and regulations are set out in agreements with the College's partner universities. Academic governance at the College is exercised through student-staff consultative committees established by each awarding body, which report to the management team and relevant Working Groups and are ultimately accountable to the Board of the College. For Middlesex provision, this role is exercised by the Board of Studies, while for Durham programmes the Management Committee exercises this responsibility. Terms of reference indicate that each of these bodies considers matters relating to academic standards and the quality of learning, such as programme development, external examiner reports, and learning resources. Each awarding body appoints a senior academic, who provides oversight of regulatory and governance matters. Alongside these deliberative bodies, for executive management purposes, the College has a management structure that is overseen by the Dean and that includes a management team, which meets on a regular basis.

1.9 The College uses the clearly documented and transparent academic frameworks and regulations that govern the awards of its awarding body partners, which would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.10 The review team examined a range of documentation to test the use made by the College of awarding body academic frameworks and regulations that govern the award of credit and qualifications, and also the effectiveness of academic governance arrangements. The team also met senior staff, teaching and support staff, awarding body link and liaison persons, and students.

1.11 The Academic Director has responsibility for oversight of the maintenance of academic standards, academic policy and regulatory links with awarding bodies, including link officers, and is supported in this by the Academic Coordinator, who oversees administrative aspects of university links, including external examining and validation planning. These arrangements are supported by awarding body link officers, who serve to ensure that the College is complying with the relevant regulations. They attend examination and assessment boards and meetings of the Board of Studies and Management Committee and are in regular contact with staff of the College. The review team confirms that these arrangements are well embedded, are understood by College staff, and work effectively.

1.12 Staff and students confirm that the regulations of both awarding institutions are available and readily accessible on the College's virtual learning environment (VLE) and on the websites of the respective university. They are also introduced to new students and new members of staff during induction events.

1.13 Staff understand the regulatory frameworks applicable to the programmes and awards with which they are associated, and students are aware of the regulations applicable to their programme of study and either know how to access them or where to seek advice if

necessary. Staff also understand how academic credit is awarded.

1.14 Some regulatory matters have been harmonised into internal College policies. The main consideration is in the area of academic assessment, where an individual member of staff is aware of which programme students are following and which regulations apply. The Lead Tutor for Assessment provides advice as necessary. Regulatory differences are understood by staff and are managed effectively. Consistent application of regulations is also ensured through the involvement of university liaison and link officers in the respective examination boards and College academic committees.

1.15 As part of follow up to the 2013 review and more recent senior management restructure, the Academic Working Group and Centres Working Group, designed to both support the work of the College's management team and to improve communication across the College, have been put in place. Regular national staff meetings are also held, which bring together staff from all College locations. These arrangements are understood by staff and are working well. In addition to strengthening lines of communication on operational and organisational development matters, staff confirmed to the team that they are now better informed on regulatory, policy and procedural matters. This was supported by extensive documentary evidence.

1.16 The College makes effective use of the academic frameworks and regulations that govern the awards of its awarding body partners; this is supported by effective internal academic structures and communication mechanisms. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.17 The College relies on the approval processes and regulations of both Durham and Middlesex University as the awarding bodies.

1.18 The College holds a definitive record of each programme, which is composed through the combination of approval processes. For Durham University awards, the programme is made up from a selection of Common Award modules, which are selected by the College and offered on a programme subject to validation by Durham University. For Middlesex awards, the College uses a module template produced by Middlesex University and then adds the specific module content. The module template is then sent to Middlesex University, along with the programme specifications for validation or revalidation. The definitive record is held on the relevant page on the VLE.

1.19 The module leader has responsibility for ensuring that teaching and assessment on the module gives students the opportunity to meet the learning outcomes, according to the definitive record. The external examiners use the definitive record as a reference for their report. As part of the peer review process, a teacher is reviewed on whether the learning outcomes in the lesson have been mapped against the module guide.

1.20 The definitive record is used in the process of annual programme review. Interim transcripts for alumni are held on the College SharePoint site and are produced by the College from the students' record of study, which is held on the VLE. The processes described would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.21 The review team scrutinised minutes of meetings, programme and module specifications, and the VLE, as well as discussing the systems and processes with the College and awarding body staff.

1.22 The Link Tutor for Middlesex University holds a watching briefing on any subsequent changes to the definitive record. If a minor change is made it is sent to Middlesex University's quality committee and is usually approved by the Chair's action. If it is a major change, it triggers a revalidation. A major change is either a change of 25 per cent of the programme or altering the learning outcomes for a module. As a result, the Link Tutor provides a significant amount of oversight in ensuring the maintenance of the definitive record and its use as a reference point. As programmes validated by Durham form part of the Common Awards structure at Durham University, it is not possible for the College to modify the modules or programmes without recourse to the awarding body. As a result, the definitive records for those programmes are robust.

1.23 The staff are aware of the definitive record and use it when referring to learning outcomes for teaching purposes. The staff are also aware that mapping against learning outcomes forms part of the peer review process.

1.24 The evidence demonstrates that processes for the development and maintenance of definitive records of programmes are working and used effectively. The definitive record

for each programme 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. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.25 The College follows the policy and practice for programme approval of its degree-awarding bodies. The Common Awards validated by Durham University were designed by the Ministry Division of the Church of England in collaboration with the University. Within this process, programmes are mapped against Subject Benchmark Statements in Theology and Religious Studies and are positioned at the appropriate level of the FHEQ for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

1.26 The programmes are reviewed and revalidated by the respective degree-awarding body. The programmes validated by Middlesex University were revalidated in 2017. The Common Awards validated by Durham University are subject to a six-year review process, which also involves the Ministry Division of the Church of England. These processes would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.27 The review team reviewed a range of documentation, including the initial approval documentation of the awards with its validating partners. The team held meetings with staff to gain further understanding of the programme approval process as applied to the College.

1.28 The BA Theology and Youth Ministry and the MA Christian Leadership were subject to Middlesex University's programme validation process. The College devised its own programmes, which were subject to scrutiny by a review panel, including an external assessor in line with Middlesex's policies as laid down in its Learning and Quality Enhancement Handbook. As part of this process, there is alignment with Subject Benchmark Statements and the FHEQ. There is also confirmation that standards are set at an appropriate level within the awarding bodies' academic framework.

1.29 The College not only applies the policies and processes of its awarding bodies in the programme approval process, but also follows and applies the academic regulations of these bodies. The regulations are available on the VLE with links to the awarding bodies' websites.

1.30 The policies for the approval of taught programmes of the awarding bodies, and their implementation by the College, ensure that academic standards are set at an appropriate level. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

**Expectation (A3.2): 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**

1.31 The programme and module learning outcomes are approved as part of the validation process. The programmes are subject to the respective academic regulations of the awarding bodies. The regulations of both validating bodies permit compensation of failed modules. In the case of Middlesex University, all learning outcomes have been mapped to ensure that the award of credit and qualifications cannot take place unless the learning outcomes have been met. For Durham University Common Awards, the TEI handbook has a link to Durham's regulations, which permit 20 credits to be compensated as long as the average mark is 40 per cent or above.

1.32 The learning outcomes are tested through the assessment process. The forms of assessment are determined at the point of programme and module approval, although there is a process for modifying modules. For the Common Awards, the TEI can choose the assessment methods for each module in line with the assessment guidance published by Durham University. Responsibility rests with module leaders to ensure assessment is appropriate to assess the learning outcomes.

1.33 External examiners approve assessments, attend boards and have responsibility for ensuring that the regulations are applied appropriately. External examiners, as part of the reporting process, confirm that academic standards are appropriate and comparable to other similar institutions. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.34 The review team reviewed a range of documentation, including the academic regulations of its validating partners, the assessment board minutes and external examiner reports. The team held meetings with staff to gain further understanding of the award of credit and the operation of the assessment process.

1.35 The College adheres to the academic regulations of its awarding bodies. Both awarding bodies maintain oversight through the role of the Link Tutor (Middlesex) and University Liaison Officer (Durham), who attend the respective assessment boards held at the College. This ensures that the award of credit and qualifications are in line with the awarding bodies' academic regulations. Staff who met the review team confirmed that the awarding bodies determine the award of credit or qualifications in the application of their regulations and that there is no deviation from the academic regulations on the part of the College.

1.36 External examiners confirm that the assessment process is rigorous and that the academic regulations are applied correctly. External examiners also confirm that the marking and moderation process has been carried out satisfactorily. External examiner reports seen by the review team were highly satisfied with the academic standards at the College and confirm that the process for the award of credit and qualifications is robust.

1.37 The College's assessment framework and processes are aligned with those of its awarding bodies. The academic regulations of its awarding bodies are applied in a robust and consistent manner and this is verified by its external examiners. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

**Findings**

1.38 The College follows the policy and process of the respective degree awarding body as they relate to annual monitoring and periodic review of its programmes. Although there is some variation in approach taken by Durham and Middlesex, annual monitoring is informed principally by student feedback, module review and external examiner reports. External examiner reports confirm that academic standards are appropriate and are being achieved. The annual monitoring process leads to a College action plan. Actions are discussed by the Management Committee and Board of Studies respectively and monitored by the management team and relevant Working Groups. Details of the process and guidance for institutions are available in the TEI handbook (Durham) and the Learning and Quality Enhancement Handbook (Middlesex). These processes would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.39 The review team reviewed a range of documentation, including the annual monitoring reports submitted to its validating partners, action plans, student feedback and external examiner reports. The team held meetings with staff to gain further understanding of the annual monitoring and review process.

1.40 The College is required to submit annual monitoring reports to both of its awarding bodies. It is required to complete a set template and action plan, which is then considered within the committee structure of the College before submission to the respective partners. The reports seen by the review team were informed by student feedback, external examiner reports, and data on student performance. They were supported by a review of the previous years' actions and new action plans arising out of the reports. The link and liaison tutors from the universities support the College through this process.

1.41 Programmes are subject to the periodic review process of the awarding bodies. This process is informed by annual monitoring reports, student surveys, external examiner reports, and student evaluation of modules, with programmes being validated for six years.

1.42 The review team noted that the review due to be undertaken by Middlesex University had now taken place. The College provided its self-critical evaluation with proposal for changes to its Middlesex programmes as part of the review process. The draft report from the review was provided to the team. The College is currently preparing for the joint review by the Church of England and Durham University, which is due to take place shortly.

1.43 The processes for the monitoring and review of awarding bodies as implemented by the College ensure that academic standards are being achieved and maintained. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

**Expectation (A3.4): 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**

1.44 Arrangements are in place for independent and external participation in the oversight and the management and monitoring of academic standards. These arrangements for the appointment and participation of external academics in review and approval processes, and in the proceedings of assessment boards, and for ensuring their reports are responded to, are clearly defined. Guidance is provided to external members of approval and review panels, who are contracted by the awarding bodies to inform the content of the programmes they award and to ensure the consideration of learning outcomes, FHEQ levels, and the relevant Subject Benchmark Statement. This enables awarding bodies to ensure that the relevant requirements are met in the design and approval of programmes. Further, for Durham University Common Awards, the Church of England Ministry Division provides external input into approval and review processes, acting as a PSRB equivalent for ensuring that Church of England training requirements are being met.

1.45 External examiners are central to the evaluation and maintenance of academic standards. External examiners are appointed and trained by each awarding body, with additional induction being provided by the College. They have a role in commenting on whether the curriculum as delivered, and the associated assessment, enables learning outcomes to be achieved and to confirm alignment with external reference points. Each awarding body also appoints an academic to act as a link with the College for regulatory oversight and advisory purposes. The Durham University Liaison Officer and the Middlesex University Link Tutor sit on relevant College boards and panels.

1.46 The validation, approval and review processes in place, which make use of external and independent expertise at key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards, would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.47 The review team examined a range of documentation to test how the College uses and engages with external and independent expertise in the setting and maintenance of the academic standards of its provision. The team also met senior staff, academic and support staff of the College, and representatives of each awarding body.

1.48 External academics are used in approval, validation and review/revalidation procedures to advise on setting and maintenance of academic standards. The Church of England Ministry Division is involved in approval processes, as a PSRB equivalent, for the purpose of ensuring that its requirements for theological training are being met for both Durham awards and, where relevant, Middlesex University awards. The College complies with the Ministry Division's administrative procedures.

1.49 Academic staff understand the importance of externality in confirming academic standards and their being set and maintained at the appropriate level. Although there is no formal institutional requirement to do so, the College has made internal use of external academic assessors at the initial stages of designing some of its Middlesex-validated

provision. Some members of College staff are involved externally as external examiners or external advisers for validation or review at other institutions, thus enabling them to contribute to benchmarking of academic standards against other providers. The number, however, is quite low. Students also confirm that there are opportunities to provide input into revalidation processes at the programme design stage.

1.50 Awarding body Link Tutors attend examination and assessment boards, namely, the assessment board for Middlesex programmes and the TEI Board of Examiners for Common Awards. Together with the external examiners, the Link Tutors assist the College in ensuring that the appropriate standards are met and maintained through learning, teaching and assessment. The external examiner reports and comments, and their involvement in the proceedings of examination and assessment boards, confirm that UK threshold and awarding body academic standards are being met and that their reports are being used effectively for annual programme monitoring purposes.

1.51 The College engages fully and effectively with the processes in place whereby use is made of external and independent expertise at key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

## The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations: Summary of findings

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

1.53 All of the Expectations for this judgement area are met and the associated levels of risk are low. In all sections under academic standards the College is required to adhere to the procedures of its awarding bodies. There are no recommendations or affirmations in this section.

1.54 The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies at the College **meets** UK expectations.

## 2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.1 The College applies the policy and processes of its validating universities for programme design, development and approval. These policies and process can be found on the respective university websites, in the quality handbook or equivalent, and via the link on the VLE. The Common Awards validated by Durham University were developed by the Ministry Division of the Church of England in conjunction with the University. Staff at the College had an input into the design of some modules through the membership of Working Groups and were also able to propose new modules for approval. The University has standard templates for programmes and modules on the Common Award programme, which can be found on its website.

2.2 As part of the development of the Common Awards, module learning outcomes are mapped onto the Common Award programme outcomes for approval by Durham University. The College selects the programme and modules from the pre-designed suite. However, as part of the programme regulations, College staff are able to select assessment type from a pre-determined list and develop the curriculum to reflect staff expertise. They are also able to determine the learning hours for the module, subject to University guidelines, monitoring and approval. The validation process at Durham for the Common Awards are subject to the standard University two-stage approval process that also included partner approval.

2.3 For the Middlesex University validated programmes, the College designed and developed the programme and modules for approval by the University. The process is laid out in the Learning and Quality Enhancement Handbook, which also contains extensive guidance for staff on the documentation required, producing a programme handbook, institutional approval and risk assessment. Externals form part of the approval panel. Any conditions or recommendations are responded to by the College and monitored by the College and the Link Tutor.

2.4 The College has undertaken its own review of its processes for programme and module development, including mapping against the Quality Code. This has led to changes to the module leadership role to ensure that the responsibilities are clearly defined. Students have an input into programme and module development and design through their membership of committees, such as the Board of Studies and Management Committee, focus groups, feedback and through student representatives. This includes changes to pathways on the Common Awards.

2.5 The programmes validated by Middlesex University were revalidated in 2017. This process involved changes to the postgraduate programme (see Expectation B8). The proposed changes have been informed by student feedback obtained through consultation and external examiner comments. The procedures outlined above would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.6 The review team reviewed a range of documentation, including the initial approval documentation of the awards with its validating partners. The team held meetings with staff to gain further understanding of the programme approval process as applied to the College.

2.7 The initial validation of the respective awards by the validating bodies demonstrate that a robust process is followed, including the use of externals to sit on the validating panel recommended by the College to the respective partners. External representation is also used as part of the initial curriculum design, as the College is developing a new and innovative approach to training for the Ministry. However, there is no specific requirement to use externals in curriculum design. Module mapping to programme learning outcomes is part of the validation process.

2.8 The definitive course document is the programme specification, which in the case of Durham University is produced by Common Awards, and in the case of Middlesex University is approved at revalidation. The College adopts the academic regulations of its respective awarding bodies.

2.9 Following the initial approval of the programmes by Middlesex University, the College applied for the recognition of these programmes by the Ministry Division by setting out how the programme meets the requirements for ordinand training.

2.10 The College is permitted to submit modifications to programmes and modules. In so doing, it follows the policies and processes of the respective awarding bodies. The common awards are also delivered by other TEIs; modifications are not made, as this has implications for the other TEIs and would require their approval. However, staff may propose new modules for the Common Awards. The policy for modifying programmes and modules for the awards validated by Middlesex differentiate between major and minor modifications. Limits are placed on the amount of change. Proposed modifications are submitted to the awarding body's quality committee of the responsible faculty and to the Academic Provision Approval Committee for approval. Changes are tracked by Middlesex's quality office. At College level, oversight is undertaken by the Director of Studies and the Academic Working Group. Proposed changes to learning outcomes and assessment are approved by the external examiner. Staff understand the distinction between major and minor modifications to modules and programmes. They are familiar with the process, although in reality major change takes place as part of the revalidation process. Students are informed of changes to programmes and modules via the VLE; Student Voice Leaders; membership of the Board of Studies and Management Committee; and formation group tutors.

2.11 As part of the validation process the College completes a programme specification on a template provided by the validating body. Programme specifications are made available to students on the College's VLE, with links to the respective awarding bodies. Responsibility for ensuring that modules continue to be delivered in line with the programme specification rests with module leader. The Link Tutor and University Liaison Officer of the respective validating bodies play a supporting role in the approval of programmes at the College.

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

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.13 The College has an Admissions Strategy, which informs the Admissions Policy. The Admissions Policy identifies individuals who have decision-making responsibilities with regard to admissions, and outlines the process for admissions and the process for complaints regarding the admissions process. The Admissions Officer has overall oversight of the admissions process and is the point of contact for staff and students. Prospective students can apply online, after which an automated email is sent acknowledging their application. If a candidate meets admission criteria they are invited for interview. Queries are dealt with by an Assistant Dean, and if not suitable for the programme they have applied for the candidate is invited to apply for a lower level programme. Decisions after interview are made collegiately in a debrief meeting consisting of the interviewer, other interviewers, and the Admissions Officer. The College provides information about the admissions process on the website, in the prospectus and at open days.

2.14 The procedure for complaints is set out in the admission policy, which is available on the website. The procedure sets out a timetable for dealing with complaints and the process for escalating a complaint. This complaints procedure follows the Durham University regulations and is in the process of being approved by Middlesex University as part of the revalidation process. The procedure and policies described above would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.15 The review team tested the expectation by scrutinising the admissions policies and procedures and associated documentation. The team also spoke with staff and students about the process and their experience of it.

2.16 At a strategic level, admissions are monitored through a review meeting and at staff meetings through the use of key performance indicators. Staff interviewing applicants are given an interview pack. An admissions flow chart enables all staff to understand the process of admissions. Staff who take part in interviews state that they were sufficiently trained and support for interviewing purposes. The debriefing meeting helps to ensure consistency and fairness in the admissions process and provides a forum for less experienced staff to gain the opinion of more experienced interviewers. Staff undergo an induction process before interviewing. This consists of being taken through the paperwork provided to staff for the purposes of interviewing and sitting in on interviews undertaken by other staff members.

2.17 Information for prospective students includes the website, at open days, and in the prospectus. The website sets out the process and the entry requirements, as well as providing a link to the Admissions Policy, which also sets out the necessary requirements for the different types of students and programmes. The College maintains a comprehensive list of what information is sent to which students, including a Welcome and Induction Pack providing information about the College and programme they are studying. Students also report that during the interview stage of admissions applicants have the opportunity to discuss their application and chosen course with course tutors to resolve any queries.

2.18 Students report that information around admission requirements, programmes and applications is sufficient and consistent. Students confirm that if they have any issues they would be able to speak to someone at the College.

2.19 The College's Chelmsford Centre has been working with the Diocese of Chelmsford to provide assistance in widening access to theological training through the provision of teaching and skills sessions, to assist those who do not have the standard entry qualifications. The Admissions Policy clearly sets out how the College recognises prior learning. The College is also working with the Ministry Division of the Church of England to explore ways to encourage applications from a wider and more diverse range of applicants. Collectively, this demonstrates that the College takes widening access and diversity seriously and is taking a proactive approach.

2.20 The admissions complaints procedure is aligned with Durham University's regulations and procedures, and therefore provides assurance that it is appropriate and robust. The awarding bodies' respective link and liaison tutors have oversight of these regulations providing further assurance.

2.21 The College's approach is robust, effective and results in a fair admissions process. The relevant policies are detailed, transparent, and supported by appropriate organisational structures. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.22 The College Vision and Strategy 2016-20 identifies values, aims and objectives that inform the College's learning and teaching priorities as set out in the institutional Learning and Teaching Strategy. The latter includes arrangements for the delivery of student learning opportunities and encouragement of independent learning. Staff who deliver programmes are required by the College's awarding bodies to be appropriately qualified. A senior academic holds overall management responsibility for learning and teaching matters and is supported in this by staff holding posts of responsibility for learning, teaching and assessment. All students have a personal tutor, which is arranged through the College's Formation Group system. Activities are in place to facilitate the development of staff and to enhance teaching practice, for example an induction programme for new staff, and support for research and scholarship. Substantial use is made of placements for the purpose of student development and the enhancement of student learning.

2.23 The College has systems and policies in place to ensure the institutional oversight and review of the delivery of student learning opportunities and of support for learning and teaching practices. Institutional processes enable students to develop as independent learners and for staff to share good practice. These systems, policies and processes would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.24 The review team examined documentation to test how the College works with staff and students to review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices. The team also held meetings with senior staff, teaching and support staff; staff with specific responsibilities for learning, teaching and assessment; and learning resources, and with students.

2.25 Management oversight is the responsibility of the Academic Director, with support from the Director of Education and the Director of Studies, the Lead Tutor for Assessment, and Lead Tutors for Undergraduate and Graduate Studies. These arrangements are clearly defined, and are understood by the wider academic community. In the College's committee structure, oversight is exercised by the Academic Working Group (AWG), which is chaired by the Director of Education and meets monthly. The AWG makes decisions on learning and teaching matters and reports to the College's management team on strategic issues. Members of the AWG take responsibility for finalising the College's Learning and Teaching Strategy, which was completed at the commencement of the 2017-18 academic year, and which followed an internal review of learning and teaching matters undertaken in July 2016. The Strategy builds on previous undocumented strategies and the Digital Resources Strategy. When approved by the management team, the newly developed Strategy was circulated to all staff by email communication. The College has now codified its strategic priorities for learning and teaching in a formal institutional document, but the Strategy document does not identify either an implementation plan or measurable targets against which progress in implementing the Strategy can be monitored. The review team **recommends** that the College put in place mechanisms and measurable targets, with timescales, to facilitate implementation of the recently developed College Learning and Teaching Strategy.

2.26 The College self-evaluation document states that teaching is of high quality and the review team saw evidence from students and external examiners to support this claim. The quality of learning opportunities and the availability of learning resources is monitored through the College's annual monitoring process. Students are positive about their experience of Fellowship Groups and the personal tutor support, from which they benefit through the Formation Group Tutor system. The comprehensive arrangements for personal, academic and professional development provided through this system contributes to the good practice identified under Expectation B4.

2.27 The College's self-evaluation document states that effort is made across all four sites to ensure equal delivery of learning opportunities, with teachers teaching to the same learning outcomes. Students from different College locations have no concerns on this. While the overall teaching environment is complex in view of the multiple locations, and the challenges this presents in terms of learning and teaching and learning resources, staff and students are positive about their experience of their teaching and learning environment. Documentation from a recent revalidation event conducted by a university partner states that facilities are deemed by staff to be comparable across all sites. Information on learning opportunities and learning support is viewed by students as being clear and accessible. Increasing emphasis is being placed on the uses of digital resources and learning materials for all programmes of study and on digital forms of communication on academic matters generally. This is being well received by students and arrangements are in place for staff training. In view of the strategic emphasis placed on partnership with the Church of England Ministry Division, extensive use is made of placement environments and the involvement of placement supervisors in the delivery of learning opportunities, particularly in respect of students' professional development (see also Expectation B10).

2.28 The College's arrangements for appointing qualified teaching staff are quality assured by the validating universities, which take part in the appointments process and ensure scrutiny of staff curriculum vitae at the point of programme validation. Staff are approved by the respective awarding body prior to commencing delivery on a programme of study. Durham University has a contractual agreement entitling it to representation on appointment panels. These arrangements for ensuring that teaching staff are appropriately qualified work well. Newly appointed staff are able to access the College's induction programme designed for new staff. The review team confirms that this programme is comprehensive in its coverage of learning and teaching and is viewed positively by recently appointed teaching staff.

2.29 Oversight of staff development is exercised by the College's management team. There are activities to facilitate the development of staff and to enhance teaching practice, for example, training is undertaken in pedagogic matters such as academic assessment. Staff training days and retreats for reflection purposes play an important part in contributing to the wider College ethos for learning and teaching and for formational purposes. There is also extensive staff attendance at the annual programme review event. Such activities provide opportunities for identifying and sharing good practice. Some continuing professional development provision is also made available to staff through the Durham University Learning and Teaching Award (DULTA) programme, which is accredited by the Higher Education Academy as a qualification for teaching in higher education and on which a number of College staff are currently enrolled. College staff are also able to access the national Theological Education Institution Forum and are supported in attending other external conferences relevant to their subject or professional specialism. Support is also provided for staff scholarship and research. This is allowed for in both weekly timetabling and as study leave, for which an application may be submitted every four years through the line management system. The College has a supportive approach to staff development enabling staff to access training in pedagogic and professional practice.

2.30 The College operates a peer review of teaching scheme. This scheme is linked to the institutional staff appraisal process. Under the peer review scheme, each member of teaching staff is observed by an academic colleague and the agreed outcomes are recorded on a common pro forma. Forms are submitted to the Academic Coordinator, who oversees the scheme, and to the appropriate line manager. The former also completes a summary report to identify good practice. Line managers make use of the peer review reports for staff appraisal and staff development purposes. The review team confirms that these arrangements for review and appraisal, which are based on principles of individual and professional development, are fully implemented and are understood by staff at all levels of the College.

2.31 Although the recently developed Learning and Teaching Strategy would benefit from a clear implementation plan, the College has systems and policies in place for the institutional oversight and review of the delivery of student learning opportunities, and support for learning and teaching practices. These processes enable students to develop as independent learners and for staff to share good practice. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.32 The recently developed Learning and Teaching Strategy identifies several priorities that support student achievement and development. These include the provision of learning resources that serve a dispersed learning community; encouraging independent learning; student support; and student employability. In addition to the Assistant Deans and Centre Directors, several tutors hold key posts of responsibility for assuring and enhancing the achievement and development of designated sets of students. The Graduate Tutor, Lead Tutor for Undergraduates, and the Tutor for Theology and Youth Ministry each holds responsibility for the development of their respective student cohorts. These post-holders liaise closely with Formation Group Tutors. Further oversight of matters relating to student development and achievement, such as learning resources, is exercised by the Academic Working Group in consultation with the Board of Studies for Middlesex-validated provision, and by the Management Committee for Durham University Common Awards. Other arrangements and structures designed to enable student achievement and development include recognition of student diversity, a College Dyslexia Policy, provision of study skills support, a Formation Group Tutor system, a student induction programme, diversity policy, enhancements to library provision, investment in digital resources, and an emphasis on self-reflection by learners. Student achievement and development, and the arrangements in place to facilitate this, are subject to monitoring and evaluation under the Colleges annual programme review process.

2.33 The College has in place arrangements, practices, and resources to enable students to develop their academic, personal, and professional potential, and this is subject to monitoring and evaluation. This would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.34 The review team examined a range of documentation to test the College's arrangements for supporting student development and achievement. To assist their enquiries the team also met senior managers, teaching and support staff, students, and placement providers.

2.35 The approach to student development and achievement is enabled by a 'culture of academic support', which includes key posts of responsibility at delivery centre level and at the level of specific student cohorts. The College also implements a Formation Group Tutor system. The College's comprehensive arrangements for student support was commended in the 2013 review and these have since been enhanced, particularly through strengthening the focus on formation for all students. Through the Formation Group system all students have a personal tutor. The Formation Group approach is explained in student-facing documentation, which incorporates an emphasis on self-reflection and development, enabling each student to monitor their progress, through feedback, and by engaging in dialogue with their tutor. This enables students to shape their own learning and this is reinforced through the optionality built into programmes and modules. The student submission to this review, together with views expressed by students, endorsed the review team's view that these arrangements are an important focal point for the enhancement of student development and learning opportunities. In addition to the work of Formation Group Tutors in assisting students to appreciate levelness and progression in academic assessment, tutors also work closely with students' placement supervisors.

2.36 Documentation made available to all students, together with information provided at induction and at the commencement of each academic year, is designed to assist in ensuring parity in the student experience and expectations of the Formation Group system. The Formation Group Tutor system is a core element of the College's approach to education, learning and student development, and is integral to the learning environment that supports the student experience. The comprehensive arrangements for personal, academic and professional support provided to students through the Formation Group system, which is integral to the College's ethos, is **good practice**. This is reinforced by the commentary under Expectation B3.

2.37 Documentation and other sources of evidence indicate how programme and module design take account of academic, personal and professional dimensions, and that in addition to progression between levels, emphasis is placed on independent work and autonomous learning, such as project-based empirical work at level 5 and dissertation study at level 6, which demand a higher level of independent learning and preparation for employment. Students are complimentary about arrangements for supporting progression between levels, including guidance on more challenging assessment tasks and this issue had been recognised and responded to in the College's annual programme review process. Career progression arrangements are robust but there is more work to do during 2017-18 on career progression for independent undergraduate students. The Undergraduate Lead Tutor is taking steps to address this matter, including drawing lessons from the review of Youth Ministry placements undertaken by the Lead Tutor for Youth Ministry, which contributes to the affirmation under Expectation B10.

2.38 Students are supported by welcome and induction arrangements, which include induction on learning resources, a student handbook, various residential events, and ongoing communication such as Dean's emails. Student feedback is obtained for improvement purposes. Study skills sessions are provided to all new students, and the Formation Group Tutor system is used to reinforce this. The Lead Tutor for Academic Development plays a key role in ensuring parity of provision and access to study skills resources across all sites and that a cohesive programme is available, including support for academic writing and assessment and for dyslexia. In support of this, resources developed at St Mellitus College North West have been disseminated and shared across the entire College. Study skills tutors are available at all College locations and arrangements are reviewed annually. The College has a differentiated approach to learning manifested in arrangements for study skills support, and the tiered approach adopted in providing support that reflected differentiated skill needs as between undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The effectiveness of these arrangements is reflected in the student submission to this review, in which study skills support is identified as an area of strength. The tiered approach to the provision of study skills, which supports effective student transition and development, is **good practice**.

2.39 The services available to students for pastoral and welfare purposes are highly valued and access to services such as counselling and Chaplaincy services, including for part-time students, is available at all College locations. Arrangements are in place to address the learning and development needs of all its students. This is reflected in a comprehensive programme and provision for study skills support, a Dyslexia Policy, dyslexia training for staff, and reasonable adjustments for learners who require them.

2.40 Appropriate learning resources are available irrespective of teaching centre; the use of digital resources for its dispersed community is a strategic priority, and this is endorsed in the student submission to this review. The College is implementing a strategic decision to invest both in more conventional learning resources, such as library provision and books, but also in digital resources, and to make these available through its VLE. Use is made of digital cataloguing to enable student access at all centres, and the College is increasing its

digital holdings. To support this, a Learning Resources Strategy has been developed. Additional staff appointments have also been made, including the position of Lead Tutor for Learning Resources, with oversight of physical and digital resources. Common Awards students can access Durham University's provision, while students confirm that they make use of the SCONUL facility to access provision at a local university. Students are positive about the steps being taken by the College to continually improve provision. The College makes use of student feedback in assessing provision of learning resources, and in monitoring access to resources it can filter by site and location.

2.41 For monitoring and evaluating student achievement and development the College uses data such as student surveys, student representatives' feedback and the annual programme review procedure. Data on student performance and retention are returned annually to partner universities following discussion by the management team and at the Board of Studies and Management Committee respectively, each of which has student representation, and at the Academic Working Group. These monitoring arrangements are understood by College staff and awarding body representatives. Staff teams of those services directly involved in student support and development work closely together in the annual programme review meeting, during residential weeks, at administrative staff meetings, and at the national staff meetings, which have been introduced during the 2017-18 academic session. These arrangements provide a sound basis upon which the effectiveness of the various services is evaluated.

2.42 The College has in place arrangements, practices and resources for students to develop their academic, personal, and professional potential; these are subject to monitoring and evaluation. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

**Expectation (B5): Higher education providers take deliberate steps to engage all students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience.**

**Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student Engagement**

**Findings**

2.43 The College has a number of mechanisms for engaging students in the quality assurance and enhancement process, which can be found in the Student Voice section of the Handbook on the VLE. The College seeks feedback from students in a range of forums. They have a representation structure including Senior Students, who represent their cohorts, and Student Voice Leaders, who represent their respective centres to the management team. Student representatives on the Board of Studies are nominated by the Formation Group Tutor and appointed by the Academic Director. All student representatives receive training for their role.

2.44 The College uses a number of surveys, including module surveys, the end-of-year survey and the new student survey, to gather feedback; since 2017, the College has also used the National Student Survey (NSS). These surveys are analysed at the Board of Studies and Management Committee.

2.45 Student-staff committee agendas have been utilised to ensure the discussion of quality processes such as module feedback and the NSS, and that students have input. The College has also recently instituted an annual programme review including student participation. Students are invited to take part in the recruitment process of new staff. The student engagement mechanisms and structures the College has in place would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.46 To test the Expectation, the review team examined the minutes of meetings, reviewed the results of the surveys, and met staff, students and student representatives to discuss the effectiveness of the system.

2.47 The VLE is used to circulate the minutes of the Management Committee and the Board of Studies. This enables all students across all centres to view them should they wish. The Management Committee minutes show that action points are identified and then executed by the staff team. An example of this effective response would be the increase in the number of Senior Students for certain cohorts, and changes to curriculum.

2.48 Students informed the review team of issues that had been raised with the College that had been effectively addressed. For example, students had raised the issue of the length of time it took to receive formal feedback on work and the disparity between tutors in providing the feedback. As a result, staff now have a five-week deadline for returning feedback, and the date such feedback will be released is published before the work is undertaken by the students. The NSS response rate was low in 2017, which the College identified as an issue with the database. However, overall satisfaction is good at 87 per cent.

2.49 Developments in student engagement were identified as part of the College's own monitoring and self-reflection process. The College undertakes a formal review of student participation, which has shown a decline in student engagement at senior meetings. The College acknowledged that engagement at official meetings has declined but this is hopefully only a short-term problem. Students acknowledge that this is sometimes due to the students themselves not taking the role seriously enough, as opposed to any issue with the College's structure. A suggestion was made that the management committee (as proscribed by the Durham University regulations) is staff heavy and therefore may be less engaging

for students.

2.50 Staff acknowledged that there might also be repetition in the meeting agendas, which students may feel is less valuable. Nevertheless, the College is clearly aware of this issue and is taking steps to address it. Both staff and students comment that the main source of discussion and student engagement is found in Formation Groups. The Formation Groups provide a more informal forum in which to discuss any problems students are facing at the College and for staff to keep in contact with students. Students state that this informal approach works very well and therefore do not necessarily feel the need to officially engage at higher levels.

2.51 Students are aware of what is going on at the College and how to make contact with the various members of staff, should they wish to make changes about any aspect of their educational experience. Therefore, official engagement levels do not present as a particular concern for the College given the level of feedback gained in informal forums. However, this may be difficult to maintain as the College continues to grow and should be monitored accordingly.

2.52 The College's relational atmosphere and ethos, combined with the very effective informal student engagement opportunities, and supported by formal processes, demonstrates an effective system of student engagement. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.53 The College follows the validating universities' requirements for assessment, including their respective academic regulations. There are links to university policy and regulations on the VLE and these can be easily accessed by staff and students. The modules that form part of the programmes/pathways on the Durham University Common Awards are pre-determined, however assessment is selected from a list of possible options.

2.54 The method of assessment for the Middlesex University programmes is approved during validation of the programme, and any changes are submitted to the University for approval and also approved by the external examiner. The assessment is set by module leaders, with oversight by the newly formed Academic Working Group (AWG) to ensure consistency and appropriateness. The College has determined that coursework is the most appropriate method of assessment for its programmes. There is prescribed guidance on word limits, penalties and deadlines. The College has adopted the policies of the more prescriptive institution to ensure consistency and clarity.

2.55 Students are supported through the assessment process by tutors and Formation Group Tutors. There are sessions in induction on assessment and there are study skills sessions on assessment, writing and interpreting feedback. Past essays are available on the VLE. However, students have raised issues about the timing of feedback and the bunching of assessments, which the College is addressing.

2.56 The generic assessment criteria are set by each awarding body and are available to staff and students on the College's VLE. The College does not currently set specific assessment criteria linked to the module learning outcomes for each piece of assessed work. However, it may wish to consider implementing this, so that there is increased transparency for students in the assessment process. The awarding bodies also set the requirements for moderation, second marking and academic malpractice. Students receive support and guidance on avoiding academic dishonesty through the study skills programme, the Learning Tutor for Assessment and Formation Group Tutor.

2.57 The recognition of prior learning is governed by policies of the validating university, but managed by the College as part of the admissions process for the Common Awards. Students discuss their application with the Academic Coordinator and it is then referred to the Academic Director and the Management Committee. For the Middlesex University programme, the recognition of prior learning process may exempt students from assessment and accredit prior learning. The processes described above would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.58 The review team reviewed a range of documentation, including the assessment board minutes, external examiner reports, assessment briefs, module guides and academic regulations. The team held meetings with staff to gain further understanding of the assessment process.

2.59 The College has recently appointed a Lead Tutor for Assessment (LTfA), who maintains oversight of the assessment process. The LTfA supports tutors new to marking, through the provision of sessions on assessment during induction and ensuring markers remain competent by other training sessions. This role of the LTfA is supported by the Assessment Coordinator and the Academic Coordinator.

2.60 Under the programme regulations for the Common Awards, assessment is selected from a pre-determined list and approved for the next academic year by the LTfA and the Academic Director. Assessment briefs are included in the module handbook. External examiners confirm in their reports that learning outcomes are being met.

2.61 To ensure consistency across centres, assessments are centrally administered. Marking is anonymised and allocated to markers across the whole College rather than across centres. Staff training on assessment is provided across the College. The LTfA creates an annual marking schedule. Module leaders undertake moderation and identify any disparities. All marking of assignments is online. Academic staff are fully conversant with the marking procedures.

2.62 The College is addressing the issues raised by students relating to the bunching of assignments and the timing of feedback. It has recently introduced a five-week turnaround time for the return of assessments, and the AWG is due to undertake a review of assessments and the assessment process as part of its work. Students are aware of the action taken by the College in respect of the issues raised regarding bunching and the timing of feedback. The review team **affirms** the measures being taken by the College to ensure consistency in the marking and moderation process and to improve the timing and effectiveness of feedback.

2.63 The awarding bodies operate different types of examining board. Middlesex University operates a two-tier system, and Durham University operates a Board of Examiners. The conduct of the boards is the responsibility of the College. However, the process and board membership are prescribed by the awarding bodies. It is expected that Liaison and Link Tutors will attend the respective boards. External examiners attend the board, and provide an oral and written report, which is considered by the Board of Studies and Management Committee respectively, along with the College's draft response. The report is made available to all students on the VLE and informs the annual monitoring process.

2.64 The policy and procedures for requesting extensions, submitting assessments, late submissions, and word counts are all available to staff and students on the VLE, with links to the respective awarding body information. The framework, policies and practice for the assessment of students, including marking, moderation and examination boards, are comprehensively followed. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.65 In its use of external examiners, the College adheres to the policies and regulatory requirements of its awarding bodies. The qualifications, expectations and responsibilities for the role are set out in the relevant awarding body documentation. For Durham University Common Awards, the same external examiner covers two TEIs simultaneously. For Durham and Middlesex University awards the College is informally involved in the appointment process at the nomination stage. The awarding bodies stipulate the induction processes, although Middlesex devolves more to the College than Durham in relation to the induction of the external examiner.

2.66 In accordance with awarding body policies, the responsibilities of external examiners include reviewing assessments, marking and moderation at module and programme level, and checking consistency of marking and calibration against assessment frameworks and external reference points. External examiners attend the examination boards of the respective awarding body and their oral reports feed into a written report, to which the College is required to respond using a template provided by the respective awarding body. The College uses the regulatory guidance and processes of its awarding bodies to ensure that scrupulous use is made of external examiners. This would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.67 The review team examined a range of documentation to ascertain how the College makes use of external examiners to assure and enhance the academic quality of its provision. To assist its enquiries, the team also met senior managers, teaching and support staff, and students.

2.68 In regard to the appointment and induction of external examiners, Middlesex University has primary responsibility for induction through a briefing, and the College supplements this process. Induction covers University assessment policy and practice requirements, including assessment criteria, and the operation of assessment boards. Documentation and awarding body regulatory information, including the external examiner report template, is made available to external examiners by the University and enhanced by the College. In contrast, for Durham University the awarding body provides an online briefing and an external examiner handbook. Newly appointed external examiners are invited to visit the College to attend a teaching day and to meet with the Academic Director, as the senior manager responsible for external examining matters, and with the Academic Coordinator, who ensures access to the College's VLE and who has administrative responsibilities in supporting the work of external examiners through providing programme specific information.

2.69 External examiners undertake moderation of assessment briefs and examination questions, and of assessed work through the academic year, and attend the examination and assessment boards for Middlesex and Durham awards. External examiners are also consulted on programme development where relevant. Agendas for the boards are stipulated by the awarding bodies and there are variations between the awarding bodies in terms of the powers of the boards and the external examiners. For Durham University Common Awards, the external examiner covers two TEIs, and the TEI Board of Examiners can only confirm module marks, as classification is under the responsibility of an overarching board for all TEIs delivering Common Awards.

2.70 External examiners present an oral report at the end of each meeting, and this is followed by a written report. These reports comment on methods and standards of assessment and marking, effectiveness of procedures and student attainment. They also endorse the outcomes of the assessment processes for academic progression, including exit awards for Middlesex University programmes. The Link Tutor and Liaison Officer, respectively, for each awarding body is in attendance at board meetings.

2.71 Oral reports feed into the external examiner's written report, completed on a template provided by the awarding body, to which the College is required to respond, indicating any actions to be taken. External examiner reports confirm compliance with external reference points and the relevant benchmark, and that programmes are taught to an appropriate level, and that teaching, learning and assessment at module level allow learning outcomes to be met. Responsibility for oversight of reports and responses to external examiners is held by the Academic Working Group, with responses being drafted by the Academic Coordinator. Following consideration by that body, external examiner reports and the College's draft responses are discussed at the Board of Studies and Management Committee for Middlesex and Durham awards, respectively, to enable wider discussion of learning, teaching, and assessment matters. Reports and responses are uploaded to the VLE, where they are available to staff and students. Issues raised by external examiners, and the College's responses, form a key component of annual programme monitoring in relation to respective awarding body requirements. Proceedings and arrangements for boards and for receiving and responding to external examiner reports are understood by College staff and are fully embedded.

2.72 The College has taken steps to address a recommendation from the 2013 review that it should make external examiner reports available to students. Students confirm that information on the external examiner for their programme of study is provided to them via the College's VLE and in the assessment section of the relevant handbook. They also confirm that external examiner reports and College responses are accessible through the VLE and that student representatives participate in discussion of responses to these reports at meetings of the Board of Studies and Management Committee, respectively. Students are also made aware of the availability of external examiner reports through email communication from the Dean.

2.73 The College makes systematic and effective use of the regulatory guidance and processes of its awarding bodies to ensure that scrupulous use is made of external examiners. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.74 The College implements the policies and process for monitoring and review as laid down by its validating universities. It submits an annual monitoring report to Middlesex University, which is seen by the Link Tutor prior to submission. The report is informed by feedback from students on the Board of Studies, student surveys, module evaluations and external examiner reports. An action plan is developed, which is monitored at the Board of Studies. Information about the monitoring and review process is available in the Middlesex University quality handbook. Actions from the process inform the Academic Working Group action plan. Data on student performance, including retention and progression, is reported to the awarding bodies in the annual review and is monitored by Formation Group Tutors. The College's Monday afternoon programme is also reviewed annually, with feedback analysed by the Director of Education.

2.75 Middlesex University programmes are reviewed and revalidated every six years. The College is required to undertake a self-critical review and meet an external panel appointed by the University. The College has recently been through a successful revalidation undertaken by Middlesex University.

2.76 Programme monitoring and review of the Common Awards is undertaken through the termly meetings of the Management Committee, which considers student feedback, module feedback and external examiner reports. The College is required to submit an annual self-evaluation, with Section A (governance) being submitted to the Ministry Division of the Church of England, and Section B (quality) submitted to Durham University and the Ministry, with an action plan that is monitored by the Management Committee. The University produces an overview report that highlights key issues, good practice and enhancement for consideration by the Management Board.

2.77 Periodic review is undertaken by the Ministry every six years, and Durham University undertakes revalidation of the Common Awards every six years. As part of periodic external review, the College undertakes a SWOT analysis and is visited by representatives of the Ministry, who meet staff, students and external stakeholders.

2.78 The College also has its own process for monitoring and review based on student feedback and surveys. Outcomes are considered at key committees, including the Management Committee and Board of Studies, and by the Director of Studies and have led to a number of changes, including the scheduling of assessments, timing of Moodle training for students, and timetabling of Monday afternoon sessions. These processes would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.79 The review team reviewed a range of documentation, including the self-critical review documentation, annual monitoring reports of the respective awarding bodies, and minutes of the Board of Studies and Management Committee at the College. The team held meetings with staff to gain further understanding of the annual monitoring and review process.

2.80 The Link Tutor for Middlesex University supports the authoring of the annual monitoring report. On submission to the University, it is evaluated by the Link Tutor and

Deputy Dean of the responsible department, to assess the effectiveness of the provision and any risks to academic standards and/or the quality of education provided to the students. Any significant issues or risks are addressed within the department's action plan. Annual monitoring reports are considered within the College committee structure before being submitted to Middlesex University.

2.81 The College has undertaken reviews of its own policies and practice against the Quality Code. This is reported to the National Staff Meeting. There is now a master review cycle. In addition, the College holds an Annual Staff Review event, where all aspects of College life are discussed; this has led to the establishment of monthly National Staff Meetings. There is also an annual programme review led by the Director of Studies, involving staff and student representatives, with findings discussed by the academic staff team and by the Board of Studies and Management Committee. Staff understand the annual monitoring process for the respective validating bodies. The process is evidence based, informed by student performance data, evaluation, surveys and external examiner reports. It is effective in identifying issues to be addressed in the action plan. The reports also contain a review of the previous years' actions. Reports are discussed within the College by staff and student panels, with good practice being identified and shared, before being forwarded to the awarding body. The action plans are monitored by the management team.

2.82 Students use a range of formal and informal feedback mechanisms, including module feedback forms. Students also complete an end-of-year survey and this informs the report considered by the College. Students are aware of actions being taken by the College through representation on the Board of Studies and Management Committee.

2.83 As part of the Middlesex University revalidation process, the College utilised staff and student focus groups to obtain feedback. The review and revalidation of the programmes validated by the University has provided the College with an opportunity to redesign elements of the MA programme. The revalidation event was successfully completed in November. The College is due to undergo a periodic external review by the Ministry Division shortly.

2.84 The policies and processes for programme monitoring and review as implemented by the College are aligned with the requirements of its respective awarding bodies and are effective. The review team conclude that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.85 The procedure for complaints applies to students on both Middlesex and Durham awards. The procedure is set out in a formalised policy, which has several levels and can be escalated as necessary. The policy also sets out necessary definitions and has website links to the relevant University procedures should students wish to escalate a complaint or appeal to the awarding body. The policy also suggests routes to take depending on the type of complaint and sets out a timetable for the handling of complaints. The policy is available on the VLE. Academic appeals are dealt with by the relevant awarding body according to its procedures. Links are provided within the complaints procedure to the relevant appeal regulations.

2.86 The handling of admissions complaints is dealt with under a separate policy, which is made available on the website (see Expectation B2). The College encourages informal resolution of all complaints where possible, which is often dealt with through Formation Group Tutor meetings. The centrality of the Formation Group Tutor system is further discussed under Expectation B5. Formal complaints are reviewed by the management team and the Board of Trustees. Furthermore, the policy and processes adopted by the College align with Durham University's complaints procedure. The complaints and appeals procedure and policy would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.87 The review team analysed the procedure and policy itself, examined the redacted records of a recent complaint and other documentation, and spoke with staff and students about their experience and understanding of the system.

2.88 Having examined the policy the review team noted that it was straightforward to follow and provided clear procedures for students wishing to make a complaint. The procedure allows for the early and informal resolution of any complaints, and students are encouraged to raise any concerns as soon as possible with Formation Group Tutors. The policy is accessible and widely available to students and staff and can be found on the VLE. Students the review team met were aware of where to look should they need to, or who to speak to if they were unsure. The College provided evidence of a complaint regarding dissertation supervision as an example of the complaints procedure in action. The students the review team spoke with are content with the outcome and confirmed that the complaint had been dealt with satisfactorily.

2.89 The College also provided the record of another complaint regarding several different incidents for the same student, which had been escalated according to the complaints procedure. The review team confirmed with the College that the record provided is the official recording of the complaint and how it was dealt with. There are no concerns regarding the handling of the complaint itself but the document is not robust and did not reference the complaints policy in any detail. The document is a stream of text, firstly of the complaint from the student, and then a response from the College, and finally from the Dean. The evidence does demonstrate that the College has conformed to the policy and procedure, however it is not mapped against the policy. The document also contains an email stream between the Dean and the student, which has been copied and pasted into the document as an official recording of the complaint being satisfactorily dealt with. If this complaint was to be taken beyond the College to either the awarding body or the Office of

the Independent Adjudicator, the review team concludes that it would not be clear whether the policy was adhered to, nor would it be clear who had been supplied with what information, and the reliability of the evidence could be easily questioned. This is of particular concern given the growth plans for the College. The review team **recommends** that the College implement a robust system for the recording of student complaints to ensure transparency for all stakeholders.

2.90 The College have not made direct reference to sources of support and advice for students making complaints and appeals in the self-evaluation document. The partnership agreements with the awarding bodies state that students do not have access to the relevant awarding body's students' union, and therefore the respective students' union cannot provide a formal source of advice for students. However, students state they would go to their Formation Group Tutor, who would provide the information and assistance required. For academic appeals, which are dealt with directly by the awarding body, the Lead Tutor for Assessment and the Academic Director would become involved in the process and provide assistance to the student in the forming, submission and process of the appeal. The College relies on informal systems for support and advice for students who are complaining or appealing. As the College continues to expand, this may become problematic and the College may wish to consider ways in which it can provide independent advice services for students.

2.91 The complaints process and policy aligns with Durham University's complaints procedure. The College have stated that the single procedure has been approved by Middlesex University at revalidation. Upon inspection of the revalidation documents, the review team noted that Middlesex University has acknowledged the difference in procedure for academic misconduct cases, and has requested that it be submitted for approval as part of the revalidation processes, but has not yet given official approval by the University Registrar. Nevertheless, if it is not approved, the College will be obliged to comply with Middlesex University regulations and will be subject to significant oversight by the Link Tutor to ensure compliance.

2.92 The complaints policy was most recently reviewed in light of a recent complaint. This has led to the editing of the policy and re-approval. The College knows that the policy is working from the evidence of the complaint being handled and dealt with to the satisfaction of the student complaining. As the relevant awarding body deals with formal academic appeals, the College relies on the awarding body's quality assurance processes to ensure that the procedure and policy for making such appeals is up to standard.

2.93 While the review team recommends that the College implement a robust system of recording complaints, the team is satisfied that complaints are being handled appropriately and in line with the policy. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.94 The College works with its awarding bodies and with the Church of England Ministry Division, and the dioceses of Chelmsford and London, as partner organisations. The College's placement arrangements are expected to take account of the Church of England's requirements for theological training. In working with others in the provision of placement learning, these arrangements apply to two programmes: the BA Theology, Ministry and Mission (Durham University) and a BA Theology and Youth Ministry (Middlesex University). Although there is no documented College policy for working with others in the provision of placement learning opportunities, the College's Vision and Strategy 2016-20 acknowledges the strategic importance of the College's partnership arrangements in support of training and placement learning. For quality assurance oversight of its placement locations, the College has formal working agreements with each of its partners. Risk assessments are undertaken and safeguarding arrangements are in place. Management oversight of placement activity is shared between an Assistant Dean, youth ministry tutors, the Director of Studies, and the Director of St Mellitus College Chelmsford. The College issues guidance for students and for placement supervisors and placement churches. The College has processes designed to ensure that arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with partner organisations and placement providers are managed effectively; this would enable the Expectation to be met. The team examined a range of documentation to test these arrangements. To assist its enquiries, the team also met senior managers, teaching and support staff, students, and placement providers and supervisors.

2.95 There are effective mechanisms in place for the management and deliberative oversight of placement arrangements. This is exercised by the Management Committee and Centres Working Group and through the annual programme review process. Management arrangements are shared by several core staff. An Assistant Dean oversees placements for ordinands, and processes for initiating such placements, while the youth ministry tutors oversee placements for youth ministry. The Director of Studies oversees training provision for London Diocese LLM students, while this Director, together with the Director of St Mellitus College Chelmsford, oversees training for Diocese of Chelmsford LLM students. Meetings with key staff, placement providers and students confirm that these arrangements are fully embedded and are understood by all parties.

2.96 The integration of placement supervisors in enhancing student learning opportunities was viewed as good practice in the 2013 QAA review, and the College has sought to build on this in various ways, including the introduction of an annual training event; the use of working agreements and role specifications; and an annual review visit by the personal tutor, which includes three-way discussion between student, supervisor and tutor. College tutors and placement supervisors understand these arrangements, and the frequency of both formal and informal visits, and contact throughout the duration of a placement. Extensive documentation and information is used in the preparation, delivery and management of placement opportunities and handbooks, and working agreements are customised for different types of student and placement context. Information for supervisors, placement providers and students is comprehensive. Placements are arranged in consultation with the student, and, in the case of ordinands, their diocese. This may be in

their current church context, if appropriate, or through the College placement matching process. Outside agencies (churches, charities and other organisations) apply to the College directly, and are vetted and matched to any students requiring a placement. Once agreed, the student and supervisor jointly sign the Placement Working Agreement. Information for students is comprehensive and provides for mapping against a student's development and formational needs. Placement supervisors confirm that information and guidance provided to them is impressive, that routine contact with formation group tutors is readily available, that training events to support their work as supervisors are valuable for sharing good practice, and that networking takes place amongst the community of supervisors.

2.97 There are procedures for assessing risk, and for safeguarding, and these are fit for purpose. To mitigate risk, placement handbooks contain criteria that each placement must meet; the London and Chelmsford academic staff meetings enable student placement issues to be raised; and diocesan staff are involved in risk assessment procedures. Safeguarding procedures are also in place and working agreements enable supervisor involvement in quality monitoring. In the event of a serious issue arising during a placement, whether it was prompted by relational or student development factors, arrangements are in place for changing a placement or a supervisor, and for the involvement of the Safeguarding Officer. The oversight and vetting exercised by senior managers and tutors enables the suitability of each placement to be closely monitored. Placements are tailored to students' needs, which may differ. Monitoring oversight is reinforced by quality monitoring visits, which involves discussion with student and supervisor and through meetings held under the Formation Group system.

2.98 Supervisors are reviewed, along with students, at an annual review visit undertaken by Formation Group Tutors. Use is made of a standard pro forma, which the tutor completes and adds to the student's file. These reports are reviewed by the Assistant Dean (for ordinands) and by youth ministry staff (for youth ministry students). This is supplemented by an annual supervisor day/evening, where placements are reviewed. Placement supervisors confirm that the College welcomes feedback as part of this process, and that relations with formation tutors are excellent.

2.99 In 2016, acting on behalf of the College management team, the then recently appointed Lead Tutor for Youth Ministry and other youth ministry staff undertook a review of arrangements for placements and placement supervision by reflecting on how procedures for ordinand placements could be contextualised for youth ministry students. The outcomes of this internal review included a revised handbook and other documentation, changes to the placement application process, new employment guidelines, an internal process chart, and help for prospective students to match with the best placement and to liaise with potential placements. This review process and outcomes ensure that learning in the work setting is appropriate and focuses appropriately on relevant skill needs, and that this has the potential to enhance career and employment opportunities for independent students, thereby addressing the concerns raised in Expectation B4. The review team **affirms** the steps being taken to implement the revised arrangements for the management of youth ministry placements and the support provided to students and supervisors.

2.100 The College has processes in place to ensure that arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with partner organisations and placement providers are managed effectively. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.101 The College does not offer research degrees; therefore, this Expectation does not apply.

**Expectation: Not applicable**

**Level of risk: Not applicable**

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

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

2.103 All of the Expectations relating to the College's quality of student learning opportunities are met, with low risk. The review team makes two recommendations in this section relating to putting in place mechanisms and measurable targets, with timescales, to facilitate implementation of the recently developed College Learning and Teaching Strategy, and also to implement a robust system for the recording of student complaints to ensure transparency for all stakeholders.

2.104 The review team identified two affirmations relating to the measures being taken by the College to ensure consistency in the marking and moderation process, and to improve the timing and effectiveness of feedback, and the steps being taken to implement the revised arrangements for the management of youth ministry placements and the support provided to students and supervisors.

2.105 There are two features of good practice relating to the comprehensive arrangements for personal, academic and professional support provided to students through the Formation Group system, which is integral to the College's ethos, and the tiered approach to the provision of study skills, which supports effective student transition and development.

2.106 The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the College **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 College has an information policy, which sets out the processes for amendments to public information and publishing new information. The Communications Manager is responsible for ensuring such information is accessible, fit for purpose and trustworthy. Information on the website and prospectus is sent to the relevant awarding body prior to publishing and is checked against the definitive record of programmes and modules held by the College by the Communications Manager. The College also has a Data Protection Policy in place.

3.2 Strategy and vision information is available on the College website and Facebook pages, and in the prospectus. The values are also used in a number of other promotional materials and form part of job description templates. The College have also taken the decision to re-commence publishing an annual report each year to be made available on the website.

3.3 The College uses a range of sources of information for prospective, current and past students as well as staff, including the website, prospectus, VLE, Facebook, Twitter and promotional material.

3.4 The website contains useful information that a prospective student may need when making decisions about applications, including the ability to see the admission policy and complaints procedure, course information, information about fees, and the prospectus.

3.5 Students currently studying at the College also have access to the College's VLE. The VLE contains the vast majority of information for students, including the definitive record of programmes and modules, course handbooks, assessment information and timetables, learning resources, and the College's policy and procedures. The module leader is responsible for ensuring that the information on Moodle regarding their course is accessible, fit for purpose and trustworthy.

3.6 Transcripts and degree certificates are held and produced by the awarding body. The College retains a copy of the student's transcript, which is stored on the College's shared drive. The College produces interim transcripts for students based upon the information held in the VLE. General information for alumni can be found on the 'alumni' section of the website, and alumni receive a termly email from the College with news and alumni event details. The College acknowledge that there is room for improvement in this area and has identified it as an area of focus in the College's Digital Project.

3.7 Information is provided to all stakeholders in an accessible manner, having considered factors such as dyslexia.

3.8 The process for the development, checking and disseminating information would enable the Expectation to be met.

3.9 The review team scrutinised the College website pages, including course pages, programme specifications and the prospectus. The team also analysed the relevant policies and documents, and met staff and students to ascertain their experience of information provision at the College.

3.10 The College has addressed the recommendations of the 2013 review by developing a Public Information Policy, which has been recently reviewed. The review led to the appointment of a Director of College Operations and a Media and Communication Manager. The Policy clearly identifies that the Media and Communication Manager is responsible for the College's communication plan and ensuring information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. Furthermore, the use of awarding bodies to double check public information ensures that it is accessible, fit for purpose and trustworthy. This results in a comprehensive system for the publishing and reviewing of information.

3.11 Students report that they could find all the information they needed prior to applying to the College, and that the use of open days was really helpful. They state that they find it easy to ask for information and know whom to approach should they need more information.

3.12 The College has acknowledged that some information regarding course costs has not been included explicitly and this is being addressed for the next admission cycle. There has been a review of the website, involving consultation with staff, students and external stakeholders, to ensure that it is fit for purpose and accessible.

3.13 The VLE contains vast amounts of the information that students can access. This includes assessment information, module information, contact hours and reading lists. The VLE also contains a large amount of the learning resources that students would need for carrying out their study. Students report that the VLE is excellent and works well. They know where to find most of the information they need on the VLE and report it as accurate and consistent.

3.14 Staff also find the VLE easy to use and contains all the information they need. The VLE is described as 'terrific' and 'excellent'. The review team notes that the College has made significant and deliberative steps to improve information provision for all staff and students across the College since the 2013 review. The College recognises the importance of the VLE, as the provision of teaching and learning is spread across a number of centres. The comprehensive and systematic use made of the virtual learning environment to ensure highly effective College-wide access to institutional information is **good practice**.

3.15 A significant amount of the academic standards and quality information framework is based on the processes of the degree-awarding bodies, for example the Common Awards system for Durham-validated degrees. The College reviews such standards and quality on a regular basis. Moreover, the Link Tutor for Middlesex-validated programmes and the University Liaison Officer for Durham-validated programmes provide oversight and checking of academic standards and quality information.

3.16 Information is extensive, comprehensive, consistent and accessible across all centres. There are also systems in place to ensure it is fit for purpose. Furthermore, it is reviewed to ensure it remains fit for purpose and trustworthy. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

3.18 The Expectation for this judgement area is commended and the associated level of risk is low.

3.19 There is one area of good practice relating to the comprehensive and systematic use made of the virtual learning environment to ensure highly effective College-wide access to institutional information.

3.20 The review team concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the College is **commended**.

## 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 ethos of the College, which underpins its programmes and the student experience, is the formational approach to ministry. The College has developed a strategic plan underpinned by an action plan. The action plan articulates its commitment to enhancing its programmes and student learning opportunities. However, the strategy and its plan lack any specific reference to enhancement initiatives, although it emphasises the importance of student feedback and external review.

4.2 To enable it to expedite progress on some aspects of its action plan, the College has recognised the need to establish new, key roles. As a result, it has recently appointed a Director of Education and Senior Quality Coordinator, who maintain oversight of quality assurance policies and procedures, and ensure that feedback from students feeds into quality assurance and enhancement. The Director of Education has led on the development of the plan to review policies and the mapping of policies undertaken against the Quality Code, which is now complete. There are some examples of where quality assurance processes, such as module evaluation and annual monitoring have led to change and enhancement. However, this approach tends to be reactive rather than deliberative.

4.3 Gaps in the governance structure have been identified by the College. This led to the creation of two new bodies from 2017, namely the Academic Working Group (AWG) and the Centres Working Group, with both groups playing a role in enhancement. The AWG maintains oversight and monitors actions arising from monitoring and review through its own action plan. The introduction of national staff meetings has led to improved staff engagement and communication. There have also been some key appointments, such as the Lead Tutor for Academic Development, the Director of Studies and the Academic Director, which are intended to enhance the quality assurance processes and the student experience. These processes would enable the Expectation to be met.

4.4 The review team met a range of staff and students and considered evidence, including minutes of meetings and policy documents, to determine the approach taken to enhance the quality of students' learning opportunities.

4.5 Mechanisms for identifying areas for enhancement include staff meetings, management team discussions, student feedback, internal surveys, the NSS, peer review and the minutes of key committees, such as the Board of Studies and Management Committee. There are also clear links between quality assurance processes, such as review and annual monitoring and enhancement.

4.6 The College has recently developed a Learning and Teaching Strategy, which has key themes that are intended to facilitate the enhancement of student learning opportunities. This Strategy was developed by the AWG and approved by the management team. The Strategy recognises areas for enhancement, such as providing learning resources to serve a dispersed learning community; supporting student learning and well-being; developing staff research and its links to modules; increasing employability of students; and developing transferable skills. As yet, the Strategy is not supported by an action plan or key performance indicators.

4.7 There are a number of initiatives that have enhanced, or will enhance, the student experience. These include the development of tiered study skills support that recognises the different needs of students at each level of study; the provision of a study skills tutor at each centre; the digital project, which is enabling the College to move away from a traditional library to more online resources, enabling improved accessibility to resources by students; the development by the North West centre of support for dyslexic students, which has been rolled out across the College; access to DULTA, Durham's teaching award by College staff; the development of the VLE, which has enhanced the access of programme, module and College information for staff and students; and the review of placements for youth ministry students. Good practice in learning and teaching is identified through peer observation of teaching and student feedback.

4.8 The College recognises that at this stage in its development its approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities is not fully embedded. While the review team acknowledges examples of enhancement linked to the College's quality assurance processes and student feedback, it **recommends** that the College develop further a more strategic and deliberate approach to enhancement through clearly articulated links to initiatives in support of student learning opportunities.

4.9 Although the College should develop a more deliberate approach to improving the quality of student learning opportunities, there is good evidence of enhancement taking place through quality assurance processes. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

4.11 The Expectation for this judgement area is met and the associated level of risk is low. There is one recommendation relating to developing further a more strategic and deliberate approach to enhancement through clearly articulated links to initiatives in support of student learning opportunities.

4.12 The review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

## Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 21-24 of the [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\) handbook](#).

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

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

### Academic standards

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

### Award

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

### Awarding organisation

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

### Blended learning

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

### Credit(s)

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

### Degree-awarding body

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

### Distance learning

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

### Dual award or double award

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

### e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

### **Enhancement**

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

### **Expectations**

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

### **Flexible and distributed learning**

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

### **Framework**

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

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

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

### **Good practice**

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

### **Learning opportunities**

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

### **Learning outcomes**

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

### **Multiple awards**

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

### **Operational definition**

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

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

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

### **Programme specifications**

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

### **Quality Code**

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

### **Reference points**

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

### **Self-evaluation document**

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

### **Subject Benchmark Statement**

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

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

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

### **Threshold academic standard**

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

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

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

### **Widening participation**

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

QAA2071 - R9739 - Feb 18

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2018  
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB  
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel: 01452 557050  
Website: [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)