



Higher Education Review of Carmel College

June 2014

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About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Carmel College. The review took place on 3 to 5 June 2014 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Mark Rawlinson
- Ms Polly Skinner
- Mr Jamie Clark (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review the QAA review team:

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

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

In reviewing Carmel College, the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland.

The [themes](#) for the academic year 2013-14 are Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement and Student Employability,² and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

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

¹ The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code

² Higher Education Review themes: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106.

³ QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us.

⁴ Higher Education Review web pages: www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Carmel College

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

- The maintenance of the threshold 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 produced about its provision **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

Good practice

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

- The active development of the curriculum in response to awarding body and student feedback (Expectation B1).
- The effective use of externality to maintain academic standards beyond awarding body requirements (Expectations A5 and B7).
- The highly effective support that enables students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential (Expectation B4).
- The role of the academic adviser and individual feedback in developing student academic and transferable skills (Expectation B4 and Enhancement).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Carmel College.

By July 2015:

- systematically monitor and evaluate the scope and effectiveness of student engagement as partners in quality assurance and enhancement (Expectation B5)
- develop the higher education quality framework to embed the Quality Code and other appropriate external reference points (Enhancement)
- formalise deliberative structures to further promote enhancement of student learning opportunities (Enhancement).

Theme: Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

The commitment to student involvement is evident throughout Carmel College and there are practical examples to illustrate the positive impact of student involvement in quality assurance. Student representatives are elected for every class and sit on Boards of Studies and staff-student committees, influencing the design of programmes through these mechanisms. However, there is little evidence that the College evaluates the student contribution to quality assurance processes and the enhancement agenda.

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

About Carmel College

Carmel College (the College) is a sixth-form Catholic college situated on a single site in St Helens. It was established in 1987 when Catholic education in St Helens was reorganised. The College is organised into five faculties: Science, Mathematics and Geography; Business and Law; Humanities; Creative Arts and Year Zero. Higher education provision is provided in the Creative Arts and Year Zero faculties.

The College mission is to be a centre of educational excellence, opportunity, challenge and support within a caring Christian environment: its vision is 'A Catholic College for the Community'.

Learning opportunities are delivered to around 2,000 full-time students. Of those, 1,684 students are studying A Levels or BTECs; 44 are essential skills students; 67 are Level 3 Art Foundation students and 12 are Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector students.

At the time of the review, the College's 218 higher education students, who are studying the programmes on a full-time basis, represented just over 10 per cent of the total student body. The College has formal partnership agreements with the University of Liverpool and the University of Salford.

Since the time of its Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) in 2009 the College has seen a significant increase in student numbers to its University of Liverpool Year Zero programmes, in part due to the introduction of the Foundation Programme for Allied Health Professions and Year Zero programmes for Veterinary Sciences, coupled with a successful Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) additional student numbers bid in 2009.

The University of Liverpool partnership extends back to 1995 when the delivery of the Year Zero validated provision began. The College became an Associate College of the University of Liverpool in 1997. The University of Liverpool guarantees progression across a range of subject areas to Year 1 for those students who meet progression criteria. The University of Liverpool programmes are indirectly funded and delivered wholly at Carmel College.

At the time of the review there were 200 students enrolled on the following University of Liverpool validated programmes:

- Foundation to Health and Veterinary Studies (Dentistry)
- Foundation to Health and Veterinary Studies (Medicine)
- Foundation to Health and Veterinary Studies (Veterinary Science)
- Foundation to Health and Veterinary Studies (Physiotherapy)
- Foundation to Health and Veterinary Studies (Radiotherapy)
- Foundation to Health and Veterinary Studies (Diagnostic Radiography)
- Foundation to Health and Veterinary Studies (Nursing)
- Foundation to Health and Veterinary Studies (Orthoptics)
- Foundation to Health and Veterinary Studies (Occupational Therapy)
- Biological Sciences leading to BSc (Hons) including a Foundation Year
- Chemical Sciences leading to BSc (Hons) including a Foundation Year
- Physical Sciences leading to BSc (Hons) including a Foundation Year
- Earth Sciences leading to BSc (Hons) including a Foundation Year
- Geography leading to BSc (Hons) including a Foundation Year
- Mathematical Sciences leading to BSc (Hons) including a Foundation Year
- Computer Sciences leading to BSc (Hons) including a Foundation Year

- Computer Information Systems leading to BSc (Hons) including a Foundation Year
- Engineering leading to BEng (Hons) including a Foundation Year.

Through its collaboration with the University of Salford, the College offers Year 1 BA (Hons) Graphic Design. Students progress to Year 2 at the University of Salford. This programme is indirectly funded and set up as a franchise with the College operating as a satellite campus of the University. At the time of the review, 18 students were enrolled on the programme.

The College underwent IQER in 2009, which determined that confidence could be placed in the College's management of its responsibilities, as set out in its partnership agreements, for the standards of the awards it offers on behalf of its awarding bodies and for the quality of learning opportunities it offers. It also found that reliance could be placed on the accuracy and completeness of public information.

At the time, the College produced an action plan in response to the five features of good practice and five desirable recommendations. The self-evaluation document, submitted as part of the Higher Education Review process, sets out the actions that have been taken to maintain and enhance the identified good practice and address the recommendations.

The College submitted evidence that the actions have been effective in building on the good practice and addressing issues where desirable actions were noted. In particular the College has increased the level of external scrutiny beyond the requirements of its awarding bodies and students who successfully complete their Year Zero programmes, but do not progress to further higher education study, now receive a certificate of completion.

Explanation of the findings about Carmel College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

1 Judgement: Maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards

Expectation (A1): Each qualification (including those awarded through arrangements with other delivery organisations or support providers) is allocated to the appropriate level in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)*.

Quality Code, Chapter A1: The national level

Findings

1.1 The College offers higher education awards approved by two degree-awarding bodies: the University of Liverpool of which the College is an Associate College and the University of Salford.

1.2 Ultimate responsibility for standards rests with the awarding bodies of the programmes. The University of Liverpool validates the Year Zero provision, which is delivered wholly at Carmel College. Students who meet the criteria are guaranteed progression onto Year 1 of a relevant degree at the University of Liverpool. The University of Salford, Year 1 BA (Hons) Graphic Design programme, which is set up as a franchise and delivered at Carmel College, offers progression onto Year 2 at the University of Salford. The College has a responsibility to follow the relevant quality assurance processes of the awarding bodies as set out in the partnership agreements.

1.3 The College Higher Education Strategy reinforces the College's assertion that it believes the arrangements for assuring quality and standards of its higher education provision should be as rigorous and overt as those for programmes wholly within the College's responsibility. Staff confirmed their commitment to fulfilling the aims and objectives detailed in the College Higher Education Strategy.

1.4 Overall, the College clearly allocates responsibilities for managing the standards of its higher education provision. The management structure for the higher education provision reflects the numbers of students and programmes, and the diverse nature of students on the programmes.

1.5 The awarding bodies are responsible for ensuring that their programmes of study are appropriately aligned to the FHEQ through their quality assurance processes, and therefore have full responsibility for meeting the Expectation in *Chapter A1: The national level* of the Quality Code. The College is responsible for ensuring that it maintains these requirements through the same processes. FHEQ level information is encapsulated in programme specification and handbooks which are given to staff and students associated with the course. The review team confirmed that this was the case through investigation of the evidence base.

1.6 The review team scrutinised the responsibilities checklist and partnership agreements between the College and the awarding bodies, which clearly define the expectations of each partner in relation to the setting and maintaining of academic standards. The programme specifications and module handbooks, provided to the review team, clearly set out the course of study required for attainment of module credits and progression.

1.7 The programme specifications provided by both awarding bodies, as well as the external examiner report for the University of Salford, confirm that the courses are allocated to the appropriate level of the FHEQ.

1.8 The Year Zero volume of study is delivered as part of a prescribed curriculum of content that the College is familiar with through its work in further education. The College has a proven track record of successfully delivering A Level provision and this is reflected in the strength of the relationship they have with the University of Liverpool.

1.9 In exploring the working relationships between College staff and those at the Universities, the review team found that there are secure and good lines of communication between the module leads, University and the College, which are applauded by staff. The collaboration and support play an important role in the effective management of the threshold standards and in developing the delivery of the programmes, and do not constrain the delivery or the student experience. Staff expressed enthusiasm and commitment to the support provided by the University subject advisers.

1.10 Overall, the review team concluded that the College effectively discharges its responsibilities, within the context of its agreements with its awarding bodies, for allocating qualifications to the appropriate level of the FHEQ. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is **met** and that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A2): All higher education programmes of study take account of relevant subject and qualification benchmark statements.

Quality Code, Chapter A2: The subject and qualification level

Findings

1.11 The College does not have degree awarding powers: it supports the maintenance of the academic standards of its two degree-awarding bodies, the University of Liverpool, which validates the College's Year Zero programmes, and the University of Salford, with which the College delivers one programme under a franchise arrangement.

1.12 The College is clear that the awarding bodies have responsibility for ensuring programmes of study take account of relevant subject and qualification benchmark statements and are therefore responsible for meeting the Expectation in *Chapter A2: The subject and qualification level* of the Quality Code.

1.13 This was tested by investigation of the documentary evidence provided; namely programme specifications, module handbooks, collaborative agreements, and by talking with module leads and awarding body representatives.

1.14 The programme specifications provided by the College confirm that the relevant subject benchmark statements are adopted.

1.15 The University of Salford provision at Level 4 is aligned with the subject benchmark statement for Art and Design and the relevant FHEQ level descriptor. Alignment is tested through periodic review process. A sample of University of Liverpool programme specifications reference the appropriate subject benchmark statement.

1.16 The use of subject benchmarks is embedded in the structure of the programmes. However, College staff were unable to demonstrate a clear understanding of these and other relevant external reference points.

1.17 The review team found that staff were not aware of subject benchmark statements or the purpose of these in relation to the delivery of the higher education provision. Staff who met the review team explained that they were delivering a prescribed course, which is laid out by the awarding body. The invisibility to the College of the relevant external reference points and subject benchmark statements is a risk to its ability to enhance provision.

1.18 The review team was concerned that although the awarding bodies have ultimate responsibility for academic standards, the lack of engagement with subject benchmark statements and the Quality Code more generally could potentially limit the College's understanding of the context of the higher education provision they are delivering.

1.19 The review team concludes that while Expectation A2 of the Quality Code has been **met** the associated level of risk is moderate reflecting the lack of engagement with relevant external reference points. This is also reflected in the recommendation made under Enhancement that the College develop the higher education quality framework to embed the Quality Code and other appropriate external reference points reflect

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Moderate

Expectation (A3): Higher education providers make available definitive information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements for a programme of study.

Quality Code, Chapter A3: The programme level

Findings

1.20 The College has no delegated responsibility for programme design or approval; therefore, its approach to meeting the Expectation that it makes available definitive information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements for a programme of study, is to publish the relevant awarding body programme information, which meets the Expectation of *Chapter A3: The programme level* of the Quality Code.

1.21 The College provided the review team with a range of programme specifications and handbooks that provided sufficient evidence of the College's dissemination of accurate programme information to its students.

1.22 Teaching staff stated that they explained the aims and intended learning outcomes to students at the start of each module, and that, although the information can be accessed electronically through the College's and universities' virtual learning environments (VLE), students in addition receive a paper copy. Students who met the team confirmed that the definitive information that is provided through both the College's and awarding bodies VLEs and in hard copy allows them to understand and achieve the intended learning outcomes.

1.23 The review team concludes that the Expectation, that higher education providers make available definitive information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements for a programme of study, is **met**, and that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A4): Higher education providers have in place effective processes to approve and periodically review the validity and relevance of programmes.

Quality Code, Chapter A4: Approval and review

Findings

1.24 The College's awarding bodies are responsible for assuring and monitoring academic standards including arrangements for management, moderation, monitoring and reviewing programmes. The College is responsible for the delivery of the programme under the overall academic and quality assurance oversight of the schools and faculties.

1.25 The approval and review processes of the College's awarding bodies and the oversight they provide align with *Chapter A4: Approval and review* of the Quality Code.

1.26 The College delivers Year 1 of programme BA (Hons) Graphic Design that is franchised from the University of Salford. The University is responsible for the academic regulations for taught programmes, the programme design, periodic review, approval, amendment and withdrawal policy clearly stating, in the Academic Regulations for taught programmes 2013-14, the processes for approval, re-approval and amendment of programmes.

1.27 The University of Salford regulations and process for approval and design of courses are set out in its Programme Approval document. Processes are in place to approve and periodically review the validity and relevance of all programmes with the formal systematic Annual Programme Monitoring and Enhancement Programme (APME) procedure, introduced in August 2013, forming a central part of the monitoring process linking with the Internal Review scheme, the Periodic Review and Re-approval and Strategic School Review. The APME procedure appropriately details the roles and responsibilities of the University of Salford and the College, enabling the College to monitor and enhance its provision while mapping it back to the University's requirements.

1.28 The programme delivery team also complete an annual higher education Self-Assessment Report (SAR) and action planning as part of the College-wide self-assessment process (see Expectation A6).

1.29 The review team found that the concise diagram is helpful in confirming the timetable for the APME. The APME report is circulated for further comment and information to the student representatives at the Staff-Student Committee. Academic staff year summaries and student module evaluation questionnaires contribute to reviewing and monitoring the programme.

1.30 There is evidence that the BA (Hons) Graphic Design programme team has been proactive in developing the programme, which has benefited from a range of student-focused activities providing engagement with industry and the creative community. The APME report is strongly focused on developing the validity and relevance of all levels of the degree programme wherever it is delivered across the collaborative provision. The scope of the report is wide and it is not clear how it refers specifically to College staff and students, or to other collaborative organisations. Staff agreed during the review meetings that College reporting was on a risk basis and that, unless there was a significant risk of not meeting standards, no specific mention was made about the College.

1.31 The Year Zero programmes are governed by the University of Liverpool through an annual review meeting and Board of Studies and, in addition, are subjected to full College quality processes. These include the College programme management meetings and,

like the BA (Hons) Graphic Degree programme, the annual higher education SAR process. The Year Zero higher education SAR is the annual report offered to the University Teaching Quality Support Officer for Collaborative Provision following the reporting structure outlined by the Teaching Quality and Support Division. To ensure full participation, contribution, and cohesion the College Head of Faculty is a member of the following strategic groups: the Board of Studies, Board of Examiners, Associate College Liaison Committee and the Staff-Student Liaison Committee.

1.32 The minutes of the University of Liverpool review suggest that it would be useful for the College to involve students in curriculum design and scrutiny in line with University procedures. The College has not yet specifically involved students in curriculum design and scrutiny, however, students stated that the continued evolution of the programme is attributed to student feedback which is reviewed and incorporated into future endeavours. In the limited time available to deliver the University of Liverpool provision, that is 22 weeks, during which a two-year programme of teaching and learning is compressed, the focus for staff is on the successful progress of their students.

1.33 Module changes and reviews for Year Zero are discussed, in some detail during Programme Management meetings, covering for example, curriculum content, teaching and learning and programme information.

1.34 Annual common data sheets provide a key part of the link to the University reviews and to the higher education department SARs. The data feeds into discussions with senior management regarding how the area is managed and also informs the periodic review process.

1.35 The Board of Studies provides a formal opportunity for programme review, identifying opportunities for improvement to which both staff and students contribute. There are examples that demonstrate willingness for academic cooperation and collaborative working. In one case in the review of an IT module, College staff offered to work alongside University colleagues to bring the module in line with the A Level.

1.36 The review team concludes that the College's engagement with the processes of its partner universities **meets** the Expectation and that the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A5): Higher education providers ensure independent and external participation in the management of threshold academic standards.

Quality Code, Chapter A5: Externality

Findings

1.37 The degree-awarding bodies are responsible for setting the standards of the degrees. The College complies with the policies and procedures of its awarding bodies for the use of external expertise in quality assurance within the context of the partnership agreements. These policies and procedures meet the Expectation in *Chapter A5: Externality* of the Quality Code.

1.38 There are two processes in place to confirm that the provision from both the University of Liverpool and the University of Salford ensures independent and external participation in the management of threshold standards. The College benefits from university module leads who act as external examiners for the Year Zero programme, and University of Salford external examiners for the Level 4 degree provision which is beyond awarding body requirements. These measures contribute to the feature of **good practice** identified under Expectation B7.

1.39 In more detail, the committees and processes employed by the University of Salford provision are the APME, together with School Executive, associate deans, the external examiner, and the Learning, Teaching and Enhancement Committee (LTEC). The roles, responsibilities and purpose in the independent and external management of standards, of all these groups are clear for all internal and external participants.

1.40 The BA (Hons) degree in Graphic Design is Year 1 of the University of Salford three-year degree programme, approved through University processes, making use of its externals in the approval process to ensure independence and objectivity. The programme is enhanced through the use of external advisers with appropriate academic knowledge and experience, and representatives of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRB). The University of Salford College Partnerships and Programme Approval and Review Committee (CPPARC) benefits from internal peer review, which includes in the process staff from other disciplines in the collaboration, an independent chair, and a Students' Union representative.

1.41 For the Year Zero programmes independent and external participation in the management of standards is reinforced by the biannual Module Review Board of Examiners to consider and to ratify all module marks and to make decisions on progression onto Year 1 of the relevant degree programme.

1.42 The recommendations from the IQER included that the College and University of Liverpool liaise to ensure that its Year Zero provision is subject to an appropriate level of external scrutiny. The College states that there is an appropriate method of scrutiny in place and that this has been reported to the University of Liverpool's Board of Examiners and the Head of College's Science Faculty.

1.43 The review team found that College senior staff are united in asserting that there is an established understanding with the University of Liverpool that the modules should prepare Year Zero students to a high A Level standard. To underpin this there is an A Level examiner in each Year Zero module team. The effective collaborative arrangement between the University of Liverpool module leads and the College module leads, where the University module lead checks and moderates the College procedures, ensures externality in Year Zero programmes.

1.44 The review team considers both quantitative and qualitative evidence to determine the sufficiency of independent and external participation in the management of threshold standards for the higher education provision, noting in particular the bespoke nature of the Year Zero provision, concluding that the Expectation is **met** and that the risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A6): Higher education providers ensure the assessment of students is robust, valid and reliable and that the award of qualifications and credit are based on the achievement of the intended learning outcomes.

Quality Code, Chapter A6: Assessment of achievement of learning outcomes

Findings

1.45 The College follows university arrangements for ensuring the validity of assessment. The University of Salford Staff Handbook provides comprehensive information about Board of Studies membership; principles; student support; programme and module structure; assessment procedures; grading matrix; giving feedback; penalties for late submissions; and mitigating circumstances. To quality assure the programme, the handbook clearly states that moderation/standardisation takes place throughout the year, both in person and using digital samples. Results are subject to scrutiny at programme and module boards at the University and are further examined at the College during the September review, which feeds into the department's higher education SAR, which is central to the College quality standards. Student feedback is monitored through module evaluations and also through student representation at Programme Boards and the Staff-Student Committee. Guidance, provided in the University of Salford Assessment and Feedback for Taught Awards Policy, also links to procedures which have a direct impact on assessment, and include timely feedback to students on assessed work in a way that promotes learning and facilitates improvement.

1.46 There is extensive evidence indicating that the University of Liverpool Year Zero programmes intended learning outcomes are substantially covered and robustly assessed, and that progression is based on the achievement of learning outcomes. College module leads co-write assessment tasks, mark student assessments, and participate in moderation process with University module leads. Some modules are co-assessed by both College and University module leads. Module breakdown sheets are produced and presented to the Board of Examiners for approval. College staff deliver the module, mark the assessments and feedback to students. Moderation is completed by the awarding body's module leads with feedback to College staff. The marks are then ratified and given an awarding credit and qualification by the University.

1.47 A similarly rigorous process is applied on the degree programme. The University of Salford creates assessment tasks and ensures credit is based on the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. College staff deliver the module, mark the assessments and feedback to students. Moderation takes place with feedback to College staff. The marks are then ratified and given an awarding credit and qualification by the University of Salford. During the APME process, the external examiner for the BA (Hons) Graphic Design stated that the team are now confident in awarding grades at the higher end of the scale where outstanding work has been produced.

1.48 Year Zero Module handbooks are explicit in providing appropriate guidance to achieve the module. This includes a list of what intended learning outcomes will be addressed, when these will be delivered, when and how they will be assessed and the marking criteria for assessed work. In one case, the practical logbook provides the record for continuous assessment to demonstrate achievement of the intended learning outcomes. In other subject areas, appropriate and similar processes are in place. However, the degree programme module specifications are not as clear as those for Year Zero.

1.49 The College makes good use of the online facility for moderation for University of Liverpool programmes. The degree students state that they find the availability of the

University of Salford's VLE for online submission of work helpful and access is relatively easy.

1.50 During the student meeting, the review team heard that assessments grading criteria are related to the intended learning outcomes, that information is direct and easily understood, that assessment briefs are very clear and specific, and that teaching staff are always available to explain any terms. Students confirmed that feedback received at the end of every module is full and timely.

1.51 Teaching, tutorial support, assessment and feedback are at the right level and pace for the students who appreciate the good and ongoing one-to-one support that is readily available to improve their grades. Students agree that their work is regularly assessed.

1.52 Staff find that the support offered through moderation activities enables them to be confident that they are assessing using the appropriate criteria to match the learning outcomes. New College staff are effectively supported by the module lead adopting a mentor role. In this process pre-moderation discussions and ongoing thorough consideration of every module before marking pre-empts any inaccuracies. Staff mark separately before meeting to compare and contrast samples. The University of Liverpool programme of professional development includes techniques on the topic of peer-assessed moderation as used in the University. This has been introduced for the College staff and shared by the teaching, learning and assessment advocates.

1.53 The College does not provide a dedicated quality handbook for higher education. Staff can, however, access the College-wide Quality Policy and Framework which maintains that, as part of the quality assurance process, team meetings include internal exam marking standardisation and focus upon improving teaching, learning and assessment.

1.54 The review team concludes that the College's assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning **meets** the Expectation and that the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Maintenance of the threshold academic standards: Summary of findings

1.55 In reaching its positive judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook and took into consideration that the College's degree-awarding bodies have ultimate responsibility for the setting of the academic standards. All of the Expectations for this judgement area have been met, with all but one assigned a low level of risk. This demonstrates that the College is aware of its responsibilities for maintaining those standards.

1.56 The team identified no recommendations or affirmations for this judgement area.

1.57 This judgement area contributes to the feature of good practice: the effective use of externality to maintain academic standards beyond awarding body requirements, which is explained more fully under Expectation B7.

1.58 A moderate level of risk was assigned to Expectation A2. This has been addressed by the review team making a recommendation under Enhancement that the College develop the higher education quality framework to embed the Quality Code and other appropriate external reference points.

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

2 Judgement: Quality of student learning opportunities

Expectation (B1): Higher education providers have effective processes for the design and approval of programmes.

Quality Code, Chapter B1: Programme design and approval

Findings

2.1 The two separate institutional agreements, between the College and the University of Liverpool and the University of Salford, state that the awards are provided by the awarding bodies and are clearly expressed to meet the needs and expectations of the College and regulatory bodies. The design and approvals process is overseen by the College's partner universities and aligns with *Chapter B1: Programme design and approval* of the Quality Code.

2.2 In defining its own programme design, approval, amendment, review and withdrawal procedures, the University of Salford takes appropriate account of best practice in the UK higher education sector and in particular the indicators and guidance articulated in the Quality Code. All taught programmes are required to comply with the University's Academic Regulations for Taught Programmes (ARTP). A rationale for any proposals leading to a change which does not meet the ARTP must make it clear that an exception is being sought.

2.3 Year Zero programme staff have been involved as partners with the University of Liverpool in initial discussions about programme design and approval. The College regards the Year Zero programmes as bespoke programmes, developed alongside the University over a number of years, and remain within the domain of University's responsibility.

2.4 The University of Salford's institutional agreement with the College states that the University has the responsibility for the style and content of the award, prescribing the curriculum, writing and validating all modules. However, the Board of Studies, that reviews and approves any exceptions of proposed changes to the programme, has subsequently approved that the staff at the College should be permitted to deliver modules which they had prepared themselves in liaison with the University School of Arts and Media. Should the College or the University identify the need for a new programme then this will be formally proposed by the University to the College and developed in collaboration between the two parties. As a response to local need, discussions are currently taking place to establish further art and design degree programmes potentially from 2015.

2.5 There is a good relationship between the College and the University's staff and a good interaction between the faculties, schools and College staff, with module leads from the University of Liverpool working alongside College staff. All staff, working with both universities, say that if there are immediate needs for changes in module design or programme development that the Head of Faculty or Head of Department would contact the appropriate University lead to discuss.

2.6 The Board of Studies is appointed by the University of Liverpool to monitor and organise all aspects of the course. It is composed of University staff, College tutors and student representatives. Staff who met the review team confirmed that the Joint Boards of Studies are held at either the College or the University.

2.7 In preparation for the University of Liverpool institutional review for the accreditation process in 2011, the College produced a comprehensive list of supporting documentation to demonstrate its capability and capacity to delivering the Year Zero Health and Veterinary

studies programmes. In general discussion it was noted that, in the future, this process would be useful to include the entire Year Zero provision. Recommendations included the involvement of students in curriculum design. This recommendation has not yet been addressed, however, students say that the College is responsive to their opinion and ideas for improving the programmes and that, wherever it is possible, some immediate changes to the curriculum do materialise, particularly through the staff-student Liaison Committee forum. Longer term changes manifest, as appropriate to the programme and time constraints, benefiting the student cohort in the next academic year.

2.8 Student-Staff Liaison Committee meetings offer opportunities for students and teaching staff to discuss academic standards, including such details as assignment weighting, learning opportunities and any related services or resources that are likely to impact on the validity or relevance of programmes.

2.9 The review team found in documentary evidence and from meetings with the staff and students that the College is responsive to University and student views. For example, the College has acted upon a recommendation arising from a University review to include mathematics in the curriculum of other Year Zero courses.

2.10 The Year Zero full mathematics course was designed for requirements of numerous departments such as chemistry, geography and ICT and could not be changed in the way that would benefit all the departments. As a direct result, the College responded by devising a new course called additional maths, created solely for the needs of the engineering and mathematics students. The content of the course was decided after numerous meetings with members of both departments and emails confirming the needs of the students. It was then approved by Board of Studies and was introduced in September 2010.

2.11 Student views from a number of Student-Staff Liaison Committee minutes record positive and enthusiastic student comments about both additional and full maths. Since the introduction of the additional maths to the engineering programme the dropout rate has gone from 19 per cent to six per cent. It is hoped that examination results will also show improvement has been made by the curriculum change. Staff were keen to explain how this change had been made and to champion its success.

2.12 The review team consider the active development of the curriculum in response to awarding body and student feedback to be **good practice**.

2.13 The review team found that the processes of the awarding bodies are effective for the design and approval of the programmes. The College has sufficient opportunity to work alongside the awarding bodies to develop a degree of distinct provision, meeting the needs of the students and the resources offered in the College. Based on the evidence provided the review team concludes that the Expectation is **met** and that the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B2): Policies and procedures used to admit students are clear, fair, explicit and consistently applied.

Quality Code, Chapter B2: Admissions

Findings

2.14 The College follows the admissions policies of University of Liverpool and University of Salford, in meeting the Expectation in *Chapter B2: Admissions*. Information regarding admissions is available on the College website with links to the relevant awarding body.

2.15 The policies and procedures followed by the College are consistent and clearly set out, and are aligned with *Chapter B2: Admissions* of the Quality Code. The objectives are to offer opportunities for study in higher education to a wide pool of applicants, to provide staff with all the information they need to advise students appropriately and to supply applicants with the knowledge they need to make informed decisions about their education.

2.16 The College has a commitment to widening participation and providing second chances to adult learners. The Year Zero provision meets a particular and specific local and national demand identified by the Lifelong Learning Networks, and which is embedded in the College's vision of its future higher education delivery.

2.17 Admissions to programmes of both awarding bodies is through UCAS. Mature students applying to the University of Liverpool's Year Zero science and engineering programmes are considered individually and are encouraged to contact the College for a preliminary discussion prior to submitting a UCAS application. All applications go through the University of Liverpool's Admissions and Recruitment Centre (ARC) and are forwarded to the College for consideration only if the student does not meet the admissions criteria. College degree coordinators for the University of Liverpool programmes are trained to act as Admissions Tutors of the University. Admissions decisions in these cases are made by the College, following the relevant policies and procedures. A telephone interview is held with candidates who do not meet the admission criteria to ensure that they understand the demands and expectations of the programme.

2.18 BA (Hons) Graphic Design students are admitted by the University of Salford having applied through UCAS.

2.19 The College supports prospective students with information and guidance about the opportunities available to them, as well as the demands that will be made of them by study in their chosen disciplines at this level.

2.20 The review team tested the arrangements for admissions by reading the policies and talking to students admitted to programmes in the College. Students found the admissions process to be good, and the opportunities made available by the College were highly valued. The review team reviewed data on the socio-economic characteristics of the Year Zero programme cohorts which demonstrated the inclusiveness of the College's admission.

2.21 The College has increased its enrolment while sustaining its commitment to diversity, particularly in terms of age, prior achievement, and socio-economic status. The Year Zero health and veterinary programmes have recently been given greater visibility to prospective applicants by a UCAS listing, which was much appreciated by the students, but as yet has not impacted on the number of applications.

2.22 The review team concludes that the College has clear admission procedures that are efficiently executed, staff are appropriately trained and communication with prospective students is good. Therefore the Expectation is **met** and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B3: Learning and teaching

Findings

2.23 The College has approved a Higher Education Strategy linked to its Strategic Plan. The College's approach to the quality assurance of its higher education provision is to integrate it within the College's common quality assurance processes, which are benchmarked against the Common Inspection Framework.

2.24 The College has foregrounded three performance indicators, those being attendance, retention and progression, as measures of student engagement. The rationale for this approach is that the College operates an evidence-based process with which it can identify and implement actions to achieve targets and meet relevant performance indicators.

2.25 The review team tested the College's review and enhancement of its provision of learning opportunities in higher education by analysing the issues raised through annual monitoring, and addressed in its arrangements for checking and improving the quality of teaching. The review team talked to teachers and students about the standards and quality of the learning that goes on in the higher education programmes, and in particular about independent learning, and the opportunity students have to develop as learners.

2.26 Staff, who teach across both further and higher education provision, are able to demonstrate a clear differentiation in their approaches to teaching and learning in higher education. The review team heard from staff that, for Year Zero students, because of the foreshortened period of registration, students quickly become independent learners who undertake their own research and apply knowledge, preparing them for progression to university. Staff new to higher education, are inducted at the beginning of the academic year and are given a staff handbook which sets out how teaching higher education differs from A Level. New staff members informally observe experienced staff and discuss pace and level with the module lead. However, staff voiced the opinion that there was no expectation from the University of Liverpool that Year Zero students were to be taught as higher education students.

2.27 The College has in place a number of measures to test its teaching and disseminate good practice in learning and teaching. Staff observations feed into the annual staff review. Its teaching triangles offer staff an opportunity to share ideas to improve teaching, the student experience and achievement. The use of teaching, learning and assessment advocates, volunteers who work within each faculty, promotes reflection and developments in teaching, learning and assessment.

2.28 The College develops its teachers through a range of staff-development initiatives. These are set out in the Staff Development Policy and inform a college-wide staff development programme. A staff development plan is produced annually taking account of any development needs identified during staff reviews. The review team heard from staff that, as part of the continued professional development process, they are encouraged to ensure that their engagement with industry remains current and is effectively translated into the programme delivery.

2.29 The College's learning environments are of a high standard with standard teaching accommodation, a VLE, ICT and traditional library resources. As university students, the students also have access to university resources through the respective VLEs and library resources. A recent development has been the introduction of a dedicated higher education area within the College.

2.30 The College draws effectively on evaluations made by students to review and improve the learning environment. The College has a demonstrable record of responding to the opinion of students in improving the learning environment.

2.31 The College has thorough and effective quality assurance processes and the teaching staff are active in sharing best practice across faculties. The role of module lead is pivotal to the management of the delivery of learning opportunities. A module lead handbook specifies the role in relation to assessment, the updating of module outcomes, effecting actions in response to the Student-Staff Liaison Committee and student evaluations, and liaising with the awarding body. The College has improved its performance against its indicators for student engagement in learning, and the students were enthusiastic about the progress they had made as learners.

2.32 The College has established a programme of study skills learning for its foundation degree students through its academic adviser scheme, and staff are supported with an academic adviser handbook and training. A personal tutor system mirrors the academic adviser scheme for the University of Salford students.

2.33 Students with whom the team met spoke well of the formative assessment opportunities offered by the College. Students receive oral and written feedback, often the day after submitting work, although the stated turnaround time is 15 days. Students appreciated being able to reflect on their mark and then to have the opportunity to discuss it in a group. Further opportunities for formative feedback are afforded through drop-in subject tutorials which are regularly timetabled.

2.34 The review team can conclude that the College has the capacity to review its provision, and that it could identify areas where it could develop its evidence-gathering. The review team concludes that the Expectation is **met** and that the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling student development and achievement

Findings

2.35 The College has a Higher Education Strategy which sets out the strategic objectives of the higher education provision within the College. To reflect its aim that the College contribute to the widening participation agenda, the Year Zero student body is atypical, with a higher percentage of mature students, of those from low socio-economic classes and of those from lower participation neighbourhoods.

2.36 The College's approach to enabling students to develop is to challenge them to be independent while providing support and guidance for their transition into higher education. Students with whom the team met were fully aware of these objectives.

2.37 Students are provided with guidance about transition into and beyond the College's programmes through Discovery Days held at the University of Liverpool. At these, potential students can learn about what Year Zero has to offer through a dedicated transition day that explains the differences between further and higher education, as well as students being provided with pre-course materials. The College provides all students with full module and programme information at the beginning of their course along with an undergraduate handbook. Looking forward, they have opportunities to gain first-hand professional and academic experience in their intended fields through taster events which are held throughout the year, some of which have been made more accessible by relocation to the College.

2.38 The review team tested the College's approach to enabling student development by talking to students and staff, and by reading the documentary evidence, which included information to students, schedules and policies, logs of activity, and the student submission. The review team wanted to find out how the College knew that its approach was effective, how it acted on feedback, and what the students felt about the challenges and the support they were given.

2.39 The academic adviser scheme and its integrated study skills programme have been instrumental in supporting students to progress in their studies. The College regards the role, which was developed in response to student feedback, as fundamental to the positive student experience. All Year Zero students are assigned an academic adviser who offers both academic and pastoral support. The College's academic advisers receive training for the role delivered by the University of Liverpool. University of Salford students are assigned a personal tutor, who has also received training for the role. This role mirrors that of the academic adviser.

2.40 The College has appointed a dedicated learning support officer for its higher education cohort, and has a system for coordinating support to learners with special educational needs. This is a well founded and well resourced approach that is appreciated by the students.

2.41 The programme of skills training through regular meetings with teachers in the academic adviser role was found to be effective by students, and has had a positive impact on retention. The College has introduced a transferable skills mapping table to ensure the coverage of a range of skills in modules. Transferable skills are clearly and explicitly mapped to subjects in subject-level documentation. The students responsible for the student submission provided evidence for the effectiveness of the College in supporting the development of transferable skills, with an articulate summary of the skills developed on their

courses. Foundation degree students have regular one-to-one review meetings with their academic adviser, at which they can take stock of their progress. The role of the academic adviser and individual feedback in developing student academic and transferable skills is a feature of good practice that is identified under Enhancement. In addition, the review team found the highly effective support that enables students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential is **good practice**.

2.42 The College has set out to augment support to students with a number of new initiatives which it has not yet had time to fully implement and evaluate. These include a peer-assisted learning and mentoring scheme, PALS, successfully piloted with biological science students, a buddy scheme to support transition whereby Year Zero students are paired up with a student who has progressed from Year Zero to the University of Liverpool.

2.43 Two members of staff have undertaken research into student support and student achievement as part of continuing professional development. Teaching staff are encouraged to pursue staff development opportunities relating to the industrial or professional aspects of their programmes, and these contribute to the currency of the delivery.

2.44 Learning resources budgets are held by each subject area. The College librarian liaises with teachers, students and the respective higher education institutions to ensure that print material is current, and students have access to the physical and virtual libraries of the respective university partners.

2.45 The team concluded that the College was successful in developing its students because they are articulate and knowledgeable in their written and spoken evaluations of the education they receive; because the College has good systems for supporting students; and because there is a learning ethos in the College which extends beyond the curriculum.

2.46 The review team therefore concluded that the College effectively plans, allocates and manages resources and supports students' academic, personal and professional development to reach their potential. The review team concludes that the Expectation is **met** and that the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student engagement

Findings

2.47 The College's approach to making students partners in quality assurance and enhancement is to ensure that the views of students are captured and considered at numerous points in its processes. The College has a commitment to having multiple lines of communication with its students.

2.48 Student representatives are elected for each class and are in attendance at meetings in which the curriculum and its delivery are discussed. Student representatives found their roles less onerous than they expected. They reported that they had not had training, and that they felt that more information about the requirements of the role, which they had tended to overestimate, would have helped potential representatives decide whether to put themselves forward for election.

2.49 The College employs formal instruments and forums to gather evaluations from students, notably module evaluations but also focus groups and group meetings with academic advisers, as well as Student Voice, an online system which gathers qualitative evaluations. Student representatives sit on the Staff-Student Liaison Committee for the University of Liverpool Year Zero programmes and Staff-Student Committee for the University of Salford provision, where they share in the discussion of the delivery of programmes.

2.50 The College additionally has higher education student representation on Joint Board of Studies, Programme Management Team Meetings and on the College's cross-College Chaplaincy and Equality and Diversity and Health and Safety Committees. Higher education student representatives also sit on the cross-college Student Council.

2.51 Student evaluations of current provision inform the annual monitoring process, but issues and needs raised by students are commonly dealt with more directly by actions taken in-year by module leads, the Head of Faculty or by the corporate management team.

2.52 The student partnership is potentially constrained in its effectiveness by the limited understanding of enhancement in the College. The University of Liverpool Staff-Student Liaison Committee agenda does not yet fully facilitate deliberate enhancement of learning and teaching opportunities. The University of Salford Staff-Student Committee agenda is more explicitly tied to quality assurance and enhancement themes, and identifies business accordingly.

2.53 The review team tested the College's approach to engagement with students by reflecting on the student submission and evidence of the way the College collects and acts upon student views. The review team talked to staff and students about the way they worked together to improve the delivery of learning opportunities, and assessed a range of actions and initiatives, including student representation on committees and student evaluations, to test how students were involved and the extent to which there were deliberate, as opposed to reactive, measures to improve the quality of student learning opportunities.

2.54 Students report the effectiveness of the College's student engagement policies with a series of case studies that highlight the responsiveness of staff and systems to issues raised. Actions arising from student evaluations are reported on the noticeboard adjacent to the higher education work areas.

2.55 Students and staff took different views of the effectiveness of the method the College employed to achieve high rates of completion for module evaluations, the former providing evidence about the lower quality of student responses immediately after sitting examinations, and staff citing the poor rates of return from online surveys. The College seemed to be unaware of this evidence, because it does not formally evaluate student engagement in quality assurance.

2.56 The review team did not find evidence that the College formally and explicitly evaluated the scope and effectiveness of student engagement in quality assurance and enhancement. The review team **recommends** that the College systematically monitor and evaluate the scope and effectiveness of student engagement as partners in quality assurance and enhancement.

2.57 The team concludes that the College is energetic in seeking to learn what students think about the delivery of its programmes, and it creates formal opportunities to enter into discussion with them about how well the College is doing in its support of them. In the context of the short periods of registration, the review team found evidence that the College's direct and reactive approach is meeting the needs of current students. Numerous improvements have been secured for students by staff responding to student requests including the extension to taster days, the University of Liverpool visiting lecturer series, an extension to practical exercises and a change in timetabling.

2.58 The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is **met** and that the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B6): Higher education providers ensure that students have appropriate opportunities to show they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the award of a qualification or credit.

Quality Code, Chapter B6: Assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning

Findings

2.59 The awarding bodies and the College have effective processes to ensure that students have good opportunities to achieve the intended learning outcomes informed by the guidance set out in *Chapter B6: Assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning* of the Quality Code. These are described in either the programme specifications or the module handbooks. To further this aim there are a variety of learning and teaching approaches offered to enable the intended learning outcomes to be achieved.

2.60 The College Higher Education Strategy confirms that the BA (Hons) Graphic Design programme curriculum delivered at the College is as prescribed by the University of Salford. All modules are written and validated by the University and the programme specifications specifically reference that all teaching methods, curriculum and assignments are designed in relation to level and individual module, in order to give plenty of opportunity for students to demonstrate achievement of appropriate learning outcomes. The University of Salford, where appropriate, will supply the required teaching, learning and assessment materials for the modules offered at the College. The College will follow, as appropriate, the University's policy on Assessment and Feedback for Taught Awards. The University of Salford creates the assessment task followed by verification of the module that is delivered by the College. After moderation and feedback to the College, staff marks are ratified and given an awarding credit and qualification by the University of Salford.

2.61 The University of Salford programme structure provides the opportunity for reinforcement of the learning outcomes and provides ample opportunity to develop students' skills, and in doing this to gain the required knowledge and understanding of intended learning outcomes. All teaching methods and assignments are designed in relation to level and individual modules, so that students can demonstrate achievement of appropriate learning outcomes.

2.62 To support the achievement of the intended learning outcomes, University of Salford employs a variety of teaching, learning and assessment methods which include external industry-related assessment opportunities and live briefs.

2.63 The College is responsible for Year Zero formal examinations, which are held in accordance with University of Liverpool's Code of Practice on Assessment and Year Zero assessments are effectively discharged adhering to this Code. The examination boards have been restructured, following the recommendations of the University of Liverpool's institutional review visit, to incorporate Module Review Boards.

2.64 College Year Zero staff deliver programmes as outlined in the University of Liverpool's programme specifications and assessment is agreed with the University's module leads. Students are provided with formative feedback.

2.65 The programme promotes flexibility of study and real work scenario experiences, enabling students to make informed career choices. This feature was clearly described by staff who have provided students with the opportunity to practice and achieve the intended learning outcomes in a practical sense. Year Zero veterinary students attend Reaseheath College, a land-based college, to study animal health, and medics attend the University of Liverpool Human Anatomy Resource Centre. Students were most enthusiastic speaking

about the huge reinforcement of learning attributed to this participation. The College intends to offer both opportunities to the next Year Zero cohort.

2.66 All students talked knowledgeably about the sufficiency and coverage of the intended learning outcomes and agreed that they were given ample time to practice new knowledge or skills to be able to demonstrate competence. The students agreed that the overall programme experience prepared them very well for transition to the higher levels of study in the university.

2.67 During meetings with staff, the review team found that programme staff confirmed initial evidence that they are either all working practitioners or have sufficient professional experience to have a comprehensive understanding of the importance, currency of the content, and relevance of students' achievement of the intended learning outcomes.

2.68 The review team heard from students that learning outcomes are highlighted before the start of each new topic and directly relate to assessment. For further confirmation, the learning outcome is also highlighted in the materials available on the College and University VLEs. Students indicate that they find that the programme is incrementally more challenging during the year.

2.69 Most formative assessment is marked within the deadline and corrections are explained to reinforce learning. The grading criteria are readily available and the mark scheme in Health Sciences is often shown to the students.

2.70 Teaching and learning is central to all the College's activities. Constant attention and continual review ensures that the materials target the needs of the students. The College is aware of the implications of the significant increase in the number of widening participation students on Year Zero programmes.

2.71 To identify and provide appropriate ways for any students requiring additional support to succeed in their studies, the College analysed management information. It found that streaming the full maths and physics cohort, and implementing the academic adviser role resulted in a reduction in the likelihood of students not achieving their learning aims and goals in the defined programmes.

2.72 The College collects records of prior achievement at the admission stage but given that the student profile is either in-college progressions or longer-term returners to learning, accreditation against prior achievement, other than consideration of life experience, experiential learning has not generally been requested to be accredited.

2.73 The review team considers that the evidence base provides appropriate and full information to conclude that the Expectation is **met** and that the 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

2.74 The University of Salford External Examining for all Taught Programmes Policy contains explicit outlines of the general principles, regulations and guidance relating to the operation of external examining applying to all taught programmes, including programmes offered by accredited and affiliated partners. The University's external examining system is an integral and essential part of institutional quality assurance and in accordance with *Chapter B7: External Examining* of the Quality Code.

2.75 The University of Liverpool model for assuring Year Zero is through an informal agreement with the College to ensure the students reach a very high A Level standard. Staff who met the review team spoke confidently that, during the intensive 22-week academic year, students attain the standard. The Joint Board of Studies determined that an external examiner was not formally required for Year Zero programmes.

2.76 However, in recompense to formal external examination, the informal adopted model sees University module leads act as external examiners for the Year Zero provision. This position was confirmed and discussed during the review visit. The review team found that the University works closely with College teams to use the University staff's external expertise appropriately to inform and contribute positively to the programmes.

2.77 To ensure that high A Level standards are met the College attests that the process is strengthened as assessments are co-written by the University module leads, marked by the College module lead and moderated both internally and by the University of Liverpool module lead. The assessment marks are considered at the Module Review Board and ratified by the Board of Examiners. There is a further check and some degree of externality in the form of College A Level examiners, one of whom is linked to each of the higher education programme module provision.

2.78 In contrast, the University of Salford degree programme makes use of external examiners. Although there is no formal requirement for an external examiner at Level 4, the College states that assessments are robustly moderated and that the College is able to submit samples of assessed work to a University-approved external examiner, who is also the external for the whole programme delivered at the University of Salford.

2.79 The external examiner report provides further detailed evidence of the effectiveness of this relationship. The review team saw evidence that the Programme Leader continually informs the external examiner of any programme changes or developments, and that the range of assessment methods operated by the team are appropriate for the teaching and learning, are aligned with the Quality Code and adhere to the *Subject benchmark statement: Art and design*.

2.80 The University of Salford annual programme monitoring and enhancement report for 2011-12 records the view of the external examiner and states that College staff make full use of external examiners. This was confirmed by staff who said that the use the College makes of the external examiner is effective practice and works well for them, providing a useful and supportive level to reinforce externality.

2.81 The review team considers that the effective use of externality to maintain academic standards beyond awarding body requirements is **good practice**.

2.82 College degree staff make full use of University of Salford's external examiner, benefiting the programme by encouraging the development, importance and relevance of externality. There is sufficient evidence of positive interaction between the University of Salford external examiner and the degree team; the University of Liverpool model, with University module leads acting as external examiners; and the use of a College A Level examiner linked to each module, to conclude that the Expectation is **met** and that the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B8): Higher education providers have effective procedures in place to routinely monitor and periodically review programmes.

Quality Code, Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review

Findings

2.83 Responsibility for programme monitoring and review lies with the College's awarding bodies whose policy and processes align with *Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review* of the Quality Code.

2.84 The Universities are responsible for the overview, maintenance and enhancement of academic standards of the awards, including all the arrangements for moderation, monitoring and periodic review of awards. The responsibility for quality assurance rests with the University school/faculty. The quality of the College higher education provision is assessed through the University annual and periodic academic review system as approved in both of the institutional and franchise agreements. The agreements indicate a clear policy on programme withdrawal.

2.85 Annual programme monitoring and enhancement (APME) forms part of the University of Salford internal review scheme for degrees in conjunction with the periodic programme review; its purpose being to maintain and enhance the quality of University taught programmes. The internal review APME is the system to which the College contributes.

2.86 The University of Liverpool tests the quality and maintenance of standards, delivered by the Year Zero College provision, by means of an institutional review method. University representatives from the Learning and Teaching Committee visit the College to ensure that the appropriate policies, procedures and resources are in place to enable the College to continue to deliver the University Year Zero provision. The review has been delayed this year and is expected to take place in the autumn term of 2014.

2.87 Year Zero provision is also subject to annual monitoring that is considered at the Board of Studies meetings. Modules are evaluated and the higher education self-assessment report (SAR) is presented as an annual report to the University of Liverpool Teaching Quality Support Officer for collaborative provision following the reporting structure outlined by the Teaching Quality and Support Division. To ensure contribution and cohesion, on behalf of the College, the College Head of Faculty is a member of the following: the Board of Studies, Board of Examiners, Associate College Liaison Committee and Staff-Student Liaison Committees.

2.88 Senior staff were keen to describe the processes in place for the ongoing College review to enrich the quality of provision in highlighting lesson observations, staff development, learning walk themes, student voice and focus groups, module evaluations, annual programme monitoring and review, and the way in which the College September review contributes to the College SAR.

2.89 The SAR and common data sheets are scrutinised and approved by an interview panel comprising Principal, Assistant Principal Quality Assurance and a 'critical friend'. The approved higher education SAR and emerging action plan is measured against performance indicators, scrutinising and comparing performance data and identifying areas for improvement. The higher education SAR is then incorporated into the whole College self-assessment report.

2.90 The review team found that the SAR is not evaluated against the Quality Code or other appropriate external reference points.

2.91 The review team considered that the College's routine arrangements for programme monitoring and review are sufficiently rigorous and transparent to provide appropriate assurance of the quality and standards of its provision. The review team concludes that the Expectation is **met** and that the risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B9): Higher education providers have fair, effective and timely procedures for handling students' complaints and academic appeals.

Quality Code, Chapter B9: Academic complaints and student appeals

Findings

2.92 Both the University of Liverpool and the University of Salford have academic appeals and complaints procedures supplemented by the College's internal complaint procedure for non-academic complaints. The procedures align with *Chapter B9: Complaints and appeals* of the Quality Code.

2.93 The review team examined how the procedures worked in practice by reviewing the evidence and by speaking to staff and students.

2.94 All higher education students receive a copy of the complaints and appeals procedures relevant to their awarding body during induction and are directed to use these processes if they wish to make an academic appeal. The University of Liverpool student handbook provides detailed and informative information about its complaints and appeals processes. Students on University of Salford programmes have access to the University's student charter, which although it does not explicitly refer to appeals, contains links to a wide range of University of Salford policies and procedures. Students were clear that information could also be found on the University of Salford's VLE.

2.95 The student submission reports satisfaction with the way that the complaints procedures are drawn to the attention of students, and that the procedures are readily accessible the College VLE. Few complaints are made and therefore, students had no experience to draw on to judge the timeliness with which complaints were dealt with, but they expressed confidence in the efficiency of the College and the awarding bodies in administering other aspects of their learning experience, such as registration and enrolment.

2.96 The College four-stage complaints procedure outlines clearly the process by which a complaint can be made. In the first instance students have an informal discussion with their tutor or academic adviser/personal tutor. If the issue cannot be resolved locally, it can be brought to the attention of the College's central administration and management, and ultimately a member of the Board of Governors responsible for liaison with the Student Council.

2.97 The College's internal students' complaints procedure document is an easy to follow single page word document which can be accessed from the College VLE. The document details and explains the complaints procedure and contains a blank form to be completed by the student who wishes to lodge a complaint. Students are taught how to navigate the VLE at the start of their programme of study and all students seen by the review team were clear on where to locate the information.

2.98 If a student cannot locate what they require on the relevant VLE they can approach their academic adviser (University of Liverpool) or their personal tutor (University of Salford), who will then take responsibility for directing them through the complaints/appeals process.

2.99 Students have access to guidance and support through their awarding bodies' support teams and students' unions.

2.100 The review team found no recorded complaints or academic appeals. When there were any complaints/appeals to report these would be received at the College Corporate Management Team meetings.

2.101 The review team found that the awarding bodies and College have fair, effective and timely procedures for handling students' complaints and academic appeals. The review team concludes that the Expectation is **met** and that the risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B10: Managing higher education provision with others

Findings

2.102 The College does not work with organisations to whom it has delegated responsibility for the delivery of or support for learning.

2.103 However, the review team found that there is one element of one module in the veterinary science programme that requires learners to engage in a 10-week work experience placement. This element was introduced to enable learners to gain the experience of working with livestock and particularly large animals, which is a mandatory requirement for entry to Year 1 of the University of Liverpool programme. This element therefore ensures the guaranteed progression of the learner to Year 1 of the University of Liverpool degree course.

2.104 The University of Liverpool facilitated an agreement with Reaseheath College, a land-based college of further education, to deliver this practical element of the Year Zero foundation course. As the College is not responsible for establishing and monitoring the partnership, the management of the relationship does not fall within the scope of this review. The College receives a remission of the course fee in order to remunerate Reaseheath for their services to the University of Liverpool.

2.105 The review team heard that learners are required to produce a logbook to demonstrate that they have attended the required period in the relevant work place before entry to Year 1 of the degree programme. This is signed off by the Reaseheath College tutor.

2.106 The College monitors the experience of learners while on work placement through informal discussions with learners when they return to the College. This feedback is captured and then fed into the Health and Veterinary Staff-Student Liaison Committee meetings.

2.107 The review team is assured that the College is meeting its obligations as far as can be expected under the Expectation set out in *Chapter B10: Managing higher education provision with others*. The review team concludes that the Expectation is **met** and that the 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

2.108 The College does not offer research degrees.

Quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.109 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings to the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook. All of the Expectations for this judgement area have been met and the level of risk is low.

2.110 The review team made one recommendation in this area: that the College systematically monitor and evaluate the scope and effectiveness of student engagement as partners in quality assurance and enhancement. This is because, although the College affords opportunities for students to engage as partners in quality assurance and enhancement, it does not evaluate the scope or the effectiveness of the engagements and is reactive rather than proactive in making changes based on current student preferences.

2.111 The review team did not find evidence that the College's processes and educational goals were explicitly benchmarked to the Quality Code. Nor did it find evidence that the concept of enhancement, understood as taking deliberate steps to improve the quality of learning opportunities, explicitly informed College processes.

2.112 The College's capacity to systematically enhance its higher education provision would be facilitated by referencing processes to the Quality Code and by making explicit reference to enhancement in the appropriate policies, report templates and committee remits. This is reflected in the recommendations made under Enhancement that the College develop the higher education quality framework to embed the Quality Code and other appropriate external reference points and formalise deliberative structures to further promote enhancement of student learning opportunities.

2.113 The review team concludes that the quality of learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

3 Judgement: Quality of the information produced about its provision

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 Responsibilities for information about the higher education provision at Carmel College are clearly divided between the two awarding bodies and the College. The College does not have an information policy, but designates responsibilities for checking and signing off information to College staff. The College publishes information about its vision and strategy for its higher education provision in both its Strategic Plan and Higher Education Strategy. It publishes a quality assurance policy that is not higher education specific, covering all of its provision.

3.2 Information is available to prospective students through Carmel College website with links to the relevant awarding body. This includes programme information and the application and admission processes. The College makes information available about its programmes and the standards required of students, through programme specifications, programme handbooks, and module handbooks.

3.3 The College publishes information about the mutual expectations of students and staff through its student charter and University handbooks, and provides students with records of their study. There is very clear information available in handbooks for externals and students about complaints, mitigation, plagiarism, attendance, resits, exam procedure, student support, and Board of Studies. Students are given the information at the University induction day when College links also receive key documentation and information is uploaded to the University VLE.

3.4 The review team tested the College's published information by reading it critically, and talking to users of that information about its usefulness, accessibility and reliability. The review team also explored the processes by which the College and its awarding bodies checked the accuracy and currency of information for which they have responsibility.

3.5 Higher education information on the College website is checked for accuracy and content by the College and Universities. The College marketing team liaise with department heads in the revision of the College website, with the Assistant Principal (Marketing) having responsibility for its sign-off. The review team heard that the College liaises with the marketing division of University of Liverpool in the production of a prospectus for the foundation year provision for which the University is responsible for publishing. Responsibility for course documentation lies with the Joint Board of Studies for the respective programmes. All public information for the University of Salford programme is produced by the University.

3.6 Students, with whom the team met, confirmed that they had sufficient information pre-enrolment to make an informed choice and that the admission processes were clear.

3.7 College teaching staff were able to articulate a baseline expectation for course and module information published on the College VLE, and the review team heard that this is audited annually. The team found that the availability of module information on the VLE was variable in nature and scope. Students confirmed that they were able to access the VLEs of

the Universities and that they could track their progression, access University libraries and submit assessments electronically. The review team heard that all materials are uploaded to the College's VLE at the start of the programme. Students agreed this enabled them to plan ahead and manage their time effectively.

3.8 The higher education student support officer coordinates the provision of adapted versions of information for visually-impaired students.

3.9 The review team concluded information published by Carmel College was fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy because the College is systematic in the checking of information it is responsible for publishing and in making information available to students in a timely fashion to support their learning and development. Based on the evidence provided the review team concludes that the Expectation is **met** and that the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Quality of the information produced about its provision: Summary of findings

3.10 In reaching its positive judgement, the review team matched the findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook. The Expectation for this judgement area was met and the associated level of risk was low. There were no recommendations. The review team therefore concludes that the quality of information produced about its higher education provisions **meets** UK expectations.

4 Judgement: 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 College's Strategic Plan sets out its expectations for its higher education provision. It makes several references to activities being targeted towards enhancing students' learning opportunities, however, the College does not have a distinct enhancement strategy. The review team was able to identify several areas of targeted activity, which would be considered as directly and strategically enhancing the student learning opportunities at the College. These included; the University of Liverpool peer-assessed moderation shared by the College teaching, learning and assessment advocates group; the academic advisers initiative; the Buddy Scheme; additional maths provision; practical sessions at Reaseheath and the University of Liverpool for Year Zero veterinary and medical students; taster days and lecture series; and re-allocation of the work resource area.

4.2 It was clear from the College's self-assessment reports and the minutes of Programme Management Boards/Joint Board of Studies that the teams delivering higher education take the opportunities presented by the quality assurance processes to reflect on evidence about the quality of learning opportunities and identify actions to develop, though not explicitly enhance, provision, and follow up on those actions where required.

4.3 During induction, all higher education students are assigned an academic adviser (University of Liverpool) or a personal tutor (University of Salford). Their primary roles are to deliver pastoral support and guidance to the learner throughout their course of study. This includes but is not limited to; delivering the detailed induction programme to new students; help identify students with additional needs; deliver weekly timetabled academic adviser sessions; monitor student attendance using management information attendance reports; conduct one-to-one progress interviews as outlined in the academic adviser handbook; and signpost students to relevant support services. Students are enthusiastically supportive of the benefits this programme provides in preparing them to attain their potential. These policies are directed by the awarding bodies but are maintained locally by the College.

4.4 Academic advisers and personal tutors have received training from the relevant awarding bodies, which are responsible for the overarching coordination of the initiatives.

4.5 In the case of the University of Liverpool academic adviser scheme, the awarding body borrowed aspects of the College's original personal tutor programme when it was designing the wider university academic adviser scheme. The College's scheme was succeeded by the University of Liverpool replacement. The College sought special concession from the University of Liverpool to modify the prescribed programme structure in order to ensure that it would remain fit for purpose in the College's learning environment. The University's mainstream programme delivered at the University requires far less contact time with students, and does not prescribe the same programme of support that the College offers. The College's programme of structured academic skills support directly enhances the students' learning opportunities by providing them with the tailored skills and guidance with which to approach their academic study and assessment. The review team considers the role of the academic adviser and individual feedback in developing student academic and transferable skills to be **good practice**.

4.6 The College's appointment of a higher education Head of Faculty Year Zero has directly enhanced the higher education provision by allowing coordination of higher

education developmental activities within the College while also providing a distinct higher education voice at senior management levels within the College. There are close links between the higher education Head of Faculty Year Zero and the Assistant Principal for Curriculum. This enables effective oversight of the higher education provision within the wider College provision.

4.7 The College has established a buddy system for its Year Zero learners. The system pairs current students with a student from the same course who has progressed to Year 1 of the degree programme at University of Liverpool. Students were highly enthusiastic about the benefit this provided to them in terms of support and reassurance about their course of study. Several expressed an interest in undertaking the role next year should they be asked.

4.8 The College has recently acted on student feedback in relation to resourcing and has reassigned the old language classrooms to become a dedicated higher education learning area. This required strategic planning as the rooms had to be removed from the general College timetable. The dedicated space has given higher education learners a more distinct identity within the College which has in turn enhanced their educational experience.

4.9 The College offer Year Zero learner taster days and a lecturer series as part of their commitment to supporting the progression of its learners onto Year 1 of the degree course.

4.10 The review team found that the College's current monitoring processes were unable to identify and assess proactive and strategic enhancement opportunities. There were multiple examples of reactive changes to the provision which were driven by student demand. The concern was that while these changes are highly positive examples of direct responses to student feedback, there was no mechanism in place to assess the impact of such changes, risking a yo-yoing effect between meeting student preferences without considering the impact to the provision. The student submission reinforces the view of reactive rather than planned enhancements and also contains an example of a reactive change which was then reversed by the following cohort.

4.11 The College's self-assessment report monitoring framework closely mirrors the Ofsted common inspection framework (CIF), which focuses on the identification of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. While the CIF framework is able to identify and address certain aspects of the higher education provision's performance, it does not provide scope for the consideration of enhancement against the Quality Code's Expectations. The review team **recommends** that the College develop the higher education quality framework to embed the Quality Code and other appropriate external reference points.

4.12 The College could not demonstrate to the review team that its self-assessment report procedure, in its current format, is able to identify, monitor, evaluate, and develop activities which are targeted towards the enhancement of students' learning opportunities across the College's higher education provision. The review team found that the College demonstrated little understanding of the Expectation and felt that with targeted adjustments, the existing self-assessment process would be able to take account of the higher education provision to establish a formal point for the discussion and monitoring of deliberate enhancement initiatives. The review team **recommends** that the College formalise deliberative structures to further promote enhancement of student learning opportunities.

4.13 The review team concludes that the Expectation is **met**. However, the lack of a framework that makes use of appropriate higher education external reference points limits the College's ability to enhance its higher education provision and therefore the risk is **moderate**.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

Enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.14 The review team concluded that the College demonstrates that it does take deliberate steps at provider level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities. The Expectation for this judgement area is met and the associated level of risk is moderate. The review team identified one feature of good practice in this area: the role of the academic adviser and individual feedback in developing student academic and transferable skills.

4.15 The review team also identified examples of deliberate steps including appointing a higher education Head of Faculty Year Zero and the creation of a higher education resource area.

4.16 However, contributing to the moderate risk associated with the Expectation, the review team found that the College Quality Framework is explicitly focused on its further education provision and does not embrace the Quality Code or other appropriate external references points that are embedded in all of the higher education programmes for managing standards and quality of learning, information and enhancement. Moreover, the College higher education self-assessment reporting process makes no reference to the Quality Code or other appropriate external reference points that are fundamental to enhancing and further developing the integrity of the higher education provision.

4.17 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook. The review team concludes that the enhancement of learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

Findings

5.1 The College considers student involvement in quality assurance and enhancement effective. However, it also acknowledges that improvements could be made. Student representatives, who sit on the Staff-Student Liaison Committees and attend Board of Studies and Programme Management Team Meetings, are elected for each class. All students complete module evaluations immediately after Semester 1 and Semester 2 examinations, and every student is given the opportunity to contribute electronically to the student voice. In addition, higher education student representatives sit on cross-College committees including the Student Council, Health and Safety, Equality and Diversity, and the Chaplaincy Committee, where students are afforded the opportunity to air their views.

5.2 The College identifies a number of changes to the provision and support of learning opportunities which have arisen from partnership activity with students. These include the taster days for the University of Liverpool's Health and Veterinary programmes, innovations in formative assessment for learning, and a visiting lecture series. The student submission provides well documented case studies which focus on other developments arising out of partnership with students, which include alterations to the assessment of learning and more accessible timetabling.

5.3 However, missing from this pattern of activity is the articulation of shared goals for the enhancement of learning opportunities benchmarked against the sector (including the educational work of the NUS) and the scholarship of learning and teaching in higher education. The team did not find evidence of deliberate steps to work with students proactively on issues which have identified worthwhile developmental projects, as opposed to reactively, on issues which have been identified as problems or potential improvements.

5.4 The College has extended the ways in which it includes students in its quality assurance processes. It has put into operation a range of additional instruments for capturing student evaluations of its provision beyond quantitative module evaluations. These include an online survey on the College VLE which generates qualitative data and additional coverage of aspects of student support and student engagement and an exit interview designed to identify factors in student non-progression to a higher education institution. The College follows the remits and agendas for its Staff-Student Liaison Committee (University Liverpool) and Staff-Student Committee (University of Salford) as set out by the awarding bodies. Staff are very supportive of students contributing to quality assurance processes. The College ethos foregrounds taking students and their perceptions of their learning very seriously, treating them with respect, and recognising and acting on their evaluations and ideas. The College makes the outcomes of discussions and actions known to all students, and does so formally through the notice board adjacent to the higher education study areas.

5.5 Student engagement is widespread and supported and managing the needs of students is a clear focus of the College's strategies, policies and actions. However, the review team did not find evidence that the College evaluated the student contribution to quality assurance processes and the enhancement agenda. The student submission provides evidence of the need for a more strategic approach, and for the use of other reference points in negotiating action plans arising from student evaluations, where it reports on a pattern of changes to module design in the light of the preference of cohorts but with no apparent reference to external and professional benchmarks: 'The current model of professional studies delivery was created following a review from previous cohorts that expressed a wish for a higher level of structure in the module. The new review will seek to counter this by asking for less structure in accordance with student wishes.'

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 27-29 of the [Higher Education Review handbook](#)

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

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

Academic standards

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

Award

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

Blended learning

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

Credit(s)

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

Degree-awarding body

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

Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

Dual award or double award

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

e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning

Enhancement

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

Expectations

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

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

See also **distance learning**.

Framework

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

Framework for higher education qualifications

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

Good practice

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

Learning opportunities

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

Learning outcomes

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

Multiple awards

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

Operational definition

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

Programme (of study)

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

Programme specifications

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

Public information

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

Quality Code

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

Reference points

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

Subject benchmark statement

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

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)

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

Threshold academic standard

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

Virtual learning environment (VLE)

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

Widening participation

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

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