Higher Education Review (Embedded Colleges) of Bellerbys Educational Services Ltd (Study Group UK)

The University of Lincoln International Study Centre

May 2016

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Embedded Colleges) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at The University of Lincoln International Study Centre. The review took place from 23 to 24 May 2016 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Donald Pennington
- Professor Gaynor Taylor.

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by The University of Lincoln International Study Centre 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 (Embedded Colleges) the QAA review team:

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

In Higher Education Review (Embedded Colleges) there is also a check on Study Group's financial sustainability, management and governance (FSMG). This check has the aim of giving students reasonable confidence that they should not be at risk of being unable to complete their course as a result of financial failure of their education provider.

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 4.

In reviewing The University of Lincoln International Study Centre 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 2015-16 are Digital Literacies 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 (Embedded Colleges).[4] For an explanation of terms see the glossary at the end of this report.

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[1] The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at:
www.qaa.ac.uk/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 (Alternative Providers):
www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Educational-Oversight-.aspx

Key findings

QAA's judgements about The University of Lincoln International Study Centre

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at The University of Lincoln International Study Centre (LINCISC).

- The maintenance of the academic standards of the awards offered on behalf of Study Group and of LINCISC's degree-awarding body **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following feature of **good practice** at The University of Lincoln International Study Centre.

- The holistic and integrated approach to student support that enables learners to develop their academic, personal and professional potential (Expectation B4).

Enhancement of student learning opportunities

The University of Lincoln International Study Centre (LINCISC) has taken deliberate steps to enhance the quality of its provision. In particular, the review team noted the approach to the use of the virtual learning environment (VLE), the closer links with partner university staff and the use of the red/amber/green (RAG) status to support student progression. Enhancements arise from a variety of feedback processes and actions to implement them are added to the Centre Action Plan. This is reviewed regularly at both Centre and Study Group level.

Theme: Student Employability

LINCISC is in the process of implementing Study Group's employability development theme that embeds employment-relevant skills into programmes of study. LINCISC is also working to implement CareerAhead by 2017. This is a strategic initiative led by Study Group that aims to enhance employability by supporting each student to have a career direction of travel, an understanding of how graduate recruiters assess applicants for jobs, develop a CV and personal statement, and a personal career plan. LINCISC is reviewing its programmes and modules to identify where enhancements need to be made in order to meet the requirements of the scheme. The Centre presently offers employability training by way of English sessions, study skills, discussions about employment in one-to one tutorials and the provision of a skills-based module in the International Year One Engineering programme.

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

About The University of Lincoln International Study Centre

LINCISC was opened in 2010 and is based on the main University of Lincoln campus. The focus of LINCISC has been International Year 1 along with small numbers of pre-master's programme students. Foundation students joined the ISC in January 2015 and the extension of the Foundation offer during 2015-16 has increased the range of progression routes. Student numbers have now stabilised to approximately 300 and the Centre employs 29

part-time academic staff. All programmes are approved Study Group provision endorsed by the University of Lincoln.

Recent changes have included the introduction of the International Foundation Year. For the academic year 2015-16, there has been a reduction in International Year 1 numbers but with a concurrent increase in Foundation numbers. The effect has been a reduction in the overall number of Business and Management students but an increase in the number of Engineering students across the International Year 1 and Foundation pathways.

Progression requirements for International Year 1 have been amended to include a requirement for students to achieve an average of 60 per cent in order to progress to Year 2, with students achieving the 40 per cent pass grade in each module progressing to Year 1. This change has been implemented with a view to increasing the number of students achieving higher level degree outcomes.

Centre priorities are outlined in the Centre Action Plan, addressing the key challenges currently being faced. There has been a focus during 2015 on the development of the International Foundation Year to broaden the range of options for students applying to Lincoln University and to extend the diversity of the intake. As part of the new contract negotiations, it has been agreed to admit under-18 students to the Foundation programme and catering for the needs of these students will be a priority from the academic year 2016-17. All staff currently receive basic safeguarding training, but a number of staff will also now undertake enhanced training. The Centre has also identified e-learning as a priority and there has been an increased focus on staff baseline employment of the virtual learning environment (VLE).

LINCISC was subject to a QAA Embedded College Review for Educational Oversight monitoring visit in July 2015. The Centre Action Plan has been used successfully to address actions needed and LINCISC continues to make good progress in monitoring, reviewing and enhancing its higher education provision.

Explanation of the findings about The University of Lincoln International Study Centre

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

1.1   Study Group is not a degree-awarding body, and does not offer credit; however, its programmes are benchmarked, during initial development and at approval and re-approval (or validation and revalidation according to the specific partnership academic arrangement) against the FHEQ, for programmes set at Levels 4-6, and against the Regulated Qualifications Framework for preparatory programmes set at Level 3. It uses The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages for English programmes.

1.2   Programmes at LINCISC are approved by Study Group using its own processes. There are three types of programme: International Foundation Year (IFY), which is pre-university and approved at level 3; International Year 1 (IY1), which offers four streams, allows direct entry to the second year of a range of appropriate courses and is approved at Level 4; and a pre-master's programme, which is currently suspended and will not be considered further in this report.

1.3   Since Study Group's approval process includes reference to the FHEQ for programmes set at Levels 4-6, and against the Regulated Qualifications Framework for preparatory programmes set at Level 3, the Expectation can be met.

1.4   The review team considered approval and programme documentation.

1.5   The most recent approval was that of IFY in 2013-14 with amendments to IY1 being considered at the same time. This took place prior to enhancements by Study Group to its approval system. However, the process used included two external panel members from higher education institutions whose comments, submitted in writing, included reference to Level 4 benchmarks.

1.6   IY1 programme documentation maps learning outcomes against benchmarks for Business, Computer Science, Engineering and Media Studies at the appropriate level. Learning outcome descriptors are also at the appropriate level. IFY programme documentation references A and AS Level skills.

1.7   Programme and approval documentation demonstrates that the requirements of the FHEQ are met.

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

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.9   Programmes offered at LINCISC are approved by Study Group and endorsed by the University. Study Group and the Centre maintain a definitive record of each programme specification and module specification. The programme specifications detail the aims of the programme, programme structure and module learning outcomes.

1.10   The definitive record of each programme and their constituent modules would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.11   The review team tested this Expectation by scrutiny of documentation, including programme and module specifications, and through meetings with senior staff from the University, Study Group and the Centre.

1.12   Study Group and Centre maintain full, detailed and up-to-date records of programme specifications. The Academic Management Board of LINCISC has, as part of its terms of reference, responsibility for initial approval of new programmes and recommendations of approval to the Steering Group for significant changes to programmes. Minutes of these meetings demonstrate that this is operating effectively. Study Group is in the process of introducing a new definitive document called a Centre Specification. The Centre Specification will record additional information about LINCISC, including programme entry requirements, external examiners and progression awards and entry requirements at the University of Lincoln.

1.13   Changes and modifications to programme specifications take place once the appropriate subject area has considered and made proposals for programme and module changes. The Academic Management Board considers proposals for new programmes and then makes recommendations for implementation to the Steering Group. Programmes are usually approved for a five-year period and then subject to periodic review and re-approval. Periodic review of a programme takes place according to the International Study Centre Approval Process Handbook. The Head of Centre keeps a record of approval and re-approval dates for programmes. The review team found that these processes are operating effectively.

1.14   Study Group's Programme Approval and Validation Committee, a subcommittee of the AQAEC, has oversight of programme approval and re-approval, and has the responsibility of approving amendments to programmes of study.

1.15   The review team concludes that there is effective maintenance of a definitive record of each programme at the Centre, through the approval arrangements with Study Group and through endorsement by the University. Therefore, Expectation A2.2 is met and the associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.16   Programmes are approved by Study Group using a standard process, which includes external input. The current Study Group programme approval, re-approval and modification processes were approved by AQAEC in September 2015. The approval and re-approval processes are designed to ensure that programmes are at the correct academic standard and that the learning opportunities for students are appropriate.

1.17   These processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.18   The team considered Study Group's approval process and the most recent approval documentation and met with staff from Study Group, Centre and University.

1.19   The review team noted that Study Group's process has been updated since the courses were approved, but that the documentation (which referred to a single event approving the IFY programme and re-approving the IY1 programme) confirmed the involvement of two external panel members from higher education institutions and implicitly indicated consideration of standards.

1.20   Programme specifications provide learning outcomes phrased to reflect the level of the programme and a mapping between learning outcomes and modules. For the IFY, the Programme Document notes that 'The subject modules are based on, and at the same level as Ofqual AS/A2 subject standards and referenced to other level 3 qualifications in the UK'. Appendix 5 of the document provides a detailed mapping of programme learning outcomes to the appropriate subject specific level 3 criteria. For the IY1, the programme document states that subject modules are based on, and at the same level as, NQF Level 4 subject standards and referenced to other Level 4 qualifications in the UK. Appendix 2 of the document provides a detailed mapping between the relevant Level 4 Subject Benchmark Statements and the programme learning outcomes.

1.21   The review team concludes the processes in place for the approval of programmes ensure academic standards are set appropriately and the Expectation is therefore met with a low level of risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.22   Study Group and the Centre are not degree-awarding bodies nor do they offer credit or qualifications. Nevertheless, programmes are benchmarked against the FHEQ, as appropriate to their stated level. The assessment process operated by the Centre, including the use of internal moderation, oversight by the University, and the use of external examiners ensures academic standards through achievement of learning outcomes.

1.23   The assessment process and associated procedures ensure that threshold academic standards are met and would enable Expectation A3.2 to be met.

1.24   The review team examined relevant documentary evidence, such as internal moderation documents and external examiner reports, and held meetings with senior staff and teaching staff responsible for the assessment of academic standards.

1.25   The FHEQ is used effectively for programmes set at Levels 4 and 6, and the Regulated Education Qualifications for programmes set at Level 3. For example, the International Foundation Year programme specification is explicitly benchmarked against the Regulated Education Qualifications Level 3 criteria.

1.26   The assessment process ensures that the programme and module learning outcomes have been met at threshold standard when the student is deemed to have passed the assessments associated with the module and passed all modules that make up the programme. Formal assessments enable students to demonstrate that they have attained the necessary level. Tasks are mapped to learning outcomes and this provides transparency for students in terms of understanding what has to be achieved in order to pass the module and the programme overall. Module and Programme Assessment Boards confirm marks and achievement of students and minutes of Assessment Boards demonstrate these processes are operating effectively and according to the terms of reference.

1.27   Overall, there are effective and appropriate assessment processes in place to ensure that module and programme learning outcome are met and academic standards are satisfied. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation A3.2 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.28   An annual monitoring report (AMR) is produced for all programmes. Programmes are subject to a re-approval process at least once every five years. Additionally, Study Group has introduced Centre Review which includes oversight of academic standards. Actions arising from any of these processes are included in the Centre Action Plan.

1.29   These processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.30   The review team examined examples of annual monitoring, re-approval, external examiners' reports and the Centre Review Report.

1.31   External examiners are asked explicitly to comment on standards. Their comments feed into the AMR which includes reflective analysis and indications of actions to be taken.

1.32   The re-approval process follows the same format as the approval process, including consideration of standards.

1.33   The Centre Review report covers a range of cross-programme issues, including any relating to standards. It is a newly introduced procedure to allow consideration of the Centre as a whole and will be repeated as indicated by a risk-based assessment.

1.34   Actions arising from these processes have been included in the Centre Action Plan.

1.35   The review team concludes that these processes allow the Expectation to be met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.36   Programmes are benchmarked against the FHEQ or the Regulated Education Qualifications. The former is used for programmes set at Levels 4 to 6, and the latter for programmes set at Level 3. External and independent academic expertise is used at a number of key points in the academic cycle to ensure that both the setting and maintaining of academic standards are appropriate to UK threshold standards. External examiners are nominated by the Centre and formally appointed by the University.

1.37   The use of external and independent expertise, as identified above, would enable Expectation A3.4 to be met.

1.38   The review team tested the operation of these processes by examining relevant documentary evidence, including external examiner reports and programme approval notes, and held meetings with senior and teaching staff.

1.39   The use of independent external expertise takes place at programme approval and programme re-approval events. For example, the LINCISC held a re-approval event for the IY1 and International Foundation Year programme and their associated modules. Two independent experts were members of the panel, which was chaired by the Regional Director. This is in line with Study Group's requirements for its International Study Centres.

1.40   Each programme at LINCISC has an external examiner, appointed by the University, whose role is to oversee academic standards and ensure that threshold academic standards are set at the right level and achieved where students pass modules and their programme of study. External examiner reports confirm that appropriate standards are both set and maintained.

1.41   Overall, there is clear, effective and extensive use of independent external expertise at key stages of setting, meeting and maintaining UK threshold academic standards. The review team concludes that Expectation A3.4 is met, and the associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of the provider: Summary of findings

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

1.43   LINCISC effectively follows the requirements of the University and Study Group to maintain academic standards. These processes are supported by LINCISC's own internal procedures and guidance.

1.44   All seven of the Expectations in this area are met and the level of associated risk is low. The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered **meets** UK expectations.

2   Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1   Programmes are developed and designed in conjunction with both Study Group and the University to prepare students for entry onto a range of university courses as noted in A1 above. Initial approval for development must be granted by Study Group's AQAEG Committee (a lead role in such approval is now taken by the new Programme Approval and Validation Subcommittee, reporting to AQAEG). Programme design is discussed with the University, in particular with the link tutors. The proposed programmes are subjected to Study Group's approval process which uses a panel that includes two external members from other higher education providers. Once recommendations from the panel have been considered and any conditions met, the programmes are presented to the Board of Studies and the Steering Group for endorsement by the partner university.

2.2   These processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.3   The review team considered documentation relating to the approval of the IFY programme and met senior and academic staff including link tutors

2.4   The development process includes close liaison with link tutors and other departmental representatives from the University to ensure modules will allow students to successfully transition to the relevant University programmes. Senior staff noted that programme benchmarks are considered during the design process, and when benchmarks are updated. Link tutors identify changes in the university programmes to which students progress and an example of this was given in the redesign of modules in computing.

2.5   LINCISC's most recent approval process was conducted in 2014 and was a joint event approving IFY and re-approving IY1. The panel received comments in writing from two external members from other higher education institutions. Following approval by the panel the course was discussed with the University at the Academic Management Board, the programme was not fully endorsed at this point as issues relating to entry requirements were raised. These were discussed over a period with final endorsement occurring at a later Academic Management Board followed by a report to the Steering Group.

2.6   The review team notes that Study Group has further enhanced the programme approval system since the last approvals.

2.7   The processes are used to allow the effective design and approval of programmes. The Expectation is met with low risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.8   Study Group has responsibility for the recruitment and admission of students. All students recruited and admitted to programmes offered at the Centre are overseas students requiring a UK Visas and Immigration Tier 4 licence to study. The admission process is centrally managed by Study Group and is conducted according the recently implemented Admissions Policy. Borderline cases are referred to the Centre by Study Group for decision over whether or not to offer a place to a prospective student. The Centre reviews the admissions requirements with Study Group and the University. Due process at both the University and Study Group is followed before changes are made. The website provides information to prospective students concerning programmes available and progression details.

2.9   The admissions systems and processes, including policies and procedures, would enable Expectation B2 to be met.

2.10   To test this the review team scrutinised relevant admissions policy and procedure documents, website information for prospective students and met a range of senior and professional support staff and current students.

2.11   Study Group recently restructured the admissions process by separating the offer-issuing phase, application to offer, and the Confirmation of Acceptance of Studies phase required by UK Visas and Immigration. The former is now entirely managed at a hub in Singapore and the latter in the UK.

2.12   Exceptional or borderline cases are referred by Study Group to Centre for recommendation and decision over whether or not to offer the prospective student a place. The Head of Centre liaises with the appropriate Head of Subject and communicates a decision back to a Study Group dedicated link person. This is fully and clearly explained in the Centre Handbook.

2.13   Changes to entry requirements for programmes offered are discussed within the Centre between the Head of Centre and Head of Subject. These are then discussed with the University. The Steering Committee must agree any changes before they are discussed and agreed with Study Group. For example, the introduction of the IFY resulted in changes to the admissions criteria for the IY1 programme, which were then agreed by the Steering Committee.

2.14   Upon arrival at LINCISC, all students are given an induction which takes place according to the schedule detailed in the Centre Handbook. The Head of Centre is responsible for organising the induction, which includes information from the University based on their own induction programme for new students. Students are provided a copy of the detailed Student Handbook and staff are aware of their responsibilities, which are stated in the Staff Handbook. Students report satisfaction with the induction provided and there is a special induction event provided by the Centre for late arrivals.

2.15   Prospective students are able to make an appeal against a decision concerning their application to study at an International Study Centre through the Admissions Appeals and Complaints Policy. This policy also provides guidance on how a student can make a complaint about some aspect of the admissions process conducted by Study Group, in either Singapore or the UK. The Admissions Appeals and Complaints Policy clearly sets out grounds and eligibility for appeal. Study Group's Admissions Manager has overall responsibility for ensuring that appeals and complaints are dealt with according to Study Group's policy and stated timescales.

2.16   Overall, the review team confirms that there is an effective admissions policy operated by Study Group and that the Centre works closely with both the University and Study Group for admission of students to its programmes. The review team therefore concludes that Expectation B2 is met and the associated 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

2.17   LINCISC has a systematic approach to the review of learning and teaching which involves Study Group and the Centre in assessing and reviewing practice. Modules are reviewed on a termly basis following delivery and issues identified by staff and students are discussed at the QAEG. At the end of the academic year, there is a broader review of module delivery.

2.18   An appraisal system focusing on identifying staff development needs is in place. This is informed by both peer observation identifying development needs and observations conducted by managers.

2.19   The processes described would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.20   The review team considered pro forma for module review, student module feedback and appraisal together with module overview forms, an AMR, the Centre Action Plan, and the minutes of relevant committees. The team also met the Head of Centre and academic staff.

2.21   Examples of the module review pro formas and the Student Module Feedback form show that both these processes ask for information related to the quality and enhancement of teaching and learning. Module overview forms bring together information about several modules within a programme and demonstrated reflection on teaching and learning. Reviews are also discussed at QAEG and feed into the AMR. Actions resulting from these processes are added to the Centre Action Plan, for example the need to streamline assessment in some areas had been noted and actioned.

2.22   All staff are subject to teaching observation, based on a standard pro forma which informs annual appraisal. New staff are always observed by a member of the management team. Peer appraisal is used in the case of more established staff, and this may cross subject boundaries or involve peer appraisal between English and academic subject specialists. A log is kept of observations and shows the majority to either have taken place or be scheduled. The process identifies staff development needs, both individual and across a group, for example e-learning emerged as a theme in the current year and this led to a specific staff development event. Staff informed the review team that the appraisal process has been formalised in the last year and that they now found it a useful process and were able to provide examples of where it had helped them improve their teaching practice.

2.23   The processes in place to systematically review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices means the expectation is met and the associated 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

2.24   Availability and access to resources are agreed with the partner university and reviewed by the Centre Review process.

2.25   Progression rates have always been seen as a key performance indicator for ISCs. Until recently, centres considered these individually and LINCISC states that it provides significant student support in this area. There is now a central Progression Steering Group in place to monitor and report on student retention and achievement across the network of ISCs. A review of the pilot tracking system during summer 2015 culminated in a framework being established across the network, with standard definitions of student achievement through a red/amber/green (RAG) status and a systematic and common process for tracking student achievement and retention is agreed.

2.26   These processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.27   The review team considered the contract with the University, QAEG minutes, the standard form used for progression planning, the staff handbook, and met a range of students and staff.

2.28   The contract with the University ensures that LINCISC students have access to services and facilities on the same basis as University of Lincoln students. These include the library, student union areas, opportunities to join sport and cultural clubs and societies, IT and VLE facilities together with personal support such as counselling, disability/specialist learning support, the careers service and chaplaincy and faith support.

2.29   The review team noted that LINCISC has made considerable effort to make resources for practical classes available where these were essential to programme delivery; for example using the laboratories of a local further education college for engineering students. The team also learned of strong links into the receiving departments of the partner university with business students being taught part of the time in the Business School to give an enhanced pre-transition experience and media students accessing a workshop programme in the School of Media.

2.30   The Centre provides support for student progression by identifying individual student needs when rating students on a regular basis. Diagnostic testing in the first term identifies specific needs in mathematics and English. This is followed by a termly consideration of the status of students using a RAG notation to identify any individual in danger of failing to meet the requirements for progression. Criteria include attendance as well as performance in assessment. A standard form is used for this. Progression is reviewed at QAEG meetings and individual actions identified including not only one-to-one support from tutors, but also specific English needs.

2.31   The AMR gives full details of student completions and progression to the University. Overall, these seem satisfactory, but it was noted that where there had been a dip in the numbers qualifying to progress in a particular subject area the Centre had investigated the reasons for this and put in place remedial actions.

2.32   Students were aware of the criteria to progress to their chosen courses. The review team noted that there had been an increase in the grade required to progress from IY1 to

year 2 of the partner university course. Some students had only become aware of this after arrival, but student representatives informed the review team that acceptance letters had been explicit about the grades required. Students were also aware of the possibilities for resits should they fail to meet progression grades and the possibility that if they passed the course without reaching the progression grade they could move to the first year of the relevant programme.

2.33   There is a tutorial programme which includes time for tutors to work with students on their individual needs. The Centre tries to ensure that a student has the same personal tutor all year and that this tutor is also teaching the student and hence is aware of the student's current position. Information relating to student performance and their RAG rating is centrally held on the staff shared drive to ensure that tutors have access to the necessary information. The process has been supported by the introduction of the Progresso assessment module during the autumn term 2015 and additional reporting information is also now available via Progresso. Students also noted a high level of personal support from administrative officers within the Centre. The holistic and integrated approach to student support which enables learners to develop their academic, personal and professional potential is **good practice**

2.34   Students have access to a VLE shared with the University. The Centre has targeted the use of the VLE by its staff as an area for enhancement with a three-stage approach beginning with development activity to ensure that all academic staff have the basic knowledge required to use the system. Students found the system useful, but would like to see it used in a wider variety of ways.

2.35   The processes and systems in place meet the Expectation with low risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B5: Student Engagement*

Findings

2.36   Students as a body are represented on the Staff Student Committee and, since 2015, a representative from the Staff Student Committee has also been a member of the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Group (QAEG) to ensure the student voice is represented.

2.37   Module feedback is collected at the end of each term, reviewed at the Teaching Review and Content Development Subcommittee and discussed at QAEG meetings. Feedback from student responses is also discussed at the Staff Student Committee and actions identified in addition to issues raised by students on behalf of tutorial groups.

2.38   These processes would allow this Expectation to be met.

2.39   The review team examined minutes of the Staff Student Committee, and QAEG, the Student Handbook and the Centre Handbook, as well as meeting with a number of students and student representatives from different programmes.

2.40   Students had been asked to take on the role of representatives for their programmes on the Staff Student Committee. There had been few volunteers and hence no need for elections. Representatives are provided with a job description, which is included in the Student Handbook, and offered a training session to prepare for the role. One student had agreed to become Lead Student Representative for the Higher Education Review (Embedded Colleges) and to be a student member of QAEG. He noted that all papers were provided and that, since he knew the staff members of the committee, he did not find the experience stressful.

2.41   Minutes of the Staff Student Committee show that a range of issues have been raised and note the response to these. The meetings have also been used to draw student representatives' notice to the annual monitoring process and to external examiners' reports.

2.42   To encourage student understanding of the full feedback loop in addition to offering a response to issues raised at the Staff Student Committee a small group of students has been invited to offer further feedback on issues raised in student surveys to be included on the agenda for future Staff Student Committee meetings.

2.43   The use of surveys and the student representative system meet the Expectation with a low level of risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.44   LINCISC provides a full set of assessment regulations in its key handbooks, which includes the Centre Handbook, Student Handbook, and the Staff Handbook. The assessment regulations cover areas concerned with marking and grading, examination and progression boards, extenuating circumstances and academic offences. Students are introduced to the Centre's assessment regulations at induction and informed about academic malpractice. Study Group approval process and the endorsement of Centre programmes by the University involves scrutiny of programmes, modules and assessments by representatives of both bodies as well as independent external experts. In addition, external examiners comment on proposed assessments before they are given to students. The Centre does not operate a recognition of prior learning policy or procedure, in line with the general guidance of Study Group.

2.45   The policies, procedures and systems used across the assessment process would enable Expectation B6 to be met.

2.46   The review team scrutinised a range of policy and regulatory documents concerned with the assessment process, tested their effectiveness and operation, and held meetings with senior staff, including representatives from the University, as well as staff responsible for assessment and students.

2.47   Detailed and useful information concerning the assessment process and assessments themselves is provided in the Centre's key handbooks, which include the Centre Handbook, Student Handbook, and the Staff Handbook. Students reported satisfaction with the assessment process generally, are given clear guidance on assessments by their teachers in class and report that coursework is generally returned within the 10-day target set by the Centre.

2.48   Study Group is developing an assessment framework, which will build upon existing expectations for assessment that it requires of its International Study Centres. These include assessments to be written by module tutors and reviewed by external examiners, assessments linked to learning outcomes and assessments published in module handbooks, which are to be given to students at the start of the module. LINCISC currently meets most of these Study Group-set expectations and is prepared to respond and meet the new framework when it is formally adopted.

2.49   The involvement of external examiners at both the setting and marking stages helps ensure that assessments are both reliable and valid.

2.50   Modules are reviewed towards the end of the academic year. Assessment, academic offences and comments by external examiners are taken into account and inform the next offering of modules.

2.51   Module assessment is designed to enable students to demonstrate that they have attained the learning outcomes for the module and each assessment has a set of

assessment criteria describing what the student has to do to demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes. Assessed work is second marked and moderated within the Centre according to the procedure set out in its Assessment Regulations. Sample size for internal Centre moderation and for inspection by the external examiner is determined by clear guidance in the Assessment Regulations. The Assessment Regulations provide clear guidance to deal with differences between the first and second marker, with the Chair of the Examination Board responsible for making a final decision.

2.52   Module and Programme Assessment Boards have clear terms of reference and membership. These are chaired by the Head of Centre or nominee, and for quoracy require the attendance of the University of Lincoln link tutor for Module Assessment Boards and the University link tutor and external examiner for Programme Assessment Boards. Programme Assessment Boards consider cases of extenuating circumstances, academic offences and confirm progression to University of Lincoln programmes where students have met progression grade requirements. These boards operate effectively in accordance with the Centre's regulations and terms of reference.

2.53   Students submit applications for extenuating circumstances, providing independent supporting evidence, to the Head of Subject, which are then considered by an Extenuating Circumstances Panel. Outcomes of deliberations and recommendation of Extenuating Circumstances Panels are communicated to the appropriate Module Assessment Board. Cases of suspected academic offences are considered by the Academic Offences Committee, which meets before the Module Assessment Board. Clear guidelines for the operation of these committees are given in the Centre Handbook, Staff Handbook and Student Handbook.

2.54   Study Group gains oversight of the assessment process and academic standards for LINCISC through the AMR, which is considered at both regional level at the RQAEG and Study Group's AQAEC

2.55   Overall, the Centre effectively operates equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation B6 is met, and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External Examining*

Findings

2.56   Study Group requires that all programmes at its International Study Centres have oversight from external examiners. Study Group regards this as an important way in which it benchmarks its provision against the appropriate level in the FHEQ or REQ and for identifying improvements and areas for enhancement. LINCISC has its programmes approved by Study Group. External examiners are nominated by the Head of Centre to the University of Lincoln External Examiner Committee, of which the Head of Centre is a member, and are appointed by the University. External examiners attend Programme Assessment Boards. External examiner reports are discussed at Academic Management Board.

2.57   The design of the processes in place allows Expectation B7 to be met.

2.58   The review team scrutinised relevant documentary evidence, including the University's policies and regulations, and external examiner reports. The review team also met academic and senior staff from both the Centre and the University.

2.59   External examiners attend Programme Assessment Boards and their attendance is a quoracy requirement. External examiners for approved International Study Centre programmes are also approved by Study Group through its Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee.

2.60   External examiners submit reports using the University of Lincoln template and the University's Head of Quality reviews the reports. LINCISC includes issues raised by external examiners in the AMR, which is discussed at the first Academic Management Board of each academic year. The appropriate Centre subject team discusses issues raised by external examiners and actions identified, which are then incorporated into the Centre Action Plan. The Head of Centre makes a formal response to external examiners on any issues raised in their reports. The Centre makes external examiner reports available on its VLE and students showed awareness of their location. Reports are discussed at meetings of the Staff Student Committee.

2.61   Study Group gains oversight of external examiner reports for each International Study Centre through the AMR, which is considered at both regional level at the RQAEG and Study Group's AQAEC.

2.62   The Centre, working in close liaison with the University and Study Group, makes effective and consistent use of external examiners to maintain academic standards and enhance the quality of the student learning experience. The review team therefore concludes that Expectation B7 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.63   The annual monitoring of programmes at LINCISC is conducted via the presentation of the AMR to the Academic Management Board. Issues raised become items for the Centre Action Plan. A further provider review of the AMR is conducted through presentation to the RQAEG and reported to the AQAEC.

2.64   The approach to Periodic Review, termed re-approval, is briefly outlined in section A3.1.

2.65   In addition to annual monitoring of programmes there is a Study Group-led Centre Review looking at the Centre as a whole.

2.66   These processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.67   The review team examined a range of documentation relating to annual monitoring, re-approval, Centre Review as well as the Centre Handbook, and held meetings with senior and academic staff.

2.68   A range of information including student feedback, module reviews and external examiners' reports feed into the AMR. The report is peer reviewed by another Head of Centre, allowing an opportunity for the sharing of issues and good practice between centres, and presented to the Academic Management Board, which now has all link tutors as members, and RQAEG. Issues arising form part of the Centre Action Plan.

2.69   Programmes are required to undergo a process of re-approval after a maximum of five years. The re-approval process is the same as approval, involving external panel members. An example for IY1 showed this to be rigorous and to take account of changes to Subject Benchmark Statements and to programmes at the University that are progression routes.

2.70   Centre Review is a process introduced by Study Group that produces an overview of each centre's operations. In the initial round all centres were reviewed, further reviews will be scheduled according to a risk-based assessment. The review includes consideration of academic standards. LINCISC received its Centre Review in 2015, a number of recommendations were made relating to the quality of the student experience such as further enhancement of the induction process and ensuring that students understood what had happened to views they had shared in their feedback to the Centre.

2.71   Actions from both the annual monitoring process and Centre Review are placed on the Centre Action Plan, which is regularly reviewed by QAEG and RQAEG with reports to AQAEC. The processes in place offer regular and systematic opportunities for monitoring and review of programmes. The Expectation is therefore met with low risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.72   Study Group's policy and procedure for complaints and appeals are given in the Student Handbook and the Centre Handbook. While Study Group takes overall responsibility for complaints and appeals, and monitors across its International Study Centres, it is the responsibility of the Head of the Centre to ensure that complaints and appeals are dealt with according to stated procedure and timescales. Students are informed of how to make a complaint concerning a service offered by the University of Lincoln.

2.73   The policies and procedures would enable Expectation B9 to be met.

2.74   The review team examined the complaints and appeals policies and procedure as used by the Centre as well as holding meetings with staff and students.

2.75   The Centre makes every effort to resolve complaints and appeals informally and this has resulted in resolutions without students invoking formal procedures.

2.76   The policy and procedure for formal complaints are that they are made to the Head of Centre, who would appoint someone to investigate a complaint and indicate the timescales for reporting to the complainant. If the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome of the investigation, the complaint may then be progressed to the Regional Director. Outcomes of formal complaints are communicated to the Regional Director and Study Group. Students reported that they are aware of these formal procedures but had not used them since any issues are resolved to their satisfaction by the Centre.

2.77   Formal academic appeals are only considered according to certain criteria stated in the complaints and appeals policy. These include, procedural irregularity and mitigating circumstances. Academic appeals are lodged with the Head of Centre who will set up an Appeals Committee to hear the case and make recommendations, where appropriate. There is a right to appeal to the Regional Director if the outcome of the hearing does not resolve matters to the student's satisfaction. Outcomes of formal academic appeals are communicated to the Regional Director and Study Group. Again, students stated that any academic matters are satisfactorily resolved through informal means by the Centre.

2.78   The Staff Student Committee has been the main way in which informal complaints have been raised by students and subsequently resolved. While minutes of Staff Student Committees are recorded, the Centre will be keeping a separate log of complaints and this is identified in the Centre's action plan.

2.79   Study Group has developed a set of overarching principles and minimum expectations for its network, which are to be approved by Study Group's AQAEC. These are for implementation in the 2016-17 academic year.

2.80   Overall, there are effective policies and procedures in place for handling complaints and appeals. The review team therefore concludes that Expectation B9 is met and the associated level risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

2.82   All nine expectations are met with low levels of risk. The Centre has effective systems in place for programme approval, admissions, learning and teaching, student support, student engagement, assessment, external examining, programme review and complaints and appeals.

2.83   One area of good practice has been identified in Expectation B4, relating to the holistic and integrated approach to student support adopted by the Centre.

2.84   The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities in the Centre **meets** UK expectations.

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Findings

3.1 The Centre, Study Group and the University recognise the importance of producing accurate and complete information appropriate to its intended audience, including stakeholders as well as prospective and current students. The management and production of information is guided and governed by policies and requirements of both Study Group and the Centre. The Head of the Centre has responsibility for the website and ensuring that it conforms to both Study Group and University requirements. Information to current students is provided through both the website and the students' VLE.

3.2 The policies of Study Group and responsibilities of the Head of Centre for LINCISC for the information published would allow the Expectation to be met.

3.3 The review team tested this by scrutinising information published on the website and the VLE, and examining key documents such as the Student Handbook, Staff Handbook, Centre Handbook and other publications for staff, students and other stakeholders.

3.4 Study Group requires its International Study Centres to produce and annually update a number of key documents. The documents required by Study Group are given in their Study Group statement regarding key handbooks and other documents for all Centres from the 2015-16 academic year. These include the Centre Handbook, Staff Handbook, Student Handbook, Programme and Module Handbooks, and a Calendar of Business for the academic year. LINCISC's Head of Centre is responsible for ensuring these documents are produced according to templates set by Study Group. The Regional Director signs off the various handbooks. Templates for these key documents provide the overall structure and the International Study Centre provides content, which means that handbooks may be different across centres. Study Group's Head of Centre Accountabilities Statement states that the Head of Centre is accountable for both ensuring that all documentation is in place and that it is accurate.

3.5 The Head of Centre at LINCISC is responsible for ensuring that programme and module handbooks are accurate and up to date, as required by Study Group. Study Group is in the process of developing and introducing a Centre Specification. This will contain key data about each International Study Centre, for example programmes being delivered and progression routes for students. This will be controlled by Study Group's Academic Manager and overseen by Study Group's Programme Approval and Validation Committee. The Head of Centre has responsibility for ensuring information for the Centre Specification is accurate, complete and up to date.

3.6 The Centre uses the University's VLE for providing information and learning support to students. Study Group offers staff resource to the Centre to support developing learning support for students on the VLE. The Head of Subject at the Centre is responsible for relevant areas on the VLE. Students report general satisfaction with the VLE and would like to see higher levels of consistency across modules for the programme of study.

3.7   LINCISC has its own marketing brochure. This is produced centrally by Study Group, with the Head of Centre and other centre staff providing content and ensuring information is accurate and up to date. The information contained in the marketing brochure is produced through cooperation between the Centre and the University. The Marketing Manager liaises with the University of Lincoln Marketing and Communications team to ensure the prospectus is accurate.

3.8   Overall, the Centre produces information, following guidelines from Study Group and with oversight by the University, demonstrating that systems and processes are in place to ensure that information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and that the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

3.10   The Centre, working with Study Group and the University, has effective systems in place to ensure that the information it produces is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

3.11   The review team concludes that the quality of information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

4   Commentary on the enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1   LINCISC has taken a number of deliberate steps to enhance the quality of its provision. In particular, the approach to the use of the VLE, a three-step policy beginning with development to ensure all staff have the basic knowledge to use the system, the closer links with University staff epitomised by the inclusion of all link tutors on the Academic Management Board and the use of the RAG status to support student progression. Enhancements arise from a variety of feedback processes such as those detailed in section B and from Study Group. Actions to implement them are added to the Centre Action Plan, which is regularly monitored and updated by the QAEG.

4.2   The Centre Action Plan is key to this as it pulls together all agreed actions for enhancement that arise from a range of sources. Progress with enhancements outlined in the Centre Action Plan are reviewed at QAEG meetings and at RQAEG meetings.

5   Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1   LINCISC is in the process of implementing Study Group's employability development theme. Study Group's approach to student employability is to embed employment-relevant skills into programmes of study. Key skills such as team work, presentations and debating are built into the preparatory programmes offered at International Study Centres. Research conducted by Study Group involving desk research and feedback from students, College Heads and university partners identified the key area of assisting students on their journey to employability. Feedback from universities, for example, informed Study Group that students at International Study Centres did not engage or fully use the employability and careers service resource offered by the University. In response, Study Group has developed a strategic initiative called CareerAhead. This initiative aims to enhance the employability of its students by supporting them to have a career direction of travel, an understanding of how graduate recruiters assess applicants for jobs, develop a CV and personal statement, and a personal career plan. The CareerAhead initiative takes place with students before arrival at the International Study Centre, on arrival, during study and post-progression to study at the University.

5.2   Implementation of Study Group's CareerAhead scheme is identified in the Centre's action plan and is scheduled for implementation in 2017. LINCISC is reviewing its programmes and modules to identify employability skills and where enhancements need to be made in order to meet the requirements of Study Group's CareerAhead scheme. The Centre presently offers much of value to students in terms of employability skills. This includes English, study skills, discussion about employment in one-to-one tutorials and the provision of a skills-based module in the International Year 1 Engineering programme.

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 24-27 of the [Higher Education Review (Embedded Colleges) handbook](#)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

e-learning
See technology enhanced or enabled learning

Embedded college
Colleges, often operating as part of a network, that are embedded on or near the campuses of two or more UK higher education institutions (HEI) and that primarily provide preparatory programmes for higher education

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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.