

# Higher Education Review of Bolton College

March 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 Bolton College. The review took place from 24 to 26 March 2014 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Mike Bramhall
- Mr James Freeman (student reviewer)
- Dr Hayley Randle.

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Bolton 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](#) (Quality Code)<sup>1</sup> setting out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and of each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

In Higher Education Review the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
  - the setting and maintenance of 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 Bolton 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,<sup>2</sup> and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

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

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

<sup>2</sup> Higher Education Review themes: [www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/higher-education-review-themes.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/higher-education-review-themes.aspx).

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

<sup>4</sup> Higher Education Review web pages: [www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/higher-education-review](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/higher-education-review).

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about Bolton College

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

- The maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its awarding bodies and awarding organisation **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 is **commended**.

### Good practice

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

- Vocationally relevant programmes that make use of employers to enhance the student experience (Enhancement and Expectation B3).
- The range of opportunities staff are given to develop, share and adopt new and innovative practice (Enhancement and Expectation B3).
- The strategic approach, institutional commitment and opportunities provided to enhance student employability (Enhancement and Expectation B4).

### Recommendations

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

By July 2014:

- finalise, approve and make publicly available a policy for the admission of higher education students (Expectations B2 and C)
- ensure that potential applicants, students, staff and other stakeholders are informed of the opportunities for the accreditation of prior learning and that these are consistent across all media (Expectations B6 and C).

By August 2015:

- develop and implement effective engagement mechanisms, guidance, training and support for higher education student representatives (Expectation B5).

### Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms** the following actions that Bolton College is already taking to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to its students.

- The increasing use of employers and students in the design and approval of higher education programmes (Expectations A4 and B1).
- The introduction of a higher education peer review observation system in the academic year 2014-15 (Expectation B3).

## Theme: Student Employability

The College articulates its approach to enterprise and employability through the Enterprise and Employability Strategy in which the impacts on staff, students and employers are made clear. Enterprise-related skills are identified and inform the higher education curriculum, particularly in Personal Development modules.

The College has a robust understanding of the need to develop its students' critical employability-related skills. The majority of the students enrolled on higher education programmes at the College are part-time and many are already in employment. To encourage students to maintain, or even increase, their employment while studying, the College provides a comprehensive set of employability initiatives.

The College's careers and student services support students in developing their employability skills. The College's Business Development Unit is a hub for employability-related information. The Business Development Unit directly impacts on the student experience through its sourcing of work placements.

Employer forums exist within each sector of the College and take place once per semester. Employer engagement is evident at most levels; at the very least there is an open door policy at the College for employers.

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

## About Bolton College

Bolton College (the College) is a medium-sized further education college in the Borough of Bolton. The College was created in April 2001 as a result of a merger between Bolton College and Bolton Community Education Service. The College has undergone major changes since the Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) in 2009. The College has a new building on the Deane Road Campus (completed in 2010) which houses much of its provision including all of its higher education. On the same site, a major science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) building is nearing completion. The College has developed its higher education provision since the last review in response to employer and regional demand, closing some courses and developing others.

Within the last two years, the College has rationalised provision and now operates on the main site at Deane Road and across a series of 'hubs and spokes'. The four hubs are: Brownlow Fold, Westhoughton Centre, New Bury Community Centre and Deane & Derby Local Learning Centre. In addition, the College offers provision in over 100 community sites, or 'spokes', across the Borough. The College also has a large work-based learning provision.

The College's mission is to 'enable individuals, businesses and communities within Bolton and the region to realise their potential through education and training that is inclusive, inspiring, innovative and responsive to their needs'.

Students are mainly recruited from Bolton and surrounding boroughs. The College specialises in vocational education and training, higher education and community learning, and offers courses in all areas of learning except land-based studies. A strong student employability theme runs throughout its provision. The College has approximately 14,500 students of which approximately 250 (206 full-time equivalent) are on higher education programmes. The College employs approximately 165 full-time equivalent teaching staff of which approximately 25 teach on higher education programmes.

The College currently works with two awarding bodies, the University of Bolton and the University of West London, and an awarding organisation, Pearson. Its major partner is the University of Bolton which is geographically very close and with whom the majority of its higher education provision is validated. It has recently entered into a partnership with the University of West London, which validates an FdA in Healthcare Play. Finally, the College runs some BTEC Pearson HND courses. A partnership with the University of Central Lancashire was ended in 2010. For the first time this year the College has a direct relationship with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (student number control) and has also participated in the National Scholarship Programme.

The key challenges faced by the College include developing and maintaining strong and effective partnerships with employers to support curriculum development and students' work experience; successfully establishing a new infrastructure to support the additional needs of students arising from the introduction of student number control; providing a sufficiently rich higher education experience for their students; and the relatively small number of full-time students studying higher education at the College presents a challenge to the development of a higher education community for staff and students.

The College has made good progress in addressing the recommendations from its 2009 IQER.

## Explanation of the findings about Bolton 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's higher education provision is focused on FHEQ level 4 and 5 programmes. The expectations of study at these levels are explained to students through the programme handbook they receive when they enrol. Further information regarding level of study is provided for each unit/module taken as part of the programme through the module guide. Students can access additional information about the required academic performance on the College's virtual learning environment (VLE) at all times.

1.2 The awarding bodies (the University of Bolton and the University of West London) and awarding organisation (Pearson) that have the responsibility for awarding the students their qualifications rely on external examiners who confirm that students receive appropriate teaching and assessment to allow them to meet the required standards at each level. The College also benefits from effective working relationships with Link Tutors from its awarding bodies.

1.3 The review team scrutinised the College's self-evaluation document and associated supporting evidence including the College's Teaching, Learning and Assessment Handbook; the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategies (both College-wide and higher education only) 2012-13 and 2013-16; and the Assessment and Internal Quality Assurance Handbook and Higher Education Student Handbook. Additional documentation (mainly external examiner reports) requested was also carefully examined. The review team met with students, teaching staff, support staff and senior staff and comprehensively explored understanding of both the academic performance and volume of study expected at levels 4 and 5. The College's policies and procedures allow Expectation A1 to be met.

1.4 The College recognises the need to support students as they progress through the academic levels as described in the qualification descriptors and takes a student 'learner journey' approach which implements transition interventions both within and between levels/years. The College provides comprehensive information about academic expectations associated with each level as defined within the FHEQ. These are made explicit in the programme handbooks. External examiner reports confirm that sufficient study is undertaken at each level for learning outcomes to be attained. Students confirm that their programmes become more challenging as they progress through the levels and that they receive appropriate support from their tutors throughout their programme of study.

1.5 Programmes are delivered and assessed at the appropriate level and students undertake a sufficient volume of study to allow them to achieve the qualification. The College's existing delivery and management practice around levels of study presents a low risk to the quality of its higher education provision.

1.6 The review team concludes that the delivery and management of the College's higher education qualifications meet Expectation A1 and that the associated risk level 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**

1.7 The College's higher education provision takes into account national benchmark statements. This is achieved through its close working relationship with its awarding bodies and awarding organisation and relationship with employers. Links between the content of its programmes and the requirements outlined in the subject and qualification benchmark statements are made clear in the programme-related documentation that students receive. The effectiveness of the College in delivering against these benchmark statements is confirmed by Link Tutors from the awarding bodies and awarding organisation and independent external examiners. Wherever possible the College ensures that programme content aligns with the requirements of the relevant professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB). The robust design of programmes with the clearly mapped learning outcomes allows Expectation A2 to be met.

1.8 The team reviewed the self-evaluation document, associated evidence and additional evidence provided, notably programme-related documentation. In addition, the team met with senior, teaching and support staff and students. Detailed discussion took place with employment-related College staff, including the Business Advisory Team and employment-related industry personnel.

1.9 The College relies on its partnerships with its awarding bodies and awarding organisation to ensure that the academic standards of its higher education provision are appropriate, robust and secure and that programme content aligns with relevant subject and qualification benchmark statements.

1.10 The awarding bodies confirm that the College makes effective use of the subject and qualification benchmark statements to ensure that the teaching, learning and assessment of the programmes occurs at the appropriate level, and that these are augmented rather than compromised by the inclusion of the requirements of PSRBs.

1.11 The College works with the University of Bolton and the University of West London on programme development and receives comprehensive support from Link Tutors from the Universities' cognate faculties. Adherence to benchmark statement requirements is partly achieved through the completion of mandatory programme-related documentation (notably programme and module handbooks, programme and module specifications and definitive module records) during the programme approval process.

1.12 The College also benefits from the clear linking of the Pearson provision to appropriate subject benchmark statements. College staff understand the function of subject benchmark statements in programme design. Staff are particularly aware of the need to use a number of different subject benchmark statements when a dedicated one, for example in policing, does not exist.

1.13 The College takes a proactive approach to the development of new programmes. The College's Business Advisory Team is pivotal in ensuring that there is local, regional and national need for the planned provision. Further engagement with industry occurs to identify contemporary sector-specific needs and ensure that these are included in the (proposed) programme content.

1.14 There are strong links between the College's curriculum areas and professional bodies and employers. The content of the HND Police Studies is mapped to national policing

standards and competencies. Similarly, students on the health programme benefit from in-practice Hospital Play Staff Education Trust-trained mentors signing off their competencies. The College has a number of employer advisory forums in place; however, these range from wholly established to embryonic.

1.15 Overall, the review team concludes that the College's rigorous use of relevant subject and qualification benchmark statements meets Expectation A2. The College's alignment of course content and learning outcomes to subject benchmark statements and competency-based requirements of PSRBs presents a low risk to the quality of its higher education provision.

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

**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**

1.16 The College produces definitive information describing the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected achievements in a number of documents, in accordance with the awarding body requirements. These are published in a timely manner according to the College's own rigorous information publication timeline. The College's processes underpinning the publication of information for potential and current students and employers allow Expectation A3 to be met.

1.17 The team reviewed the self-evaluation document and associated evidence and additional evidence provided, notably programme-related documentation. In addition, the team met with the Principal; senior, teaching and support staff; students; and employers. Detailed discussion took place with Link Tutors from the awarding bodies. The team also held detailed conversations with the staff responsible for producing marketing material.

1.18 Programme specifications are produced for each course using a Bolton College Programme Specification template which contains clear sections on the subject-specific outcomes. The Module Specification Handbook and module descriptor templates also require the explicit identification of learning outcomes. Through these information sources students receive sufficient information to allow them to undertake their studies. Generic study skills support and guidance is provided by the Learning Resource Centre for all students. Additional course-specific support regarding the academic skills needed for level 4 and 5 study is provided by course teaching teams, using a range of approaches supported through the tutorial system and information posted on the College's VLE.

1.19 A mandatory set of documents, comprising a standardised programme handbook, a programme specification document and module guides, are produced for programme validation events and issued following successful validation subject to any amendments required. Programme-specific definitive information about each higher education course is provided in a comprehensive programme specification. Document production at the College is template driven, contains all the items required for *Chapter A3: The programme level* of the Quality Code, and includes essential information about the programmes' aims and learning outcomes. The College has an established document-tracking database in place for all programme-related information and updates are produced in accordance with an agreed timeline. All materials are signed off by awarding body personnel before issue.

1.20 The outcomes of the external examiner reports are also discussed with students; however, not all students asked had viewed the most recent report (if it was available) and some believed that they would not be able to see it until their final year of study. The practice of making external examiner reports available is variable - some courses have them on the VLE, some provide hard copies and one emails the report to students. Although there are different approaches to the way in which external examiner reports are made available to students, the team were satisfied that adequate arrangements were in place to allow all students appropriate access to external examiner reports.

1.21 The College publishes a wide range of information on its website including marketing materials, UCAS information, policies and procedures, the Student Charter, programme handbooks, programme specifications, module guides, learning materials, assessments, learning support, and career and financial support, advice and guidance. All this information is monitored and reviewed regularly by a number of staff including

curriculum-based staff and Link Tutors from the awarding bodies, and is closely coordinated by the College Marketing Unit. Students confirm that the information they receive is accurate and timely.

1.22 Definitive information is also made available on the College's dedicated higher education VLE. No minimum use is stipulated; however, it is understood that all staff will upload materials to support the largely part-time population of students enrolled on their modules/programmes. The use of the VLE is in accordance with requirements laid out in the Higher Education Learning, Teaching, and Assessment Strategy and is audited regularly. Students and staff also have access to meeting minutes via a dedicated higher education community on the VLE.

1.23 Overall, the review team concludes that the College meets Expectation A3. The thorough and comprehensive management of its published information presents a low risk to the quality of its higher education provision.

**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 has recently reorganised its higher education provision and reprioritised its management. The Director of Adults and Higher Education and the Higher Education Coordinator play pivotal roles in the management and quality assurance of the higher education programmes. The College works closely with its two awarding bodies and awarding organisation to validate, deliver, monitor, review and quality assure its provision. The College has effective procedures in place to use feedback from external examiners. The activity of the College's Business Advisory Team has enhanced the alignment of the higher education portfolio and programme content to industry needs, the provision of work-related opportunities for students and the production of employment-ready graduates.

1.25 The College processes and procedures and its relationship with its awarding bodies and awarding organisation allow Expectation A4 to be met.

1.26 The team reviewed the self-evaluation document, associated evidence and additional evidence provided prior to the review. The team met with the Principal, senior, teaching and support staff, students and employers. The team explored links with industry at all levels with a large number of staff to gain a clear view of the breadth and depth of relationships between the College and associated industries.

1.27 Since the IQER in 2009, the College has implemented a new set of policies and processes to underpin the quality assurance of its higher education provision. The design and approval of programmes are included in this, with specific guidance on teaching, learning and assessment (in addition to that of the relevant awarding body) issued in the Higher Education Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy. The College continues to evaluate the effectiveness of its underpinning higher education processes with an updated Higher Education Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy and handbooks being issued for the 2013-16 period.

1.28 As noted in paragraph 1.24, the College's higher education provision is now managed according to a hierarchical structure in which the Director of Adults and Higher Education and the Higher Education Coordinator play pivotal roles in quality assurance. The Higher Education Committee and the Higher Education Learning, Teaching and Quality Working Party are fundamental to the management of higher education quality. The Higher Education Committee forms the hub for all quality-related activities from implementation of programmes to evaluation and updating of higher education policies and procedures. The Higher Education Committee feeds directly into the managers of the curriculum areas in which the higher education programmes are located. Programme staff have a secure understanding of the quality assurance processes that underpin their programmes.

1.29 The College has made recent changes to its Higher Education Strategy and consequently the development of its higher education provision. There is a strong emphasis on employability at the College, as evidenced by the replacement of the Enterprise and Employability Strategy (2012) with the Employer Engagement and Work-Based Learning Strategy (2013-17) and the concomitant growth in the level 4 apprenticeship provision at the College. A strategic decision has been made by the College to direct its own funded numbers to HND provision which would provide progression opportunities for existing level 3 students.

1.30 Programme approval is ultimately governed by the respective awarding bodies. The College adheres closely to the programme approval rules stipulated by the respective awarding bodies and the Higher Education Management Team organises its own internal validation event prior to the final event. The internal validation process is assisted by guidance provided in the Higher Education Staff Guidance Handbook, based on an Academic Development Approval application, and managed by the Higher Education Management Team comprising the Director for Adults and Higher Education and the Higher Education Coordinator. In some instances the College works collaboratively with the awarding body to develop new modules and learning outcomes. Staff are supported in programme design, monitoring and review through monthly higher education briefings which focus on updated higher education policies and processes.

1.31 All the College's higher education programmes are subject to periodic review (once every five years) with the same degree of rigour as the original validation as part of Academic Governance. The Link Tutor plays an important role in quality monitoring and annual review of the College's higher education provision on a programme level. Link Tutors are cognate subject specialists who in addition to assisting in the safeguarding of academic standards also deal with legal and commercial aspects.

1.32 The College's higher education provision is largely service provider-focused and consequently many of its programmes require students to undertake a substantial amount of work-related activity, with learning taking place within the work context. This is frequently supported by employed and trained mentors within the workplace, usually organised by the awarding body. The use of work-based assessors also ensures that the curriculum delivered remains appropriate and current.

1.33 The College has been pivotal in reinvigorating the relationship between itself, Bolton Sixth Form College and the University of Bolton which has led to the formation of the Bolton Education Zone. There is an increased emphasis on enabling learners, particularly those from widening participation backgrounds, to progress through the educational levels and access higher education study. The College places substantial emphasis on the identification and delivery of key enterprise and employability skills and has an active Business Advisory Team, which identifies employers' needs, employment skills and job opportunities. The Business Advisory Team also generates market intelligence to support the development of new programmes within the College's higher education portfolio. The College has also implemented a summer school to allow students to gain pre-study skills which will ease their progression through the academic levels. This was considered good practice in the 2009 IQER.

1.34 The Business Advisory Team is part of the College's Business Development Unit. It provides useful and comprehensive links with industry and has contributed to the enhancement of teaching, learning and assessment opportunities for the College students within the workplace or the wider work-related context as well as the development of a deeper understanding of employers' needs. The College uses this information effectively to produce graduates who have appropriate skills for employment upon graduation. The Business Development Unit maintains a Customer Relations Management database which has been used effectively to facilitate the placement of substantially more students per year in an appropriate workplace.

1.35 Effective use is made of external examiners, professional bodies and employers at all stages of the programme design and validation process. However, the College has been proactive in recognising the need for employer and student input into the design and validation of its higher education programmes. This is evidenced by its recent updating of its new programme proposal form to include input from employers and students. The review team **affirms** the increasing use of employers and students in the design and approval of higher education programmes.

1.36 The College's compliance with its awarding bodies and awarding organisation regulatory frameworks, use of market intelligence obtained through its Business Advisory Team and proactive seeking of employer and student input into new programme proposals ensure that Expectation A4 is met and the 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 College uses external examiners effectively to ensure that the required academic standards for its higher education programmes are being met. A number of the College's programmes also benefit from the input of independent industry professionals as mentors to support teaching, learning and assessment within the workplace.

1.38 The management of the College's higher education provision is governed by the requirements of its awarding bodies who also appoint the external examiners. A number of the higher education programmes are assessed by appropriately trained mentors in the workplace. The use of academic experts and independent industry professionals allows Expectation A5 to be met.

1.39 The team reviewed the self-evaluation document and associated evidence and additional evidence provided both prior to and at the review. The team met with the Principal; senior, teaching and support staff; and employers. The team investigated the process by which external examiner reports were received by the College and subsequently processed. The team also examined the links with industry at all levels with a large number of staff to gain a clear view of the breadth and depth of relationships between the College and associated industries.

1.40 External examiners play a critical role in ensuring that the College's programmes are delivered at the appropriate level and that required academic standards are achieved. They operate in accordance with the awarding bodies' and awarding organisation's academic regulations frameworks. External examiners are involved in the moderation of assessed student work leading to the ratification of marks and consequently the assurance of the academic standard of the provision at the College.

1.41 All programmes are subject to external examination and this process is rigorously documented. External examiner feedback ensures the currency of the programmes' aims and learning outcomes. Issues arising in the annual external examiner reports and resulting action plans are dealt with by the Higher Education Management Team and the Higher Education Learning, Teaching and Quality Working Party, both of which report to the Higher Education Committee. A comprehensive process is in place whereby external examiner reports are collated into a central database, red-amber-green rated and graded 1-4 using the Ofsted grading system. All actions that arise are tracked by the Quality Director and taken to the Senior Management Team. Any actions identified as red or amber are prioritised and scrutinised at individual team performance reviews, which take place three times per academic year. Action tracking is facilitated by the use of electronic reminders (MELD) which help to enable responses to issues to be implemented mid-cycle as opposed to at the end of the academic year. Actions and identified good practice have in the past been used to inform the content of the Higher Education Self-Assessment Report. From the current academic year an annual Course Higher Education Self-Evaluation Document will replace the self-assessment report. An evaluative summary of all Course Higher Education Self-Evaluation Documents will be produced by the Higher Education Coordinator and used to inform the Higher Education Self-Evaluation Document.

1.42 Additional externality is achieved from input from specific industrial and work sectors in the delivery of programmes largely sourced from personal contacts of delivery staff or via the Business Advisory Team. This approach enables preparation of students for employment through the enhancement of their employability skills.

1.43 Overall, the review team concludes that the use of academic external examiners and professional personnel from the relevant industrial context leads to Expectation A5 being met. 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**

1.44 The College aspires to facilitate academic excellence in learning, teaching and assessment. The College's assessment processes operate in accordance with the awarding bodies' and awarding organisation's regulatory frameworks where appropriate. All assessment of the higher education provision at the College is governed by the Higher Education Strategy, the College's Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy and specifically the Higher Education Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy. Additional guidance can be found in the Assessment and Internal Quality Assurance Handbook and the Higher Education Staff Guidance Handbook. External examiners confirm that the assessments used will allow students to achieve module and programme-level outcomes.

1.45 The College's management of the higher education assessment process allows Expectation A6 to be met.

1.46 The team reviewed all assessment-related material provided with the self-evaluation document and additional evidence throughout the scrutiny process and the visit. The review team met with staff from the awarding bodies, College teaching and support staff, students and employers.

1.47 The overall responsibility for assessment is with the awarding bodies and awarding organisation. However, programme-level responsibility lies with the College, particularly the Higher Education Committee, Programme Manager and programme delivery staff. Assessment is planned and implemented in accordance with the College's Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy. The College also has a specific Higher Education Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy. The College considers that there is a need to develop a dedicated peer observation scheme for its higher education provision. All staff receive clear guidance on the design and implementation of assessments. All staff are appropriately qualified and competent to assess student work. They receive regular pedagogical training provided mainly by the awarding bodies. In addition to being appropriately qualified, many staff are also active within their professional/industry context and therefore suitably positioned to bring industry practice into the classroom both in terms of teaching and assessment. Implementation of the College's assessment-related policies and processes ensures that feedback is now timely, constructive and developmental.

1.48 Assessment is used effectively to assist student learning. Detailed use is made of assessment matrices which define grades qualitatively and quantitatively. Students find these grading matrices useful when completing assessments. Students make effective use of the guidance provided in programme and module handbooks, formative assessment opportunities and the feedback provided on assessed work. Efforts are made to ensure that students understand the purpose of assessments, and particularly how good academic practice can be achieved.

1.49 Clear moderation processes are in place and are supported with standardised recording and reporting documentation. All work is subject to internal moderation and/or second marking prior to being sampled by an external examiner. External examiners' scrutiny of assessment briefs and assessed work ensures that assessments used and undertaken are valid, rigorous and reliable, allow students to achieve the intended learning outcomes of modules and programmes of study and have been conducted in accordance with the academic regulatory framework of the respective awarding body or awarding

organisation. All assessments and assessed elements are clearly mapped to programme-level outcomes.

1.50 Overall, the team concludes that the College's effective assessment process is low risk and meets Expectation A6.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

## Maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards: Summary of findings

1.51 In reaching its positive judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex two of the published handbook. All the Expectations for this judgement area were met and the associated levels of risk were low. There was one affirmation relating to the increased use of employers and students in the design and approval of higher education programmes (Expectation A4). There were no recommendations or features of good practice. In all areas relating to academic standards, the College is also required to adhere to the procedures of its awarding bodies and does so in all aspects. The review team therefore concludes that the maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its awarding bodies and awarding organisation **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 As noted earlier, the College has established validation partnerships with two higher education institutions, the University of Bolton and the University of West London, and also delivers Pearson HND programmes.

2.2 The College's Framework for Quality Improvement articulates sound principles for programme validation. There is an internal validation procedure for all higher education programmes. To begin course development, Senior Management Team approval is needed, usually gained via a proposal to the Vice Principal Curriculum.

2.3 Programme teams submit an Academic Development Approval (ADA) form to a College Validation panel, consisting of the Higher Education Coordinator, Director of Quality, Director for Adults and Higher Education, and relevant Director of Curriculum. Recently, the College decided that employers and students do not have enough input in the design and approval of new programmes. As a result, a revised ADA form asks proposers to consider employer involvement and feedback alongside student views.

2.4 Validation panels also request standardised programme handbooks, programme specifications and module guides. Programme teams must supply staff CVs, and, if approving an HND award, permission from the awarding organisation to run the programme. Proposal documentation should also include evidence of employer engagement.

2.5 Internal validation panels assess ADA proposals against set criteria: progression, demand, employers' feedback, market research data, material and Human Resources implications. The panel set conditions and subsequently scrutinise amended ADA documentation. If required, external higher education institution validation follows, involving further documentary evidence and a panel visit (seeing both students and employers) resulting in further recommendations.

2.6 Staff can consult the Higher Education Staff Guidance Handbook for information about the process, and the Higher Education Coordinator or Director of Adults and Higher Education will offer support throughout.

2.7 Overall, the College has a robust approach to programme design that allows Expectation B1 to be met.

2.8 The team scrutinised the quality of validation documentation, tracked the development of programmes and questioned staff about their experience of programme design.

2.9 Module descriptor templates are an effective means of standardisation and staff support. Programme specification templates ensure the proposal is positioned against subject benchmark statements and, where appropriate, other external reference points, such as the Quality Code. The Higher Education Staff Guidance Handbook clearly outlines relevant procedures, and joint planning meetings with higher education institutions occur prior to validation events. College staff members understand the programme design process and relevant benchmark statements. ADA proposals allow staff to reflect on the strategic need and context of the programme. Supporting documentation considers academic

rationale, proposed learning outcomes, students' future progression routes and the programme's viability. Resourcing and staffing are evaluated and any necessary investment identified. Programmes are mapped to relevant PSRB guidance. Internal validation panels make detailed recommendations and corrections to programme information. The College engages effectively with external validation procedures.

2.10 The team also considered the role of externality in programme design. The College informally engages with external subject specialists, and the Enterprise and Employability Group acts as a forum for considering curriculum design. Staff gave compelling examples of working with awarding bodies, the awarding organisation and employers to develop new programmes and assessments. Student involvement in programme design is informal, but while some are unsure about the appropriateness of their involvement, other students highlighted examples of influencing module design in response to sector needs.

2.11 As detailed under Expectation A4, paragraph 1.35, the College is taking steps to develop both employer and student involvement in the approval process and this led the review team to affirm these developments.

2.12 Although there is no regular review of programme approval procedures, the fact that significant modifications are made to the process in response to strategic aims, such as employer engagement, reassures the team that the College evaluates the effectiveness of its approach to programme design.

2.13 Overall, the operation of a robust approval system, which is well understood by teaching staff, means the College has effective procedures in place that meet Expectation B1 and 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 does not have a publicly available overarching policy for the admission of higher education students. However, it sets out its admissions process through a section on admissions in its Student Services Handbook. This document defines the process for admissions staff. In addition, key procedures regarding the student journey, which include admissions and inductions, are set out in the Higher Education Student Enhancement Framework. These policies and procedures allow Expectation B2 to be met.

2.15 The review team reviewed the admissions policies, procedures and documentation made available to the public and applicants. The team met with academic staff, support staff and students. The team reviewed minutes of meetings where admissions are discussed and reviewed, for example in the Higher Education Operations Working Party.

2.16 The College has two sources of applications, through UCAS and internally via its Admissions Unit. The admissions information available to students in the higher education prospectus, on the College website and through UCAS is clearly articulated. There are clear entrance requirements stipulated by the University of Bolton and the University of West London that the College adheres to. Staff are trained in the admissions process as part of their regular staff development sessions.

2.17 All applicants are provided with an informative interview briefing pack for each course. The outcomes of the interview are clearly communicated to students. Students are sent offer or rejection letters, the former providing important information and the latter offering feedback. Students and staff confirmed that the admissions process is clear and fairly applied. There is a separate higher education induction that students attend and students confirmed that this is effective.

2.18 The review of higher education applications was evidenced in both the Higher Education Operations Working Party meetings and in the College's Marketing Strategy (2012-14). The team found evidence that a good range of course information is available and that this is monitored and reviewed.

2.19 The College does not have a publicly available overarching policy for the admission of higher education students. There is currently no complaints and appeals procedure for admissions. The College plans to develop a policy on appeals against admission rejection and is currently drafting a new policy on higher education admissions, which will incorporate these procedures. The review team **recommends** that by July 2014 the College should finalise, approve and make publicly available a policy for the admission of higher education students.

2.20 Overall, the review team concludes that the policies and processes for the most part meet Expectation B2. The admissions process is effective and the interview processes for each programme are clearly defined. The lack of a published policy on the admission of higher education students poses a low risk.

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

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.21 The College articulates its strategy on teaching and learning through its general Higher Education Strategy and the more specific Higher Education Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy. Although tailored to higher education, both strategies are aligned with the College-wide Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy and E-Learning Strategy. The College has a policy of requiring staff to hold or work towards a teaching diploma. The College disseminates these strategies through publication online and they are reviewed at the Higher Education Committee and Higher Education Operations Working Party. The College's policies and strategies allow Expectation B3 to be met.

2.22 The review team tested the application of these policies and strategies by reviewing a range of evidence such as committee minutes, self-assessment reports and graded staff teaching observation documents. The review team also had access to the proposed higher education VLE site. In addition, the review team held meetings with staff, students and employers.

2.23 Students are well supported from induction and throughout their course, with many opportunities for them to engage in and plan their learning. There is a good range of course and support information available to them.

2.24 There is a systematic review of teaching and learning through the College's enhancement processes, for example by the annual self-assessment reports. The College learning environment and available resources, including their VLE, support and promote student independent enquiry and learning.

2.25 New teachers are given mentoring and an induction, which is comprehensive. All staff have a graded teaching and learning observation annually and an appraisal that feeds into target setting, and depending on the outcomes staff are supported via staff development sessions, further mentoring or engagement with more observations of teaching, learning and assessment. These graded observations were found to be routinely held and have an 'inclusion' factor for staff to consider how they teach students with diverse needs. The team saw evidence that these observations of teaching resulted in good overall scores. The College has no higher education peer observation scheme, but is intending to introduce one in the academic year 2014-15. The review team **affirms** the introduction of a higher education peer review observation system in the academic year 2014-15.

2.26 The College uses data such as student course surveys to enhance its provision but these data do not distinguish between higher education and further education students. The College recognises this and is planning to use a new higher education student survey in the future.

2.27 The College uses work-based learning on vocationally relevant programmes, highlighting to students the need to uphold professional standards. The team found the vocationally relevant programmes were good practice and this is explained further in paragraph 4.9 under Enhancement.

2.28 The College's 'Take a Chance on Change' initiative is a good mechanism for supporting experimental/reflective teaching and evidence was seen of this being a good vehicle for sharing innovative practice. Full-time tutors undertake a minimum of 30 hours' continuing professional development (CPD) annually. Staff can apply for support to pursue subject updating or courses aligned to the strategic aims. The team found the range of staff development opportunities good practice and this is explained further in paragraphs 4.4 and 4.5 under Enhancement.

2.29 Overall, the team concludes that Expectation B3 is met and is low risk.

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

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

**Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling student development and achievement**

**Findings**

2.30 The Higher Education Student Enhancement Framework places emphasis on improving independent, personalised learning. The College Charter for Higher Education Students and the College Vision set out a commitment to values of inclusion, equality and diversity. The College has a 'Single Equality Scheme', which includes an equality and diversity policy with specific College-wide policies on inclusive learning. The College has an Information Learning Technology Strategy that identifies student needs and has undertaken reviews of enhancement in this area. The College has an Employer Engagement and Work-Based Learning Strategy and an Enterprise Strategy. The strategies and policies allow Expectation B4 to be met.

2.31 The review team tested the application of the policy by reviewing a range of documentation and by meeting staff and students.

2.32 The College commits adequate resources to the higher education programmes and the Estates Strategy has produced good resources for the higher education students. For example, the College now has a specific higher education room and a social area for higher education students.

2.33 The College has an impressive higher education-specific VLE that has been developed to support higher education students. The students have good access to resources, including those for franchised students who have equal access to either the University of Bolton resources or the University of West London both online and in print.

2.34 The students are inducted to their course and the learning centre. The resources available in terms of information and support for study skills are good. A more bespoke higher education library induction programme is planned for 2014-15, with plans for a new higher education homepage through the Learning Resource Centre. A range of disability and support services are made available to students.

2.35 The team identified the strategic approach of the College to enhance student employability as good practice and this is explained further in paragraph 4.9 under Enhancement.

2.36 The review team concludes that overall the strategies and policies work in practice and that Expectation B4 is met and is 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**

2.37 The College has no students' union but provides opportunities for students to engage in the assurance and enhancement of their programmes through a range of Higher Education Committees and course committees. The College Charter for Higher Education Students states that students will be able to express their views on their course and College. The College has a designated Student Liaison Officer who communicates with higher education students to facilitate participation. The opportunities allow Expectation B5 to be met.

2.38 The review team looked at the range of opportunities for students to engage by talking to staff and students and by looking at a range of policy and committee documentation. The evidence showed that at course level the engagement of students in quality assurance and enhancement is working effectively. Course committees were found to be taking place and student feedback is encouraged. Student feedback was being acted upon and this was being communicated back to students. The feedback often led to enhancements and in general students were happy that their voice was being listened to and acted upon. Students in general have access to external examiner reports and these are discussed with staff on some occasions. Student feedback is incorporated into annual course self-assessment reports but the use of data from questionnaires is sometimes sparse in them. The College acknowledged it did not have a higher education-specific feedback survey, but is planning to develop one.

2.39 Formal student representation is therefore in place, but the team found that attendance of students on committees is low. Most of the College's students are part-time so they find it difficult to find time to attend the College committee meetings. Students have opportunities to input into course design, although this and attendance at College committees is not seen by all students as desirable due to time commitments. The College intends to review its student representation on committees and acknowledged that work needed to be done to improve this area. In addition, student representatives are not trained in any formal way. The review team **recommends** that by August 2015 the College develop and implement effective engagement mechanisms, guidance, training and support for higher education student representatives.

2.40 Overall, the review team concludes that the design and operation of the College's student engagement mechanisms are working well at course level and so meet Expectation B5. The risk is viewed as moderate, since problems are mainly at College committee level.

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

**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**

2.41 Assessment is an awarding body responsibility; therefore, the College's programmes must comply with procedures outlined in Operating Agreements. In the case of awarding bodies, ultimate responsibility for assessment rests with University-level Assessment Boards. Assessment arrangements are comparable with those at partner institutions, and any modifications to forms of assessment not agreed at validation must be approved using Minor Modifications procedures. The College, working with the awarding body's Link Tutor, is responsible for setting, marking and internally moderating assessments. Each programme has an Assessment Board or equivalent, at which College and partner staff confirm results, progression and awards.

2.42 The College has internal assessment processes designed to comply with its Partnership Agreements. Guiding principles are set out across a number of policies. A Framework for Assessment in Higher Education defines assessment in terms specific to higher education and details the responsibilities of the College, its staff and students. The College-wide Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy and Higher Education Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy outline the College's pedagogic approach to assessment, which is characterised by the concept of 'assessment as learning' and commitments to sharing good practice regarding feedback. The Higher Education Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy commits programmes to a range of formative and summative assessment matched with constructive feedback. The College's Assessment Framework stipulates what assessment information module handbooks should contain and outlines criteria for the timing and phasing of assessment. Internal and external validation processes consider assessment design, during which assessments are mapped to intended learning outcomes, relevant subject benchmark statements and PSRB requirements.

2.43 The College is governed by the awarding bodies' and awarding organisation's accreditation of prior learning policies and should inform students of these opportunities in its prospectus, through UCAS and on the College website. Limitations on accreditation of prior learning credits are specified within Operating Agreements.

2.44 The Assessment and Internal Quality Assurance Handbook details an appropriate internal marking and moderation process: assessments are first and second marked or moderated and subject to scrutiny by external examiners. A sample is kept for five years, and markers undertake assessment training. The College has robust procedures for attributing student identity to work and invigilation, and these are monitored by awarding body Link Tutors. Rules regarding data protection and security of students' assessment results are in place. The College is committed to a 15-day feedback turnaround and provides guidance on the extent and type of feedback expected.

2.45 In addition to awarding body and awarding organisation procedures, the College has an internal malpractice framework, which includes clear definitions and guidance relating to plagiarism for both students and staff. All University of Bolton programmes submit assignments via plagiarism software, but the College recognises a disparity between these and Pearson programmes.

2.46 The College monitors and evaluates its assessments and procedures through its quality assurance mechanisms, including self-assessment reports, student feedback, course

committees, the National Student Survey, external examiner reports and progression data. Observations of teaching, learning and assessment and staff development help the College implement and monitor its assessment strategies. Overall, clear lines of responsibility, a strategic approach and highly developed procedures mean that the College's arrangements for assessment allow Expectation B6 to be met.

2.47 The team asked students and staff about their experience of assessment and feedback, and scrutinised relevant documentation, handbooks and committee minutes. Assessment Boards consider candidates' progression and confirm results with external examiners present to discuss feedback and cohort result profiles. Pearson programmes operate equivalent internal Assessment Boards. Module descriptor templates and accompanying programme approval guidance encourage staff to reflect on the role of different forms of assessment, relate these to intended learning outcomes and state how feedback will be used. As a result, programmes include a range of summative and formative assessments, well matched to intended learning outcomes. Students confirm assessments are appropriately aligned to the programme's aims, with appropriate differentiation between levels. Although Unit Lists do not generally indicate hours of required study, the expected commitment is made clear to students during induction.

2.48 Module handbooks contain detailed outlines of assessments, and students are aware of marking criteria and understand what is required of them. Students are satisfied with the form, timing and amount of assessment. The majority of students report the College normally exceeds its target turnaround time, although a minority are concerned about insufficient time to act on feedback between assessments. Students are confident the College would communicate any changes to assessment.

2.49 Programme self-assessment reports monitor student performance trends, and bring together a broad range of related feedback, including external examiner reports and student surveys.

2.50 Teaching observations consider assessment practices, and a system of designated 'Advanced Practitioners' champion good practice. A well-executed programme of higher education staff development includes sessions on assessment design.

2.51 Students have a mixed awareness of accreditation of prior learning opportunities, and the prospectus, programme hand-outs and website (prior to the review visit) do not detail the accreditation of prior learning options available to students. Some programme pages on the College's website now contain a link to Pearson's broad academic regulations. The review team **recommends** that by July 2014 the College ensure that potential applicants, students, staff and other stakeholders are informed of the opportunities for the accreditation of prior learning and that these are consistent across all media.

2.52 Notwithstanding the lack of information concerning accreditation of prior learning, sound principles of assessment and feedback, the operation of procedures that ensure compliance with Partnership Agreements, and mechanisms for monitoring and review mean that the College meets Expectation B6 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**

2.53 Awarding bodies are responsible for the appointment, training and recognition of external examiners, and the College fulfils its role with reference to the regulations. Awarding bodies also evaluate and define the role of external examiners. The College complies with awarding organisation procedures for external verification.

2.54 The College has internal systems for receiving reports, which account for the different contact points used in awarding body and awarding organisation processes: heads of area are responsible for informing the Quality Unit of expected reports, and regardless of the initial recipient, all reports are forwarded to the Quality Unit. To speed up this process, the College asks external examiners to send reports to the Director of Quality, course leader and Higher Education Coordinator. Reports are read and responded to by the Director of Quality, Excellence and Innovation Manager, Director of Adults and Higher Education, Higher Education Coordinator, course leader and teaching team. The Director of Quality grades reports using an Ofsted scale. Programme teams then draw up an action plan, which can only be signed off by the Head of Area and closed by the Quality Unit when complete. At curriculum level, external examiner reports feed into performance reviews and self-assessment reports. Reports are presented at the Higher Education Learning, Teaching and Quality Working Party, which is responsible for following up actions. The Higher Education Committee receives report actions and Working Party minutes for comment.

2.55 All this information is captured on a central IT system, which can be used to track action plans. From 2013-14 the Higher Education Coordinator will produce an 'evaluative summary' of reports and include this in a Higher Education Self-Assessment Report. Reports or summaries are fed from the Higher Education Committee to the Standards Committee and then Governors if necessary, and contribute to the Quality Improvement Plan and Higher Education Development Plan. Students see external examiner reports through their involvement in the above committees and the publication of reports on the VLE. Taken together, the team found the College's reporting structures allow Expectation B7 to be met.

2.56 The team compared the College's stated procedures with documentary evidence, analysed the use of external examiners in quality assurance processes, and tested staff understanding of and students' access to their reports. Reports highlight relevant issues and are complimentary about the College's provision of information to external examiners. Awarding body-validated programmes are sometimes covered by cross-partnership reports, but these still identify relevant strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for improvement. All reports comment on the currency and comparability of the curriculum, resources, assessments and feedback. Many reports also highlight good practice.

2.57 Example documentation and role descriptions confirm reporting, grading and signing-off systems operate effectively. Staff understand the arrangements for receiving external examiner reports, action planning and integration into quality assurance systems. Committee minutes and self-assessment reports show that external examiner reports are considered thoroughly and monitored at both programme and institutional level. Programme self-assessment reports use external examiner reports as a tool for identifying good practice and weaknesses, and any serious issues are discussed during Head of Area Performance Reviews.

2.58 Staff and students confirmed external examiner reports are published on the VLE or circulated via email. Student forums have also discussed reports in detail. The College acknowledges that handbooks have not previously included contact details for external examiners and is seeking to remedy this omission.

2.59 Overall, the implementation of robust reporting, recording and dissemination procedures, central monitoring systems and sound integration with other quality assurance processes ensures the College meets Expectation B7 and 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**

2.60 The awarding bodies and awarding organisation monitor the College's higher education provision using their own quality assurance processes. For awarding bodies, these include programme validation, external examiner reports, annual monitoring and periodic review, as described in Partnership Agreements. All awarding body-validated programmes are reviewed on a five-year cycle. Programmes that have not undergone a five-year review will have revalidation events in 2014-15. Modifications to programmes require approval from awarding bodies through a process that affords an opportunity for review.

2.61 A Framework for Quality Improvement outlines the College's internal quality assurance processes and includes commitments to making self-evaluation an inclusive and supported activity. The College monitors its provision via student forums, programme self-evaluations, observations, external examiners and course team meetings. All programmes complete a self-assessment report annually, which is reviewed by a Quality Panel consisting of the Director of Quality, Excellence and Innovation Manager, Director of Adults and Higher Education, and Higher Education Coordinator. Self-assessment reports are presented to course committees and the Higher Education Learning, Teaching and Quality Working Party, and are validated by the Higher Education Committee. In turn, Higher Education Committee minutes are sent to awarding bodies and feed into the College's Senior Management Team and Standards Committees, which report to the College's Governors. Similar lines of reporting apply to quality assurance information deriving from awarding bodies or external examiner reports, as described under Expectation B7. Additionally, curriculum leaders hold monitoring meetings with heads of area and undergo termly performance reviews with the Senior Management Team. Teaching observations follow a graded Ofsted model, and data is disaggregated for higher education provision.

2.62 The College has a procedure for withdrawing programmes: following initial discussion between the Director of Adults and Higher Education and the programme team, any proposed closure must be approved by the Senior Management Team. If granted, the programme team must complete 'Course Closure' documentation and have this signed off by the Higher Education Coordinator and forwarded to partner organisations and the Director of Adults and Higher Education. Relevant tutors contact applicants or enrolled students to discuss alternatives or other providers at the earliest possible opportunity.

2.63 A Higher Education Development Plan compiles outcomes from quality assurance mechanisms. All self-assessment reports contribute to the College-wide self-assessment report, and in future the Higher Education Coordinator will produce an overall Higher Education Self-Evaluation Report. A College-wide Quality Cycle synchronises these protocols, and the Higher Education Coordinator is responsible for ensuring programmes comply with quality assurance processes.

2.64 Termly staff development sessions and an Assessment and Internal Quality Assurance Handbook inform teaching staff about quality assurance mechanisms, and these are evaluated for effectiveness. Quality assurance processes are reviewed annually. Taken together, these policies and procedures allow Expectation B8 to be met.

2.65 The team scrutinised the operation and suitability of key quality assurance processes by talking to staff and analysing supporting documentation alongside committee minutes. The College effectively engages with awarding body quality assurance mechanisms, including periodic and annual review. Reviews conducted by awarding bodies

include external representatives, and the College uses its involvement in the Greater Manchester HE in FE Consortium to share good practice, particularly regarding quality assurance. As reported under Expectation B7, the Higher Education Learning, Teaching and Quality Working Party considers external examiner reports and monitors resulting action plans. Course team meetings use external examiner reports to discuss good practice and formulate action plans for areas requiring improvement.

2.66 Programme self-assessment reports effectively bring together key performance indicators with self-evaluation and comments from external examiners, students, teaching observations and Link Tutors. Overview statements in self-assessment reports allow staff to reassess the strategic rationale for the programme, its future development and role within the College. Self-assessment reports also highlight areas of good practice worthy of dissemination. Course team meetings consider self-assessment reports before they are signed off by senior management. However, the team were unable to confirm that the Higher Education Learning, Teaching and Quality Working Party responds to self-assessment reports because the group had not completed a full agenda cycle at the time of the review. That said, there is evidence that the Higher Education Committee drives the self-evaluation and that processes for incorporating programme self-assessment reports into College-wide self-evaluations and monitoring action plans are in operation.

2.67 The Higher Education Learning, Teaching and Quality Working Party monitors programmes using retention and progression data. The Higher Education Student Forum is an effective quality assurance mechanism, but as noted under Expectation B5, the College does not train student representatives for their role in such meetings. Staff and students confirmed procedures for withdrawing or making changes to programmes were in operation.

2.68 Observation of teaching, learning and assessment documentation is further education orientated. As a result, observations do not directly benchmark higher education provision against higher education sector reference points, such as the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF). Nor is there a guarantee that all staff teaching on higher education programmes will be observed teaching at higher education level. However, observations are used as a tool for identifying and disseminating good practice. As noted under Expectation B3, the College is intending to introduce a higher education peer review system and the team have affirmed this.

2.69 Teaching staff have a good working knowledge of quality assurance systems, and the Assessment and Internal Quality Assurance Handbook accurately describes College-wide procedures and collates useful templates.

2.70 Although some internal quality assurance mechanisms have not yet had a full cycle in operation, the range of inputs into centrally quality-controlled programme self-evaluations combined with sound engagement with awarding body and awarding organisation procedures means the College meets Expectation B8 and 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: Complaints and student appeals**

**Findings**

2.71 Programmes comply with the awarding bodies' and awarding organisation's procedures for complaints and appeals. The College has a regularly reviewed internal complaints procedure, and service-level agreements have built-in complaints policies. Complaints are dealt with outside the programme involved and students are signposted to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator if the outcome is disputed. The College's appeals procedure contains an inbuilt level of informality and time restrictions, and assigns staff responsibility for informing students of outcomes. When an appeal or complaint requires attending a panel, students can elect to be accompanied by someone of their choosing. The College's Standards Committee or Senior Management Team receive reports on the number and outcomes of complaints and appeals. The College does not have any procedures or policies in place for dealing with complaints or appeals regarding selection decisions. The College has recognised this omission, which is related to the recommendation made under Expectation B2. Overall, these policies and procedures allow Expectation B9 to be met.

2.72 The team talked to staff and students and analysed both supporting documentation and public information to test the effectiveness of the College's complaints and appeals procedures. Programme handbooks inform students about complaints and appeals procedures, including their right to escalate an appeal to the awarding bodies or awarding organisation when appropriate. The complaints policy and a flowchart of the procedure are available online. Complaints and appeals information is also signposted during students' inductions. Although the student submission suggested mixed awareness, students confirmed they had access to complaints and appeals information and felt they could use these procedures if necessary.

2.73 The College offers students support and advice and provides training for staff on handling complaints and appeals. Suitable complaints and monitoring forms allow the College to collect data about those students making a complaint. The Standards Committee analyses this data for the College's provision as a whole, and related action plans are monitored via an electronic system. In summary, clearly defined, widely disseminated and appropriately monitored policies mean the College meets Expectation B9 and 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**

2.74 The majority of the College's students are in employment. On some programmes interaction with employers may include industrial site visits, guest speakers and summer work placements. However, many of the College's programmes require students to undertake placements, and in most cases this work-based learning is necessary to achieve a programme's intended learning outcomes.

2.75 The College has invested in work-based learning over the past three years and placed 350 students on work placements during 2012-13. There is a strategic approach to work-based learning focused on meeting the education and training needs of the region, supporting economic regeneration, widening participation and assisting learners to progress both in education and employment. An Employer Engagement Strategy is set within the context of the College Strategic Framework and links well to the College's strategic aims. Targets are set for growing the number of employers involved in placements and deepening their connection with the College. Labour Market Intelligence and Employer Advisory Boards help align the College's curriculum to sector needs. Service-level agreements are developed with those employers who offer a large number of placements, and these are monitored by the Senior Management Team. An electronic customer relationship management (CRM) database stores employer details, and risk assessments are carried out where required. The policies and procedures allow Expectation B10 to be met.

2.76 The team discussed the management of work-based learning with staff, employers and students, but also sought documentary evidence of stated procedures. Effective service-level agreements with placement providers clearly outline the parties' responsibilities and student expectations. Programme validation identifies, and mitigates against, the risks involved in work-based learning. Appropriate safety checks, risk assessments, due diligence and site visits are carried out for those employers the College arranges placements with. This process does not apply to work-based learning taking place within local authority schools or NHS hospitals (as these have already undergone statutory checks), but is applied to placements on HND programmes. Learner Services support students on work experience or placements, and the Business Development Unit has a placement-finding role, although its focus is working with employers. Students are well supported in gaining placements and are confident the College would resolve any issues.

2.77 Placement guides provide accurate information for students and employers. Programme handbooks and specifications contain clear information about placement arrangements. Module outlines and assessment briefs relate intended learning outcomes and tasks to work-based learning where appropriate. The majority of assessment linked to work-based learning is carried out by College staff, although employers can give feedback and provide facilities.

2.78 On programmes where accredited mentors conduct workplace observations, such as Healthcare and Play Specialism, students and staff receive suitable guidance and training. Mentoring guidelines are produced both by the College and awarding bodies. Students find the support offered by mentors invaluable. A Practice Trainer, employed by the College, visits Early Years students in the workplace.

2.79 The College's Employer Engagement Strategy sets key performance indicators to measure employer engagement success. Employers and students can give feedback on work-based learning through surveys. Employer feedback has been used to adapt the curriculum, and the College uses the National Student Survey to monitor students' experiences. Overall, sound risk management, appropriate information and student support mean the College meets Expectation B10 and 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**

2.80 *Chapter B11: Research degrees* and this Expectation are not applicable to the College as it does not offer research degrees.

## Quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.81 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex two of the published handbook. All the Expectations for this judgement area were met and the associated level of risk in all but one case was low. The exception was Expectation B5 where the team judged that while student engagement in quality assurance was working well at course level, at College level there was, for a variety of reasons, a lack of effective engagement. The risk for Expectation B5 was therefore judged to be moderate.

2.82 There were two affirmations in this section relating to the introduction of a higher education peer review system and the increasing role of employers and students in the approval of courses. Three features of good practice under Enhancement also contributed to the judgement. While there were three recommendations in this section, two of them were minor and related largely to publicising documentation, while one was more substantial concerning the development and implementation of effective engagement mechanisms, guidance, training and support for higher education student representatives.

2.83 Given that all Expectations are met and the recommendations are not of a serious nature, the review team concludes that the quality of student 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 The College has a detailed Marketing Strategy, which relates promotional activities to its aims and values and makes discrete reference to higher education provision. Likewise, the College's Digital Marketing Implementation Plan contains a separate higher education section. The College publishes information about its provision via a website, social media and printed prospectus. Current students are provided with programme and module handbooks and have access to programme and College-wide information via a VLE. In addition, newly enrolled students go through an induction, which includes a Learning Resources Centre tour. A Higher Education Student Handbook has been developed to harmonise the information available to students regardless of programme. As discussed under Expectation B7, external examiner reports are shared with students via their membership of the Higher Education Committee; Higher Education Learning, Teaching and Quality Working Party and through the VLE.

3.2 The College must seek approval for any marketing materials relating to awarding body programmes. Close contact with awarding body marketing departments and University Link Tutors ensures accurate information. An electronic database collates all programme documentation. Internally, a number of departments, committees and units have responsibility for producing, monitoring and reviewing information: The Higher Education Operations Working Party has oversight of public information and is responsible for reviewing the Higher Education Student Handbook. In addition, the Director of Adults and Higher Education and the Higher Education Coordinator work with the Marketing Unit, Admissions and programme teams to confirm programme information is accurate. The Marketing Unit produces higher education publicity materials, manages UCAS data, organises events and is responsible for updating programme information in the higher education prospectus. Representation on the Higher Education Committee, Higher Education Operations Working Party and Higher Education Learning, Teaching and Quality Working Party keeps the Marketing Unit aware of developments. A proofing process run by the Marketing Unit, but involving programme teams, guards against inaccuracies.

3.3 The Admissions Unit works with the Marketing Unit, the Management Information Unit (MIU) and tutors to handle applicants' queries. The MIU generates management/monitoring information, which is circulated to senior staff. The Higher Education Coordinator, working with the Marketing Unit and MIU, is responsible for the key information set and the wider information set compliance, with the Director of Adults and Higher Education providing final sign-off. Quality assurance and strategy documents are approved by the Quality Committee, Higher Education Committee and its subcommittees. Feedback from quality assurance procedures, staff and student committees, National Student Survey and programme evaluations is used to monitor the effectiveness of information. The range of published information and stated processes for monitoring and review allow Expectation C to be met.

3.4 The team evaluated the extent and quality of information available to stakeholders, talked with students to confirm its accuracy, and gauged staff knowledge of approval and review systems. The College's website hosts a wide range of appropriate information, which

students find helpful in making the decision to study. Strategic documents are published online, including the College's Mission and Value Statement; Bolton College Higher Education Strategy; Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy; and quality assurance policies and processes. Complaints and appeals processes and policies are clearly explained and obtainable online.

3.5 While not providing the level of detail full programme specifications would, programmes have discrete sections listing entry requirements, awarding bodies and module titles. Widgets display key information set data on relevant programme pages, and past student survey data supplements this for some programmes. A high-quality prospectus provides applicants with detailed information about programmes, costs and the College's facilities. Information about awarding bodies is available both online and in print, with appropriate references to their role on specific programmes. Funding information and advice is published online, but an admissions policy is not publicly available. This omission has led to a recommendation under Expectation B2, paragraph 2.19.

3.6 Supporting documentation and students the team met confirmed induction arrangements are effective and used to highlight key information. A College Charter for Higher Education Students, developed in collaboration with the Higher Education Student Forum, contains clear commitments from the College and expectations of students.

3.7 The Higher Education Student Handbook contains useful, accurate and updated information and signposts students to policies and support services. Handbooks and minutes of College committees and working parties are available via a VLE. Programme handbooks and unit guides effectively summarise key policies, course features and assessment information. Students are provided with programme specifications, sometimes as an appendix to programme handbooks, although there is some variability in extensiveness. Staff are provided with both a College-wide Quality Assurance Handbook and a Higher Education Staff Guide.

3.8 As noted in Expectation B6, the prospectus, individual marketing leaflets and website (prior to the review visit) do not detail the accreditation of prior learning options available to students. Some programme pages on the College's website now contain a link to Pearson's broad academic regulations. This has led to a recommendation under Expectation B6, paragraph 2.51.

3.9 The College seeks approval from its awarding bodies and awarding organisation in line with its Operating Agreements. Awarding bodies' annual and periodic reviews consider information accuracy, and Link Tutors work with programme teams to update information. Public information and student handbooks are scrutinised during validation.

3.10 The Higher Education Operations Working Party actions its information review remit. Similarly, key documentation is reviewed during internal programme approval and as part of self-assessment reports. The College reviews the effectiveness of its marketing activities, including the Access to Higher Education information fair. The Higher Education Learning, Teaching and Quality Working Party instigates reviews and updates to handbooks. There is a timetable of documentation updates and publication. The VLE is monitored for completeness and level of engagement with students, and students confirm the general reliability and currency of information.

3.11 The ample range of information readily available and robust monitoring and approval systems for information ensure the College meets Expectation C and the risk is low.

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

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

3.12 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex two of the published handbook. The Expectation for this judgement area was met and the associated level of risk was low. There were no recommendations (although two recommendations in Expectations B2 and B6 relate to this section), affirmations or features of good practice. The review team therefore concludes that the quality of the information produced about its provision **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 Higher Education Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2013-16 has objectives in relation to enhancing the student experience, by setting key outcomes that serve to support both students and staff. The College presents a coherent and integrated framework and procedures for the learner journey, student engagement, student success and enhancing learning, teaching and assessment through the Higher Education Student Enhancement Framework. This framework combines all these elements, and can be read in conjunction with existing College frameworks and procedures which are in line with the Higher Education Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy.

4.2 The main mechanism for capturing issues that need enhancement is the College's self-assessment reports. A key element of teaching enhancement is through the observation of teaching, learning and enhancement. The strategies allow the Expectation about enhancement to be met.

4.3 The review team tested the policies through the examination of a number of documents and by talking to staff, students and employers. The main way of capturing issues that need improvement is through the annual course self-assessment reports, which include feedback from external examiners and students. The self-assessment reports are monitored and reviewed through the College's committee structure. The College action plans resulting from these reviews are tracked by a robust College system which is working effectively, leading to enhancement of the student experience.

4.4 The College encourages enhancement both through its staff development programme, an initiative called 'Take a Chance on Change' and also through a 'Teacher's Toolkit'. The 'Take a Chance on Change' development programme for learning and teaching uses a controlled experiments model that encourages staff to try new and innovative or alternative methods of teaching, learning and assessment. Staff individually and collaboratively reflect on what has worked and lessons learned. These adaptations are then shared more widely across the College through staff CPD sessions. The Teacher's Toolkit is a VLE course where tutors have the opportunity to improve their digital literacy via training delivered within the VLE site. Observation of teaching, learning and assessment is used not only to help each member of staff to improve the quality of their teaching, but also to share good practice where it is identified. This is done through a system of Advanced Practitioners identified through the observation process. These Advanced Practitioners then mentor staff who require development.

4.5 The College has a requirement for staff to be involved in CPD and provides an impressive and comprehensive range of staff development opportunities which can be undertaken annually. Full-time tutors undertake a minimum of 30 hours' CPD annually. Staff can apply for support to pursue subject updating or courses aligned to the strategic aims. Internally, there is a well-developed programme of higher education CPD, financial support for engagement with the UKPSF and encouragement to gain Higher Education Academy recognition. The College plans to share practice across the Greater Manchester area through a consortium of colleges. The range of opportunities staff are given to develop, share and adopt new and innovative practice is **good practice**.

4.6 The curriculum is enhanced in terms of employability, as all courses have initiatives that use employers and alumni to enhance the student experience through, for example, site visits and real industrial projects. The College informally engages with external subject specialists, and the Enterprise and Employability Group acts as a forum for considering curriculum design. Staff gave compelling examples of working with awarding bodies, the awarding organisation and employers to develop new programmes and assessments.

4.7 Careers staff offer good support to students in preparing them for employment with a bespoke series of workshops and resources. The resulting College approach provides opportunities for students to significantly enhance their employability.

4.8 There is a system of personal tutoring which is combined with Personal Development Plans to enable students to reflect on their learning. The College uses work-based learning on vocationally relevant programmes, highlighting to students the need to uphold professional standards. This is implemented through reflective assignments based on their experience and supported through guidance materials. The College also delivers leadership and team organisation skills activities.

4.9 The College's vocationally relevant programmes that make use of employers to enhance the student experience is **good practice**. In addition, the strategic approach, institutional commitment and opportunities provided to enhance student employability is **good practice**.

4.10 Particularly taking into account the whole-College culture, ethos and integrated approach to enhancement and the range of activities and policies to support student employability, the team concludes that the Expectation about enhancement is met and that the risk is low.

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

## Enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.11 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex two of the published handbook. The Expectation for this judgement area was met and the associated level of risk low. There were three features of good practice in this section, no affirmations and no recommendations. The College has a clear strategic and College-wide commitment to enhancement; there is a wide range of relevant staff development activities available to staff; and the whole-College ethos and design and delivery of programmes enhances student employability. The College has plans to development this still further. The College's internal quality assurance procedures, particularly the self-assessment reports and teacher observation system, constantly strive to drive up teaching standards and improve student employability and the student experience. The review team therefore concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities is **commended**.

## 5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

### Findings

5.1 The College's Enterprise and Employability Strategy clearly describes the functions of enterprise and employability and the impact on staff, students and employers is made clear. Enterprise-related skills are identified and inform the higher education curriculum across its provision, particularly for Personal Development modules. The Employability and Enterprise Group is responsible for implementing the Enterprise and Employability Strategy but notes some variation in representation from the curriculum areas.

5.2 The College has focused its provision on programmes for which there is a clear need within the industry. The College has a robust understanding of the need to develop its students' critical employability-related skills. The majority of the students enrolled on higher education programmes at the College are part-time and many are already in employment. Employability training is integral to all modules, largely in terms of workplace experience. The team were confident that all students have appropriate remote access to the VLE to assist them with their studies, particularly when they are based in the work environment.

5.3 A range of models are followed for different programmes to contextualise work aspects. An alumnus is being set up to facilitate progression links between current and past Police Studies students. In other programmes, such as Early Years and Childhood Studies, a period of practice is compulsory (20 hours per week, 200 hours in total). The content of the Computing and Gaming HND has been specifically designed to include commercial and employability modules to address industry-identified need. Construction students are actively involved in the design and determination of the infrastructure requirements of the STEM building.

5.4 To encourage students to maintain or even increase their level of employment while studying, the College provides a comprehensive set of employability initiatives. The College's careers service and student services support students in developing their employability skills. The Business Development Unit has a direct impact on the student experience through its sourcing of work placements. This activity has increased substantially over the past three academic years and is working effectively through the use of a CRM database. All workplaces are subject to due diligence checks and Health and Safety assessments. The College itself also offers employment opportunities, providing comprehensive student training within an industrial context. The College works with recruitment agencies and is currently exploring the voluntary work sector.

5.5 The College's Business Development Unit is a hub for employability-related information. The Business Development Unit provides market intelligence to support programme proposals and approvals, support for students seeking work-based educational opportunities and contacts for academic staff across all curriculum areas. The activity of the Business Development Unit has allowed the College to develop an innovative approach in which students' aspirations are matched to employers' identified needs rather than courses to careers.

5.6 There are two areas of good practice relating to student employability: the strategic approach, institutional commitment and opportunities provided to enhance student employability (Enhancement and Expectation B4), and the vocationally relevant programmes that make use of employers to enhance the student experience (Enhancement and Expectation B3).

5.7 Employers' forums exist within each sector of the College and take place once per semester. Employer engagement is evident at most levels; at the very least there is an open door policy at the College for employers. Employers are currently involved in the design of

the new STEM building, their input ensuring that its infrastructure matches current industry needs.

5.8 As noted under Expectation B4, effective use is made of professional bodies and employers at all stages of the programme design and validation process. The College has been proactive in recognising the need for employer and student input into the design and validation of its higher education programmes. This is evidenced by its recent updating of its new programme proposal form to include input from employers and students which the review team affirmed.

## 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 to 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](http://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/aboutus/glossary](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/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* (FHEQIS).

### **Good practice**

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

### **Learning opportunities**

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

### **Learning outcomes**

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

### **Multiple awards**

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

### **Operational definition**

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

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

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

**Programme specifications**

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

**Public information**

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

**Quality Code**

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

**Reference points**

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

**Subject benchmark statement**

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

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

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

**Threshold academic standard**

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

**Virtual learning environment (VLE)**

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

**Widening participation**

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

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