# Higher Education Review of Barking and Dagenham College

June 2015

## Contents

# About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Barking and Dagenham College. The review took place from 2 to 4 June 2015 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Liam Curran
- Paul Taylor
- Amy Woodgate (student reviewer)

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

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
  - the setting and maintenance of 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 Barking and Dagenham 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 2014-15 are Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement and Student Employability,[2] and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

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

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[1] The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code
[2] Higher Education Review themes:
www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106
[3] QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us.
[4] Higher Education Review web pages:
www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review

# Key findings

## QAA's judgements about Barking and Dagenham College

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Barking and Dagenham College.

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

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at Barking and Dagenham College.

- The comprehensive and integrated approach to supporting students in their learning and development (Expectation B4).
- The wide ranging and innovative initiatives aimed at developing student. employability and entrepreneurship (Expectation B4 and Enhancement).
- The high level of engagement with students and the College's timely response to the student voice (Expectation B5).

## Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Barking and Dagenham College.

By September 2015:

- articulate a College-wide approach for the recognition of prior learning (Expectation B6)
- set clear expectations for the provision of feedback on work that is submitted late, and communicate this to students (Expectation B6).

By January 2016:

- strengthen and formalise the processes for the monitoring and oversight of work-based learning (Expectation B10)
- ensure the completeness and consistency of programme information for prospective applicants on the website (Expectations B2 and C).

By July 2016:

- in collaboration with awarding bodies, define clearly the status of work-based learning within programmes (Expectation B10)
- develop further the higher education self-evaluation process to make more effective use of quality assurance procedures in identifying enhancement priorities (Enhancement).

## Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The implementation of a periodic review process for Pearson Higher National programmes (Expectation B8).

## Theme: Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

The College identifies student engagement as a strategic priority and has a range of well established mechanisms for achieving this, including the student representative system, student surveys, and informal feedback. Student views are used at various levels of the College to make planned improvements to learning opportunities. The College responds to the student voice in a timely and effective manner, ensuring students are kept informed of any action taken in response to their feedback. The College considers student engagement as an ongoing priority for enhancement with plans to further strengthen current arrangements.

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

# About Barking and Dagenham College

Barking and Dagenham College (the College) is a large general further education provider with some 12,400 students. Most of the College's provision is delivered from its Rush Green campus located between Romford and Dagenham, with a small number of programmes being delivered at other smaller sites. The College serves a local population characterised by high unemployment rates and below average school attainment. Aware of these challenges the College's higher education offer is intended to raise aspirations and support local residents into employment. The College's mission is 'to be outstanding in education, training and partnerships'.

The College has 337 students enrolled on a higher education programme within scope for this review, of which 22 per cent are part-time. The higher education offer at the College comprises a range of foundation and bachelor's degrees, including top-up programmes, a Master of Business Administration (MBA), a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), and several Higher National Certificates and Diplomas (HNCs/HNDs). These programmes are offered through partnerships with five degree-awarding bodies: Canterbury Christ Church University; Glyndŵr University; the University for the Creative Arts; the University of East London; and the University of Northampton. Higher National programmes are awarded by the awarding organisation Pearson. At the time of the review visit, the College was in the process of teaching out provision delivered through the University of Northampton, and since the 2013-14 academic year all new students are enrolled on equivalent programmes awarded by Glyndŵr University.

Since the last QAA review in 2011 significant investment has been made in the College's estates, including both the redevelopment of the existing Rush Green campus and the acquisition of new campus buildings elsewhere. The College has also expanded its range of higher education provision to support progression from its existing programmes and to meet local demand for qualifications in other subject areas, such as engineering. The partnership with Glyndŵr University was established in August 2014.

The College is aware of the challenges in recruitment presented by external changes to the funding of higher education, but considers that the removal of student number control will provide opportunities for growth. Widening participation is a priority for the College and it continues to support local residents in gaining entry to higher education.

The College's last review by QAA identified four features of good practice, and one advisable and seven desirable recommendations. The present review team found that the College had generally taken effective and timely action in response to the recommendations made in the previous review report. The Higher Education Strategy Group has been subsumed into the Senior Leadership Team to streamline oversight of higher education. Strategies in the areas of learning, teaching and assessment have been developed further to provide an increased focus on higher education. More accurate data is now made available to course teams and these teams are required to reflect on this data in the annual review of programmes. The record-keeping of meetings has improved with more structured and detailed minutes. Student entitlement to personal tutorials is more clearly defined, although the team found that there is some variability in the experience of students across different programmes (see Expectation B4). Prospective students are now provided with more detailed information on fees, although the review team found that other aspects of programme-related information could be improved (see recommendation in paragraph 3.3).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.1 The College's degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation are ultimately responsible for setting threshold academic standards and ensuring that qualifications take appropriate account of external reference points. The nature of the College's partnership and associated responsibilities for maintaining academic standards varies across each of the awarding partners. Staff involved in the design of programmes adhere to the relevant degree-awarding body's quality assurance processes to ensure proposals for new programmes are appropriately developed prior to formal approval. For Higher National programmes, Pearson provides generic programme specifications and ensures that learning outcomes reflect the appropriate level of the qualification.

1.2 The team tested the College's approach to meeting this Expectation by reviewing programme specifications, documentary evidence of programme approval events and written agreements with degree-awarding bodies. The review team also held meetings with senior staff and academic staff.

1.3 For validated programmes, staff use *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and Subject Benchmark Statements to set learning outcomes and design assessment tasks. The review team found

that appropriate consideration is given to the academic level of the qualification and other external reference points before proposals are put forward for external validation. External examiners confirm ongoing alignment to relevant external reference points.

1.4     For qualifications designed by the degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation, staff make appropriate use of programme specifications as a reference point in the learning, teaching and assessment of programmes. Programme specifications vary according to the degree-awarding body's requirements but in each case the qualification is positioned at the appropriate level and there is reference to Subject Benchmark Statements.

1.5     Discussions with College staff confirmed that programme teams have extensive experience of developing and writing programmes, and that they are appropriately supported by link tutors at the corresponding University. Academic staff demonstrated a high level of awareness of external reference points, including the use of the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark*. Programme teams are also supported locally by the College's Higher Education Office (HE Office), which ensures staff have access to the latest version of degree-awarding body regulations and provides support in interpreting these requirements.

1.6     Overall the team concludes that through close adherence to awarding partners' quality assurance processes the College takes appropriate account of external reference points in the maintenance of academic standards. Therefore, Expectation A1 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.7      For university programmes, the College follows the academic regulations and regulatory frameworks of each degree-awarding body. For Higher National programmes, the College has developed its own processes for assessment, including the operation of examination boards, which meet Pearson requirements.

1.8      Additionally, the College has its own internal structures to manage the quality assurance of all higher education provision. The dedicated HE Office has operational responsibility for leading and coordinating all higher education provision. The deliberative committee structure comprises the Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) responsible for setting higher education strategy; the Higher Educational Operational Group which implements College strategy and has oversight of the quality assurance of higher education; and Academic Board, a subcommittee of SLT, which monitors the performance of all College programmes.

1.9      The review team tested this Expectation by reviewing degree-awarding body agreements, terms of reference for College committees, a sample of minutes of meetings and assessment boards. The team also met senior and academic staff.

1.10      The College has clear and well established structures for managing its higher education provision and these operate with due regard to each degree-awarding body's requirements. Staff are made aware of their expected involvement in relevant committees through a Higher Education Staff Handbook issued at the start of each academic year and updated annually. Minutes of meetings confirm that there is comprehensive oversight of higher education at both programme and College level. College-wide committees often give separate and detailed consideration to higher education-related issues.

1.11      There is sound evidence that the College adheres to University processes for the award of academic credit and teaching staff participate in assessment boards held at the corresponding degree-awarding body. For Higher National programmes, there is a rigorous system in place to govern the award of academic credit at module and programme level, and assessment decisions are overseen by the Higher Education Examination Board. The latter does not have authority to alter assessment decisions but it monitors and reviews student achievement across all higher education programmes.

1.12      The review team concludes that the College has appropriate internal quality assurance and governance processes to fulfil its responsibilities to its awarding partners. Therefore the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.13     The responsibility for producing and maintaining a definitive record of each programme, in the form of programme specifications, ultimately resides with degree-awarding bodies. However, for certain validated programmes College staff produce programme specifications using the degree-awarding body's prescribed format, and these are formally approved during validation events. For Higher National awards, the College employs standardised information produced by Pearson to develop contextualised programme specifications that reflect the local context. The College is responsible for ensuring these specifications are used as reference points in the delivery and assessment of programmes, and that information in programme specifications is communicated to staff and students.

1.14     In testing this Expectation, the team reviewed a sample of programme specifications across the full range of provision, records of degree-awarding body approval events and the College website. The team met senior and teaching staff to assess the College's adherence to delegated operational standards. The review team also met students to ascertain their views on the information that is made available to them.

1.15     Programme specifications contain programme aims, learning outcomes and module descriptors, and make explicit reference to external reference points. These specifications also detail the award title and intermediate exit awards. Changes to programme specifications are managed effectively through the relevant degree-awarding body's processes. Staff the team met were aware of these processes and some had been involved in instigating changes to programmes based on the annual and ongoing review of the curriculum. Subsequent changes are then cascaded to programme teams and students.

1.16     Programme specifications are made available to students via the College's virtual learning environment (VLE), and in most cases are also published on the website for prospective applicants. Information in specifications is made more accessible to students through the provision of programme handbooks which include detailed information about the aims and learning outcomes, and the methods of learning, teaching and assessment. Students whom the team met confirmed that information about their programme of study is clear and accessible.

1.17     The College makes appropriate use of programme specifications as the definitive reference point for the delivery of qualifications on behalf of its degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.18    The College's approach to programme approval essentially comprises two stages: internal consideration of the business case; and external approval by the degree-awarding body or awarding organisation. Prior to approaching a degree-awarding body for approval, the College's academic staff work in teams to develop proposals for new programmes. In the first instance this requires the completion of a College form to outline the rationale and demand for offering a particular higher education programme. Following approval of the initial proposal by an internal course approval panel comprising senior managers, staff then undertake more detailed planning and prepare documentation for submission to the degree-awarding body. The academic standards of the award are then scrutinised through a university orchestrated approval event. These procedures are intended to ensure that the programme aims, learning outcomes and module descriptors are set at the appropriate level and aligned to the FHEQ.

1.19    The team tested this Expectation by examining completed College programme approval forms, programme specifications and records of degree-awarding body validation and revalidation events. The team also explored the operation of programme approval processes with senior and academic staff.

1.20    The College's pro forma for the approval of new programmes, although not very detailed, acts as a check for ensuring only those programmes that are viable and can be appropriately resourced are submitted to the awarding partner. The College relies on the relevant university's processes for a full and thorough evaluation of the academic standards of the programme. Although not a formally documented part of the College's approval process, the team was informed that documentation prepared by programme teams is first checked internally by senior managers before submission to the degree-awarding body.

1.21    For validated programmes designed by the College, there is evidence that staff undertake a rigorous mapping exercise to ensure academic standards are set at the correct level. Documentation submitted to awarding bodies as part of the approval process is comprehensive, conforms to the particular university's requirements and gives consideration to the maintenance of academic standards of the award. Records of successful degree-awarding body approval events show the College's high level of preparation. The College also ensures that any recommendations arising from the event are addressed in accordance with required timescales.

1.22    The College is effective in fulfilling its responsibilities to its awarding partners for programme approval. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

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

## Findings

1.23     The College follows its degree-awarding bodies' procedures for the design, approval and marking of assessment. These are set out in each degree-awarding body's quality assurance policies which are made available online for staff. For university awards, the assessment strategies for individual programmes are either predetermined by the awarding body or approved during the formal validation event held at the College. Academic staff are expected to adhere to programme specifications which identify the methods by which learning outcomes are assessed.

1.24     For Higher National programmes, the College is responsible for designing contextualised assessment tasks based on the generic learning outcomes set by Pearson. The College maintains the security of its assessment processes for these programmes through internal verification of assignment briefs and assessed work.

1.25     Assessment boards provide a further check on the security of decision-making processes for assessment. For Higher National programmes these are operated by the College at programme-level in accordance with established terms of reference. For all university programmes, assessment boards are convened by the relevant degree-awarding body and attended by College staff. The College also operates a Higher Education Assessment Board to oversee the award of academic credit. This Board is held at the end of each academic year and has a rotating external chair.

1.26     The team reviewed this Expectation by examining the College's processes for assessment, programme specifications, records of assessment boards and evidence of verification processes. The team also met a range of staff and students.

1.27     For university programmes, there is sound evidence that the College adheres to the relevant degree-awarding body's assessment requirements. Assessment tasks are explicitly linked to learning outcomes and align with approved programme specifications. Processes for moderation (in the case of university programmes) and internal verification (in the case of Higher National awards) are robust and operated consistently. External examiner and verifier reports confirm the appropriateness of assessment processes in maintaining academic standards. Staff the team met were conversant with the processes for assessment and the requirements of the degree-awarding bodies with which they worked.

1.28     Assessment boards for Higher National programmes provide a further check on assessment decisions, ensuring the awarding organisation's criteria have been applied appropriately. There is also evidence that College staff attend assessment boards for their programmes held at the corresponding university.

1.29      In summary, the College is effectively managing its responsibilities for ensuring that academic credit and awards are based on the achievement of relevant learning outcomes. The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.30    The College's awarding partners set out requirements for the annual review of programmes. The College produces an annual report for each higher education programme which involves the completion of either a university-devised template or the College's own pro forma. Reports are completed by the programme leader in conjunction with teaching staff and are discussed at course team meetings. These reports are then checked by curriculum managers and the HE Office prior to submission to the degree-awarding body.

1.31    Periodic review for university programmes is operated in accordance with each degree-awarding body's processes, as laid out in its quality assurance documentation. For Higher National programmes, Pearson is responsible for ensuring the ongoing validity of qualifications.

1.32    The team tested this Expectation through a review of completed annual programme review reports, minutes of course team meetings and external examiner reports. The team also met senior and teaching staff.

1.33    The College has developed its own documentation for annual programme review, although this is not in use across all higher education programmes as certain programmes still conform to the awarding body's template. However, in all cases annual review reports give consideration to the maintenance of academic standards. Reports make appropriate use of external examiner reports, student achievement and progression data, and staff feedback to evaluate the extent to which academic standards are being maintained.

1.34    Overall, the team found that the College's operation of annual programme review is effective and consistently applied across all higher education provision. The sample of programme review reports examined by the team were completed thoroughly and discussed at relevant committees. Actions arising from annual review are clearly documented and progress against action plans is monitored by programme teams with oversight by the HE Office.

1.35    For university programmes, the periodic review of the academic standards of awards is the responsibility of degree-awarding bodies. The team found that the College is thorough in its approach to preparing required documentation for submission to the degree-awarding body. Where periodic review involves the revalidation of an award designed by the College, there is also evidence that staff undertake a comprehensive review of the programme structure to ensure the ongoing currency of academic standards.

1.36    The team considers the College's processes for monitoring and review of programmes to be sound and rigorously applied, and concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.37      Externality in relation to the setting and maintenance of academic standards is the responsibility of degree-awarding bodies and Pearson. Each degree-awarding body appoints an external member to programme approval panels and external examiners for the annual review of each programme delivered at the College. The College's main responsibilities in meeting this Expectation are to ensure appropriate consideration is given to the feedback provided by externals on the management and delivery of programmes.

1.38      The College also engages directly with external stakeholders in the development and review of programmes. This principally occurs through dialogue with employers during the development of initial proposals for new provision and through the appointment of an external academic to chair the Higher Education Assessment Board.

1.39      The team tested this Expectation through a review of records of programme approval events, external examiner reports, annual programme review reports and minutes of the Higher Education Assessment Board. The team also met a range of senior and teaching staff.

1.40      Individual programme teams have good links with employers and feedback from industry is used to inform the portfolio of higher education offered by the College and the design of individual programmes. This dialogue often takes the form of informal discussions, although the team heard of one example where feedback questionnaires were sent to employers in the period leading up to the development of a new programme.

1.41      College staff clearly value the role of external academics and industry experts on approval panels operated by the degree-awarding bodies. Reports from these approval events confirm that universities seek appropriate input from external representatives, and that the College takes effective action in responding to actions raised by the panel.

1.42      The sample of external examiner reports reviewed by the team confirm that academic standards are being maintained by the College on behalf of its awarding partners. The College has an effective system for responding to actions identified by external examiners and this ensures that qualifications continue to align to UK threshold standards.

1.43      The Higher Education Assessment Board, although not a decision-making body, is also used by the College to provide an external view on the maintenance of academic standards. The purpose of the Board is to receive and review individual student achievement profiles at the end of the year, and the use of an external chair enables wider comparisons with the sector.

1.44      The College takes steps to engage directly with external stakeholders, and also fulfils its responsibilities to its awarding partners for making appropriate use of the expertise

provided by external approval panel members and external examiners. The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated risk is low.

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

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

1.45     In reaching its judgement about threshold academic standards, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All expectations in this judgement area have been met the associated level of risk low in each case. The College's main responsibilities for maintaining academic standards are for adhering to the policies and processes of its degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation, which it does effectively.

1.46     There are no features of good practice or recommendations in this area. The review team concludes therefore that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and other awarding organisations **meets** UK expectations.

# 2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

**Findings**

2.1     The processes for programme approval are described in paragraph 1.18.

2.2     The College's responsibilities for programme design vary according to the agreement with each degree-awarding body. For certain university programmes the College leads on the design of the qualification working collaboratively with link tutors at the partner University. These proposals are then formally approved through the relevant degree-awarding body's quality assurance processes. For Higher National awards, the College's responsibilities are limited to the selection of optional units to supplement mandatory modules in providing the required credit for the qualification.

2.3     In testing this Expectation the team reviewed completed programme approval documentation, reports from degree-awarding body approval events, and the Staff Handbook. The review team also met senior and academic staff, students, and a representative from one of the degree-awarding bodies.

2.4     The College operates an effective internal programme approval process which involves scrutiny of the initial proposal at a number of levels, including sign-off by a formal panel. Although the College's pro forma for new programme approvals does not require detailed commentary, for example on programme content and structure, it was evident from meetings with staff that new provision involves extensive dialogue between teaching, senior and university staff. The College's diligence in preparing for the delivery of a new programme is evidenced by its successful track record of approval and re-approval by its degree-awarding bodies.

2.5     Within the College's Higher Education Staff Handbook externality is a prominent feature that is expected in programme design and approval. Programme teams make good use of feedback from their links with industry, for example the software purchased by the College to teach students on the Foundation Degree in 3D Design is the same as that used by local employers. Student views are also sought on the development of new provision through informal discussions between programme teams and existing students in similar subject areas.

2.6     Staff involved in the development of new programmes are adequately supported through a number of sources. The College's HE Office works closely with programme teams to ensure the correct quality assurance procedures are followed. Staff are also provided with comprehensive written information on the programme approval process through the Staff Handbook. Teaching staff the team met also emphasised the positive relationship they share with degree-awarding bodies and the importance of working closely with link tutors in developing new programmes.

2.7     The team concludes that the College operates effective processes for programme design and approval that give appropriate consideration to the quality of learning opportunities. Therefore the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.8      The College has a detailed admissions policy which outlines its commitment to providing a clear and consistent approach to the admissions process for students. All selected applicants are required to attend an interview with a member of staff from the curriculum team. Information about the College's higher education offer, including the admissions policy, is made available through the public website. Criteria for selecting applicants is set by the degree-awarding bodies and communicated to prospective applicants in published information. Under the collaborative agreements with its degree-awarding bodies, the College is responsible for handling all student enquiries, processing applications, conducting interviews and making admissions decisions.

2.9      The College Principal and Strategic Leadership Team have responsibility for reviewing the admissions policy, while the Admissions Manager is responsible for the consistent implementation and monitoring of procedures. Within the admission policy there is also scope for prospective applicants to make a formal complaint to the Head of Higher Education.

2.10      The team tested the College's operation of its admissions policy through a review of the information made available to prospective applicants, including the College website and the Higher Education Course Guide, and through meetings with a range of staff and students. The team also met teaching and support staff involved in the admissions process, and with students to understand their applicant experience.

2.11      The team found that appropriate information is made available to prospective applicants to enable them to make an informed choice. Information made available on the website and in the Course Guide reflects degree-awarding body requirements. Students the team met reported that they received adequate information throughout the application process to make an informed decision and commented positively on the support they received during the process. However, the team noted a number of inconsistencies in the completeness and detail of information made available through the website for individual programmes (see recommendation under Expectation C).

2.12      All interviews are conducted by the programme leader and handled in accordance with published procedures. Records of interviews are kept using standardised templates to ensure consistency in the decision-making process. Programme leaders the team met felt adequately supported and trained by both College and University colleagues to conduct applicant interviews. Other support staff involved in the admissions process are also trained in processing applications and there is close collaboration between teaching and administrative teams. Records of accepted students are shared with degree-awarding bodies to ensure thorough oversight of the process. Students the team met confirmed that the application process was straightforward.

2.13      The College is committed to widening participation and accepts applications from students with a non-traditional academic background. However, the opportunities for gaining entry to a programme through the recognition of prior learning are not always explicitly or clearly promoted to prospective applicants. For example, some programme specifications

mention the acceptance of non-traditional applications, but these documents are not consistently published on the website for every programme (see recommendation under Expectation C). Staff the team met confirmed that opportunities for the recognition of prior learning are often addressed during interview, but this is after a student has submitted an application.

2.14    Annual programme reports, which include applicant and recruitment statistics, are reflected on and considered by the Strategic Leadership Team and the HE Office. Feedback on the admissions process is also obtained through an induction survey, the results of which are considered by the admissions team to make improvements for the following year.

2.15    The review team concludes that the College operates effective procedures for the admission of students and these are consistently applied and monitored. While information to prospective applicants could be improved, an area which is addressed under Expectation C, current arrangements enable students to make an informed choice. Therefore the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.16    The College's approach to learning and teaching is articulated in its Higher Education Learning and Teaching Strategy, which was developed in response to the previous QAA review to give separate consideration to higher education. There is a clear emphasis in the Strategy on developing and promoting high quality learning opportunities. Strategies for learning, teaching, and assessment at programme level are captured in programme specifications. The Higher Educational Operational Group is the main vehicle for reviewing learning opportunities and is responsible for implementing College-wide strategies set by the Strategic Leadership Team. Evaluation of the quality of learning and teaching also occurs through annual programme review and at College-level through an overarching higher education self-evaluation document.

2.17    Support for enhancing teaching practice is also outlined in the Higher Education Learning and Teaching Strategy and operationalised through the staff development policy. The College operates a peer observation scheme to encourage academic staff to reflect on and further develop their practice.

2.18    The team tested this Expectation by reviewing the College's strategies and policies, annual programme review reports, minutes of the Higher Education Operational Group and Strategic Leadership Team, recent higher education self-evaluations and evidence of peer review. Meetings were also held with senior staff, teaching staff and students across the full range of higher education provision.

2.19    Minutes of the Higher Education Operational Group demonstrate that this Group is effective in its role of monitoring and enhancing learning opportunities. Membership of the Group includes staff from each of the higher education programmes and elected student representatives. The work of this Group is supplemented by annual reviews of programmes which provide a more detailed evaluation of the quality of learning for a particular award. Regular course team meetings ensure that the quality of the student learning experience is kept under review throughout the academic year, and these meetings are also attended by student representatives. The College draws on a wide range of information in its review of learning and teaching. Sources of information include student achievement and progression data, external examiner reports, results of student feedback surveys and the outcomes of peer observations.

2.20    Academic staff are provided with a number of development opportunities to support their teaching practices. These include both College-based briefing and training days as well as access to events hosted by partner universities. Recent staff development activities have focused on the Quality Code. Feedback from College-wide evaluation processes, including the outcomes of peer reviews, is also a regular feature at staff development days. Staff the team met valued these days and considered them to be an effective method of sharing good practice. Staff also felt well supported in meeting their individual development needs, including support to undertake formal qualifications.

2.21     Since 2012-13 the College has operated a separate peer observation process for higher education which is explicitly mapped to the Quality Code. The process encourages staff to reflect on their own practice and provides an opportunity to identify strategic priorities for development. Outcomes from observations are regularly collated and analysed in order to identify any cross-College actions that need to be addressed by the HE Office. Staff the team met who had engaged with the process reported positive experiences, and in particular valued the opportunities to learn from other subject areas through cross-discipline observations.

2.22     Staff and students the team met confirmed that appropriate learning resources are made available for their particular programme. This includes the provision of specialist resources in certain subject areas. The College has a comprehensive VLE which is used to provide learning material to students and more general information about the College. The College's e-learning team regularly review VLE sites to ensure minimum requirements are met. Individual programme sites are awarded either gold, silver or bronze status, and staff from the e-learning team work with programme teams to support them in achieving the next level up. Students the team met considered the VLE to be a useful, reliable and accurate source of information for their modules and programmes.

2.23     The review team concludes that the College has effective processes for the review and enhancement of learning opportunities, pedagogical practice and the learning environment. These processes make appropriate use of information and are adequately informed by the student voice. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.24     The Higher Education Strategy, which is underpinned by a set of strategic objectives, outlines the College's commitment to providing high quality academic and pastoral support. Student entitlements are also documented in the Student Charter and in the Higher Education Learning and Teaching Strategy. The College has clearly defined administrative and academic roles to support students in achieving their qualification. All higher education students are provided with an induction at the start of their period of study. Ongoing support is then provided through tutorials with academic staff and services provided by the central administrative team. In response to the last QAA review the College has developed a formal tutorial policy which sets each student's entitlement to timetabled tutorials.

2.25     The review team evaluated the College's arrangements for enabling student development and achievement through a review of formal policies in this area, minutes of relevant committees, evidence of support services and personal development planning. The team also met academic staff, support staff and students.

2.26     Students are provided with a comprehensive induction which includes information on both the College and their specific programme of study. Students the team met confirmed that support for transitioning between levels is provided in their induction to familiarise themselves with the expectations of higher level study. Students that progress internally from within the College are offered a useful summer school to develop their study skills before starting their programme. Students complete a feedback survey on their induction experience, the results of which are used to make improvements for the following year.

2.27     The format of personal tutorials varies according to the needs of each programme. Group tutorials tend to be used with larger cohorts of students and individual sessions to review portfolios of creative work. Tutorials are used to support students' academic development and a record of the meeting is kept to aid personal development planning. Students the team met confirmed that they had timetabled tutorial time but a few students reported that tutorials had been cancelled or that group tutorials were not supervised by a staff member. However, overall, students felt well supported by academic staff and many commented on the positive way in which tutors challenged them to develop their academic potential and to achieve better grades.

2.28     The College offers a comprehensive range of additional support services, including additional learning support, counselling and careers advice. There is a close and collaborative working relationship between academic and administrative staff to ensure students are provided with appropriate support. This includes the provision of one-to-one counselling sessions and careers advice or group tutorials to meet the needs of a particular group of students. For example, the review team heard of examples where academic staff liaised with the administrative team to deliver additional sessions on academic referencing. While not all students the team met had accessed these support services those that had reported positive experiences. The College is taking steps to promote the availability of support services to higher education students to encourage further uptake. Stalls are set out at induction to advertise the full range of services available at the College and these are located in close proximity to one another to make them more accessible. Feedback on support services is also embedded into programme evaluation processes. Staff involved in

providing these services also use an evaluation of their own data collected on the types of support provided to identify thematic issues that can be addressed more strategically. The comprehensive and integrated approach to supporting students in their learning and development is **good practice**.

2.29　　Developing students' employability and entrepreneurial skills is a strategic priority. Many programmes include opportunities for work placements as an integrated part of the programme. There are also close links with employers to ensure that both curricular and extracurricular learning opportunities are closely aligned to the employment sector and enable students to develop current vocational skills. A number of programmes make regular use of guest speakers from industry, and students who have been exposed to these opportunities find this a useful way of linking theoretical learning to practice.

2.30　　Significant strategic investments have been made to set up College-based facilities specifically geared towards enhancing student employability. The College established a training hub (iCreate@BDC) to provide a creative space for students where business ideas can be developed through direct interaction with local businesses. Another initiative is Pitch on Demand (POD), an entrepreneurial zone that allows students to operate in a workplace-like environment and makes use of guest speakers and live briefs to help students develop a range of skills, including team working. Although these opportunities are not a formal part of the curriculum they are highly regarded by staff and students as a creative way of providing direct links to industry and developing skills that will develop students' employability. Staff also promote external competitions to students and encourage them to bid for specific work projects run by local employers. The wide-ranging and innovative initiatives aimed at developing student employability and entrepreneurship is **good practice**.

2.31　　The College has a number of mechanisms to support students in developing their academic, personal and professional potential. In particular, students are provided with comprehensive support for learning and are encouraged to develop their employability skills through a range of initiatives. The team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.32     The College's approach to student engagement is articulated in the Student Charter and the recently developed Higher Education Student Engagement Strategy. The latter aims to give students an active role in the development, management and governance of the College. A range of formal and informal mechanisms exist for engaging with the student voice. There is a formal student representative system, and representatives are members of course team meetings, a Higher Education Student Forum (HE Student Forum) and the Higher Education Operational Group. There are also a number of surveys in place to obtain feedback from the wider student body, the results of which are analysed by the relevant body within the College. Ongoing informal feedback is gained through other student-facing mechanisms, such as personal tutorials and interaction with support staff.

2.33     The team evaluated the effectiveness of processes for engaging students through a review of minutes of meetings attended by student representatives, evidence of feedback surveys, annual programme review reports and the higher education self-evaluation document. The team also met staff, and a range of students, both representatives and non-representatives.

2.34     Since 2013-14 the College has made improvements to student engagement, including improved representation in quality assurance mechanisms and enhanced opportunities for students to participate in decision-making processes. The number of student representatives elected and engaged with on a regular basis has increased since the last QAA review.

2.35     Students are active participants in their learning experience and the College ensures their voice is heard via both formal and informal mechanisms. The HE Forum is seen by staff and students as the main vehicle for eliciting student feedback. The Forum is used to brief students on developments in the College, action taken in response to their feedback and to obtain their views on the quality of higher education provision. Although most matters raised are of a non-academic nature, there is a clearly documented action plan with resolution dates and progress updates, this is a useful way to report to students in a formal, documented manner. Students the team met recognised the HE Student Forum as the main mechanism for influencing change in the College. The Forum also provides opportunities for student involvement in more strategic developments, for example the recent redesign of the HE Zone was influenced by issues raised at HE Student Forum meetings.

2.36     Minutes of course team meetings also have 'student voice' as a standing agenda item and representatives are invited to provide programme-specific feedback. There is evidence of prompt action being taken in response to issues raised by students to make improvements to programme delivery. Examples include changes to the timing of assessment to rationalise workload and changes to the order in which units are delivered to suit students' needs. It was evident from meetings with staff that they encourage student feedback, value the contributions students make and enhance learning opportunities in response to the student voice. The high level of engagement with students and the College's timely response to the student voice is **good practice**.

2.37     Feedback surveys are used consistently as a means of engaging with the collective student voice. Students are encouraged to participate in post-induction surveys, mid-year

course surveys and module evaluations. The results of these surveys are evaluated by the Higher Education Operational Group, and programme-specific issues are addressed through annual programme reviews and discussions at course team meetings.

2.38    Student representatives are not currently provided with any formal training, but instead new representatives are briefed on their role at the start of each HE Student Forum. While this is repetitive for longer-standing members, representatives found the briefing useful and felt well supported by the HE Office in fulfilling their role.

2.39    The review team concludes that a range of mechanisms exist for student engagement and these are working effectively with good evidence of the College's responsiveness to the student voice. Therefore, this Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

### Findings

2.40      Assessment and feedback are clear priorities in the College's Higher Education Strategy, which places a strong emphasis on the provision of a high quality learning, teaching and assessment experience. The Higher Education Learning and Teaching Strategy also sets out entitlements for assessment. These expectations include the delivery of well-planned programmes of study with clear objectives and appropriate assessment design that includes formative and summative methods. These high level statements are operationalised through programme specifications and briefs for individual assessment tasks.

2.41      The assessment of all higher education programmes is undertaken in accordance with awarding partners' requirements. For university programmes, the College does not have its own College-wide assessment policy; instead staff refer directly to each degree-awarding body's quality assurance procedures. These are made available to staff online and to students through programme handbooks and assessment briefs. For Higher National programmes, Pearson sets out expectations for assessment and centres are then expected to develop their own policies. Consequently, the College has produced its own policy for the assessment and internal verification of Higher National programmes. Students enrolled on these programmes are also provided with a generic guide to assessment.

2.42      Arrangements for the operation of assessment boards are described in paragraph 1.25.

2.43      In testing the College's processes for assessment, the review team reviewed degree-awarding body policies, College strategies, programme specifications, programme handbooks, sample assignment briefs, evidence of internal verification and external examiner reports. In addition, meetings were held with senior, academic and support staff, and students.

2.44      Students are provided with clear and comprehensive information on learning outcomes and assessment methods through programme specifications, and course and module handbooks. For university programmes, these handbooks also include standard degree-awarding body information on assessment regulations, academic appeals and guidelines for academic practice. Equivalent information is provided to Higher National students through the student guide to assessment. Students the team met reported that assessment strategies used by their tutors are varied and provide them with appropriate opportunities to demonstrate the achievement of programme learning outcomes. Assessment methods include presentations, live project work, and written assignments and examinations.

2.45      The College has robust mechanisms for ensuring the parity of assessment. These include moderation and internal verification processes, the exact arrangements for which vary according to the requirements of each awarding body and the awarding organisation. For University programmes, the appropriateness of assessment design is confirmed during validation and staff are supported by link tutors to adhere to awarding body guidance.

For Higher National programmes, assessment tasks are explicitly linked to Pearson's assessment criteria, and all assignment briefs are internally verified prior to their first use. External examiner reports reviewed by the team also confirm that the design and conduct of assessment is appropriate.

2.46　　Criteria for the assessment of prior learning are determined by awarding partners, and College staff refer directly to these policies. Information on the opportunities for the recognition of prior learning is briefly mentioned to students in handbooks for university programmes, but is not referenced in handbooks for Higher National programmes or in the Student Guide to Assessment. In the absence of a College-wide policy it was unclear to the team how staff and students would know how the process operated or how students could access these opportunities. While the team acknowledges that staff must refer to criteria prescribed by awarding partners to make assessment decisions on the recognition of prior learning, the College has responsibilities for managing the process locally. For example, the Pearson policy on the recognition of prior learning sets out broad expectations, but it makes clear that centres are expected to develop their own contextualised policy with identified roles and responsibilities. Although the team is satisfied that in practice these applications are dealt with appropriately by College staff, there is a need for greater clarity in this area. The team **recommends** that the College articulates a College-wide approach for the recognition of prior learning.

2.47　　Assessment literacy is developed through information provided at induction and in handbooks, and also by academic staff during teaching sessions. Students the team met commented on the challenges of understanding the language of assessment briefs and criteria. Academic staff play an important role in explaining how criteria should be interpreted and what is required to achieve a higher grade. Students find this verbal contextualisation helpful. Referencing skills are also developed through tutorials and specific sessions delivered by staff in the central administrative team. Students are regularly reminded of the need to adopt good academic practice and are supported in avoiding plagiarism through the use of anti-plagiarism software.

2.48　　The College has a policy of providing feedback within three working weeks across all its higher education programmes. Students the team met confirmed that generally work is received within this timeframe, and in some cases within 10 working days. Students also reported that feedback is detailed, constructive and supports their personal development. Staff are available to provide further explanations on how work has been assessed and the reasons for a particular grade. However, several students the team met across different higher education programmes reported that they had not received feedback on work that was submitted late, or in some cases feedback was provided but after the end of the academic year. Teaching staff the team met were of the view that all work is marked and returned within three working weeks of the date of submission. Written information about entitlements to feedback on work that is submitted late is also unclear. The team therefore **recommends** that the College sets clear expectations for the provision of feedback on work that is submitted late, and communicates this to students.

2.49　　Enhancement of the assessment process is through end-of-year programme reviews which reflect on student achievement data and the feedback provided by external examiners. There is also evidence of changes to assessment in response to student feedback. For example, on one programme the assessment strategy of two similar units was combined to reduce the assessment burden.

2.50　　The review team is satisfied that overall the College operates effective processes for the design, conduct and review of assessment. Processes for assessment are conducted in accordance with awarding body requirements and students are provided with appropriate opportunities to demonstrate the achievement of learning outcomes. The team has identified

two areas for improvement but both of these relate to the need to develop or update documentation and in the view of the team presents a low level of associated risk.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.51    In all cases the degree-awarding bodies and Pearson are responsible for the selection, appointment and induction of external examiners. The College is expected to respond to any actions raised by external examiners in their annual report. There is a clearly established system for handling external examiner reports. These are received centrally by the HE Office and then circulated to curriculum teams for detailed consideration. Oversight of the process is through a tracking system, which takes the form of a spreadsheet and logs the recommendations made in each report and the action being taken. Staff also provide a written response to the examiner detailing the actions to be taken.

2.52    The College expects external examiner reports to be uploaded to the VLE for student access and to be discussed at course team meetings where student representatives are present.

2.53    The team tested this expectation through an evaluation of external examiner reports, minutes of assessment boards, annual programme review reports and evidence of the external examiner tracking system. The team also met staff and students.

2.54    There is a robust system in place for making effective use of external examiners. Recommendations made by external examiners are responded to through an action plan developed by the programme team and monitored by the HE Office using a tracking system. This also enables any cross-College themes to be identified and addressed through the Higher Education Operational Group. For university programmes, detailed written responses are also provided to the external examiner.

2.55    There is evidence that external examiner feedback is also used to enhance programmes. Staff the team met valued the role of external examiners and worked with them in a supportive capacity rather than just for the purpose of verifying academic standards. Advice from external examiners has been used to make improvements across programmes. For example, when examiners had identified some overlapping content in modules on two different programmes, both teams were able to work together to streamline the delivery of content leading to an enhanced student experience. Programme teams also use external examiner reports to develop their end-of-year action plans as part of formal programme review.

2.56    External examiner reports are received at the College's Higher Education Assessment Board and minutes indicate that these reports inform the work of the Board. It is not clear from the minutes to what extent the content of reports are discussed at this meeting, as meetings only seem to record the receipt of the reports. However, this is not a decision-making body and external examiners do participate in assessment boards required to be held at the awarding body.

2.57    Students the team met were aware of the role of the external examiner and some were aware of the availability of reports through the VLE. A number of students had met external examiners during their visits to the College and felt that they had a good level of interaction with the examiner. Students also confirmed that programme staff share the external examiner reports more widely and raise awareness of issues raised by examiners to support students in their assessment.

2.58     The College engages positively with external examiners and has a well established system for responding to their reports for the purposes of quality assurance and enhancement. Students also have a good understanding of the role of the external examiner in assuring the quality of their learning experience. Therefore the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.59    The College's arrangements for the annual and periodic review of programmes are described in paragraphs 1.30 and 1.31.

2.60    The team tested the effectiveness with which the College's processes for programme review assure and enhance the quality of learning opportunities through a review of documentary evidence. This includes annual programme review reports, awarding body periodic review reports, minutes of meetings and recent higher education self-evaluation documents. The review team also met a range of staff and students.

2.61    The College undertakes a rigorous review of each programme at the end of the academic year. Programme teams are required to submit a written report which may conform to the awarding body's template or use the College's own pro forma. These reports are evaluative, draw on a wide range of information and result in an action plan. Data from end-of-module questionnaires and information from meetings attended by student representatives ensures the review is appropriately informed by the student voice. Consideration is also given to the views of external examiners, and in some cases feedback from employers. All reports are accompanied by a checklist to ensure teams have considered all the expected information in their review of the programme.

2.62    Oversight of the annual monitoring process and associated action plans occurs through a number of different channels. Firstly programme teams are responsible for implementing action plans and monitoring progress throughout the year. Annual monitoring reports also require an update on the previous year's action plans. All reports are received by the central HE Office so that progress can be monitored centrally. The Higher Education Operational Group, which has representation from all programmes, has oversight of review activity across all higher education provision. At a strategic level outcomes from the annual review are reported to the Strategic Leadership Team. The College also produces an annual higher education self-evaluation document which is intended to summarise the themes arising from the review of individual programmes. However, this document focuses on an evaluation of the process with close reference to the Quality Code rather than the actual outputs from the process (see paragraph 4.5).

2.63    All university-approved programmes at the College are subject to the awarding bodies' periodic review processes. Documentary evidence of these reviews reveal that College staff undertake a thorough evaluation of their programme in preparation for the review. This is a broader review of curriculum content and structure as well as the delivery of the programme, and it provides an opportunity for the College to ensure appropriate resources continue to be available and that the qualification maintains currency.

2.64    For Higher National programmes, the review of the curriculum is the responsibility of Pearson. However, the College has recognised the importance of undertaking its own periodic review of Higher National provision, and at the time of the visit the College was in the process of implementing such a process. This is intended to allow a more strategic review of Higher National programmes to look at, for example, the choice of optional units and long-term alignment to stakeholder needs. The review team **affirms** the implementation of a periodic review process for Pearson Higher National programmes.

2.65     The review team concludes that the College's approach to monitoring and review is consistent and effective across all its higher education provision and contributes to assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities for students. Therefore, this Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.66     Academic appeals for all university programmes are handled in accordance with the relevant awarding body's policy, which is documented in quality assurance policies for staff and in programme handbooks for students. The responsibility of the College in this context is therefore to raise awareness of the appeals process and to support students in accessing the correct procedure. The College has its own policy for dealing with academic appeals for Higher National awards which meets the requirements of Pearson. For all College provision, complaints are dealt with through the Compliments and Complaints Policy. Complaints are managed locally by the College, but students have final recourse to the awarding body or organisation. Compliments and complaints are monitored at College-level and reported on internally.

2.67     The review team tested the College's approach to appeals and complaints through consideration of policy documents, module and programme handbooks, partnership arrangements and minutes of meetings. The team also held meetings with staff and students.

2.68     The College signposts students to their relevant University's processes for academic appeals through the VLE and programme handbooks. All handbooks communicate this process clearly and students the team met are aware of where to access information on appeals. Higher National programme handbooks, which are produced by the College, include an appendix of the College appeals policy. Awareness of students' right to appeal for all programmes is also raised during induction.

2.69     All service compliments and complaints, including for current staff and students, are covered by the Compliments and Complaints Policy which signposts users to an online form. This practice ensures a prompt and standardised response to complaints. In the first instance complaints are investigated by the College and where a student remains dissatisfied with the resolution they have the option of using the awarding body's student complaints policy. Students the team met confirmed that they have access to clear information on complaints and advice on accessing this process is available through the HE Office. The meeting suggested that students prefer resolving complaints informally through a staff member as this often leads to prompt and satisfactory resolution.

2.70     All complaint submissions are monitored and reported to the Strategic Leadership Team for consideration on an ad hoc basis and the most recent annual reports indicates practice for addressing issues in a timely manner is improving.

2.71     The College handles academic appeals and complaints in a fair and timely manner, and procedures are easily accessible to staff and students. There are also clear mechanisms for elevating unresolved issues to the appropriate body as required. Therefore the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.72    The College does not consider any of its higher education provision to fall within the scope of this Expectation. Work placements are offered across a number of programmes but these are considered optional rather than mandatory. However, the team found references in the programme handbooks for a number of foundation degrees and Higher National programmes to mandatory work placements. The College also delivers a Professional Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), which also requires students to have access to suitable work. The review team considered these work-based experiences to fall within the scope of this Expectation and reviewed the arrangements for managing work-based learning.

2.73    Prior to a student undertaking a work placement as part of their programme, a risk assessment must be completed and approved by a member of staff. The length and nature of work-based learning varies considerably across the different modules and programmes, but in all cases arrangements are managed by the programme team. Staff are expected to complete regular progress reports for longer placements and maintain regular contact with the employer and student. Employers are not involved in the assessment of learning but may provide developmental feedback to the student. Although mandatory work placements are not an assessed part of the programme, students are expected to use the learning undertaken in the workplace to demonstrate the achievement of programme outcomes.

2.74    The team tested this Expectation by examining programme specifications, module and programme handbooks and completed documentation for work placements. The review team also met staff involved in delivering programmes that include work placements, and students that had accessed work-based learning.

2.75    The College encourages students to access work-related learning opportunities across all programmes, but handbooks for some programmes indicate that this is a requirement. Students the team met also confirmed that a number of programmes require them to undertake a placement in order to successfully achieve their qualification. However, staff the team met reported that none of their programmes include mandatory work-based learning although it is strongly encouraged. Where students are unable to obtain a placement they are provided with alternative means of demonstrating the achievement of learning outcomes. In the view of the team it is important for the College to establish a clear understanding of the status of work-based learning within programmes and communicate this to staff and students. The team therefore **recommends** that the College, in collaboration with its awarding bodies, defines clearly the status of work-based learning within programmes.

2.76    The team found that overall arrangements for work-based learning are managed appropriately. For the PGCE programme, work placements are jointly overseen by the College and Canterbury Christ Church University. Mentors in the workplace are provided with a University handbook and also attend a briefing session led by the University. For other programmes, work placements are managed by the programme team. A number of mechanisms are employed for ensuring work placements are appropriate and safe. Module documentation also makes it clear to students that they would not be able to start a

placement without appropriate approval from the relevant module leader. Programme staff complete risk assessments and work place visits and/or telephone conversations with employers to monitor progress. Students the team met reported positive experiences of work-based learning and valued the opportunities these presented to contextualise their learning. Although the team saw examples of completed risk assessments there is less evidence of consistent formal monitoring of placements and central oversight across all programmes. Employers the team spoke to also reported differences in the support and frequency of contact received from the College. Therefore the review team **recommends** that the College strengthen and formalise the process for monitoring and oversight of work-based learning.

2.77      The review team concludes that despite the lack of a full understanding of its responsibilities under this Expectation, the College has appropriate arrangements for managing work-based learning but these need to be improved further to ensure consistency and oversight. Therefore the review team concludes that the Expectation is met but the need to strengthen current processes presents a moderate level of associated risk to this area.

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

**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**

2.78      The College does not deliver research degrees and therefore this Expectation is not applicable.

# The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.79     In reaching its judgement about the quality of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. In summary, all 10 applicable expectations in this area have been met, with the associated level of risk low in all but one case. The exception is Expectation B10 where a moderate risk was identified.

2.80     The review team has identified four recommendations under this judgement area. Two of these areas for improvement relate to Expectation B6 and the team recommend the College develops a College-wide approach to the recognition of prior learning and sets clear expectations for the provision of feedback on work that is submitted late. Both of these recommendations relate to the need to establish clearer policies and processes, and therefore in the view of the team pose a low risk.

2.81     The remaining two recommendations relate to the management of work-based learning (Expectation B10) and resulted in a moderate risk. The team recommends that the College make clear whether or not work placements are a mandatory part of a programme, and that the arrangements for managing work-based learning are formalised and strengthened to provide better oversight. At the time of the review the College was not fully aware of its responsibilities under this Expectation, but in practice the arrangements for work-based learning were broadly adequate and therefore the team considers Expectation B10 to be met. In the view of the team, the need to strengthen existing arrangements poses a moderate risk.

2.82     There is one affirmation in this area where there is evidence of action being taken to address a weakness that had already been identified by the College itself. The team affirms the implementation of a periodic review process for Higher National programmes.

2.83     The review team also identified three features of good practice, which make a positive contribution to the management of this area. These relate to the comprehensive support provided to students, the varied initiatives for developing students' employability skills and the College's responsiveness to the student voice.

2.84     In reaching its judgement, the review team gave consideration to the nature of the recommendations in this area and concluded that they do not, individually or collectively, pose any serious risk to the present or likely future management of the quality of student learning opportunities. Previous responses to external review provide confidence that areas of weaknesses will be addressed promptly and professionally. Therefore, the review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

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

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

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

**Findings**

3.1    The College's website is the principal mechanism for communicating information about its higher education provision to prospective students. While it is the responsibility of each degree-awarding body to produce definitive programme information, the College takes an active role in ensuring this information is communicated appropriately to relevant stakeholders. Information made available through the website includes programme specifications and entry criteria. There is also a downloadable Higher Education Course Guide which is the equivalent of a prospectus and provides an overview of all higher education programmes. Students are provided with module and programme handbooks and programme-related information is also made available through the VLE. There is an established process for checking the accuracy of public-facing information, with ultimate sign-off by the marketing team.

3.2    The team reviewed a wide variety of available materials, including the public website, the College VLE, student handbooks, and awarding bodies' partnership agreements and quality assurance guidance. The review team also met a range of staff and students to triangulate the documentary evidence.

3.3    Overall, public-facing information appears clear and up to date, with relevant links clearly displayed on the website for use by a wide and diverse audience. Students the team met confirmed that they had sufficient information on application to make an informed choice. A number of students had progressed internally and were therefore easily able to access information from teaching staff and the admissions team.

3.4    While the website is helpful and provides essential information about the College's higher education offer, the team noted a number of inconsistencies between website pages for different programmes. Downloadable programme specifications are available for most but not all programmes. The more detailed information contained within specifications may be useful to prospective applicants for all programmes. The name of the awarding body for the programme is not always made immediately clear from the website. There is also variation in the level of detail provided about non-standard entry requirements and the opportunity for the recognition of prior learning for the purpose of gaining entry to a programme. For some programmes, examples of alternative routes of entry are provided while for others reference is only made to formal qualifications. Staff informed the team that alternative routes are usually discussed in detail during interview following application, although the team noted that the template for interviews does not include specific reference to the recognition of prior learning. In the view of the team fuller information about the opportunities for the recognition of prior learning could be made available to prospective students and greater consistency ensured in the information provided for higher education programmes. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College ensures the completeness and consistency of programme information for prospective applicants on the website.

3.5    There is a clear and effective mechanism for checking the initial and ongoing accuracy of information on the website. Information goes through a series of internal quality

assurance checks from all stakeholder groups, including programme leaders, the HE Office, and final sign-off by the Director of Marketing before publication. Informal feedback from staff and students on the appropriateness of information is fed into these processes. Formal review of information is undertaken on an ongoing basis and reported to the Strategic Leadership Team.

3.6      During the course of their study students are provided with a range of information about the overall programme, individual modules, assessment tasks and regulations governing their qualifications. Handbooks for University programmes are prepared in accordance with awarding body templates ensuring contextualised information is provided to students. The College has also devised its own comprehensive handbooks for Pearson programmes. Students are made aware of programme and module specifications through their handbooks and the VLE. These documents are well received by students and used throughout study as a signposting tool to College resources.

3.7      The VLE serves as the main information portal for students, providing access to external examiner reports and student surveys. Students the team met valued the information made available through the VLE and commented positively on the accessibility of information offsite. Staff also use this portal to access College and awarding body policies and guidance. The e-learning team monitor the content of the VLE to ensure minimum requirements are met.

3.8      The issue of certificates is the responsibility of the degree-awarding bodies and Pearson. Upon graduation all students are also provided with a transcript from either the degree-awarding body for university programmes or the College for Pearson programmes. Secure arrangements exist for providing students with these records upon completion of their studies.

3.9      Overall, the College provides appropriate information to the full range of its stakeholders with appropriate systems for checking the ongoing accuracy of this information, and therefore the Expectation is met. The team has made one recommendation in this area to improve the completeness and consistency of information for programmes to prospective students. Since the most essential information is made available to applicants to enable them to make an informed choice, in the view of the team the recommendation presents a low level of associated risk.

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

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

3.10      In reaching its judgement about the quality of the information the College produces about its provision, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

3.11      The team found that, overall, information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. However, there are some inconsistencies in the information provided to prospective students through the website. The team has made one recommendation to address the latter relating to the need to improve the consistency and completeness of programme information. This recommendation relates to the need to update information on some parts of the website and in the view of the team presents a low risk to the management of this area. The review team therefore concludes that the quality of information **meets** UK expectations.

# 4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

**Findings**

4.1 The College's strategic approach and aims for enhancing the quality of students' learning opportunities is articulated in its Higher Education Strategy. This is put into practice through the deliberative committee structure and quality assurance processes. The Strategic Leadership Team sets overarching priorities for the College, and separate consideration is given to higher education. This includes the implementation of specific initiatives intended to improve particular aspects of the student learning experience such as enhancing student employability. The Higher Education Operational Group includes representation from all higher education programmes and provides a forum for delivering enhancement. The College undertakes an end-of-year evaluation of its higher education provision which results in the production of a higher education self-evaluation document with an associated action plan for making planned improvements.

4.2 In testing this Expectation the review team scrutinised a wide range of documentary evidence, including minutes of meetings, recent higher education self-evaluation documents, strategy documents, annual monitoring reports and records of peer observation. The team also met a range of staff and students.

4.3 The College is committed to continuously improving the quality of its higher education provision, and its approach is underpinned by a number of student-centred strategies. There is effective oversight of the implementation of these strategies through the Strategic Leadership Team and its subcommittees. The Higher Education Operational Group has oversight of quality assurance processes such as annual monitoring and responses to external examiner reports. The Group, which is attended by staff and students, provides a forum for identifying areas for enhancement and for sharing good practice. Staff the team met confirmed the usefulness of meetings in having an awareness of developments across higher education as well as providing an opportunity to share practice in approaches to learning, teaching and assessment.

4.4 Peer observation and other staff development activities enable the sharing of good practice and encourage enhancements to teaching practice. Records of individual peer observations show that detailed and constructive feedback is provided by the observer to prompt pedagogical reflection and development. Academic staff the team met confirmed the benefits of engaging in peer observation, particularly across different subject disciplines. A summary of peer observations is produced at the end of the academic year to identify common trends and this is analysed by the Higher Education Operational Group. Common areas for development result in College-wide development activities for staff involved in higher education. Staff are also supported in various other ways to engage in professional development and scholarly activities that relate to their area of expertise.

4.5 The higher education self-evaluation document, which is produced annually, identifies specific actions and priorities for enhancement in the coming year. Examples of recently identified actions include the implementation of a periodic review process, enhancing teaching practice and supporting student transitions. Both the self-evaluation document and the resulting action plan are mapped to the Expectations, and in some cases Indicators, of the Quality Code. While this does result in actions that contribute to enhancement it is unclear how the outcomes from quality assurance processes such as

annual programme monitoring and external examining feed into this process. The College states that the higher education self-evaluation document draws on annual monitoring but there is no commentary or analysis to this effect in the document, and the team was unable to identify a clear link between themes arising for programme monitoring and the enhancement action plan. Self-evaluation focuses on the implementation and evaluation of processes rather than the outcomes of these processes. The review team **recommends** therefore that the College develops further the higher education self-evaluation process to make more effective use of quality assurance procedures in identifying enhancement priorities.

4.6      Students are engaged in quality enhancement primarily through their participation at the HE Student Forum and Higher Education Operational Group. The results of student surveys are also used to identify areas requiring improvement. There is good evidence of College-wide enhancements being informed by the higher education student voice. For example, the redesign of learning space has been informed by student feedback. Students the team met also commented on the College's keenness to involve students in enhancements and developments to higher education.

4.7      The College has introduced a number of strategic initiatives specifically aimed at enhancing the quality of learning opportunities. This includes comprehensive transitional arrangements aligned to the College's commitment to widening participation. Students are supported through all stages of their learning experience from before starting their course to onward transition. The College has also invested significantly in a range of facilities to enhance student employability and therefore support transition to employment. This includes Pitch on Demand (POD) and iCreate@BDC, both of which are creative physical spaces within the College intended to encourage entrepreneurship and employability. These are complemented by a range of interactions with employers to ensure the learning experience is continually enhanced and that students are supported in developing relevant graduate skills (see good practice under Expectation B4).

4.8      The review team concludes that the College has a clear commitment to enhancing the quality of its provision and has appropriate structures to enable College-wide improvements to take place. The recommendation in this area relates to making better use of quality assurance processes in the higher education self-evaluation process which informs enhancement priorities. Since enhancement also occurs through a number of other mechanisms and there is evidence of planned improvements, the team considers the recommendation to pose a low risk. Therefore the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

4.9      In reaching its judgement about the enhancement of learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. There is appropriate oversight of higher education in the College and evidence of planned improvements to student learning opportunities.

4.10     The team identified one area for improvement, and recommends that the College develops further its higher education self-evaluation process to make better use of quality assurance processes in identifying enhancement priorities. This recommendation relates to the need to improve the effectiveness of an existing process which contributes to enhancement, and therefore in the view of the team poses a low risk.

4.11     The team acknowledges the positive impact of good practice located under Expectation B3, which relates to the strategic initiatives for enhancing student employability.

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

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

**Findings**

5.1 The College identifies student engagement as a strategic priority and has a range of well established engagement mechanisms, including the student representative system, student surveys, and informal feedback. Together these enable the College to involve students in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience.

5.2 The College considers the HE Student Forum to be the most effective mechanism for engaging students regularly. This is well attended by student representatives and ensures the student voice is heard at College level. Meetings result in identified actions with progress reported at subsequent meetings. Both staff and students commented positively on the Higher Education Student Forum as a vehicle for initiating student-led change within the College. Students also have the opportunity to participate in discussions around quality assurance through representation on the Higher Education Operational Group and course team meetings. Additional opportunities for the student voice to influence academic study are available through personal tutorials and course-level surveys, which are implemented across all higher education courses.

5.3 There is good evidence of the College's responsiveness to the student voice in ensuring the feedback loop is closed. Students are kept informed of any action taken in response to their feedback through the Higher Education Student Forum and through 'You said, We did' poster campaigns. Staff at all levels of the College are willing to listen to students' views to improve the quality of provision. Examples include teaching staff making changes to curriculum content and programme structure, support staff improving the visibility and accessibility of their services and, at a strategic level, senior staff investment in the learning environment and resources being informed by student feedback.

5.4 The College plans to make further improvements in this area and is currently pursuing methods such as key performance indicators to assess the effectiveness of student engagement in the quality assurance process.

# Glossary

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**e-learning**
See technology enhanced or enabled learning

**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.