



# Higher Education Review of East Berkshire College

May 2015

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## About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at East Berkshire College. The review took place from 12 to 14 May 2015 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Kevin Burnside
- Mrs Maz Stewart
- Mr Craig Best (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

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

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

<sup>2</sup> Higher Education Review themes: [www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106).

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

<sup>4</sup> Higher Education Review web pages: [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review).

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about East Berkshire College

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

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding bodies and/or 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.

### Good practice

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

- The high level of responsiveness to stakeholder demands for employment-focused programme development (Expectation B1).
- The high levels of support from staff which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential (Expectation B4).
- The wide range of formal and informal initiatives to gather and respond to student feedback (Expectation B5).
- The wide-ranging resources and activities, which enhance students' employability skills and professional development (Expectation B4).
- The innovative use of new technologies, which ensures that a wide range of information is readily accessible for prospective and current students (Expectation C).

### Recommendations

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

By September 2015:

- ensure that the terms of reference and membership for the key deliberative committee for quality assurance enable effective evaluation of student engagement and feedback, and external examiners' comments (Expectations B8, B5 and B7)
- formalise guidance, including programme information, for workplace mentors and ensure that roles and responsibilities are clear (Expectation B10)
- formalise and document the processes for the approval and review of information (Expectation C).

By December 2015:

- develop a more systematic approach to providing oversight and management of the good practice and recommendations emerging from external examiners' reports (Expectation B7 and Enhancement)
- ensure the annual self-assessment process provides more evaluative and effective planning and oversight of provision (Expectation B8)

- consolidate and articulate a more systematic and explicit approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities (Enhancement).

### **Affirmation of action being taken**

The QAA review team **affirms** the following action that East Berkshire College is already taking to make academic standards secure and improve the educational provision offered to its students.

- The steps being taken to strengthen students' partnership in quality assurance and enhancement processes, and in formalising their representation in the deliberative bodies (Expectation B5).

### **Theme: Student Employability**

The College is committed to establishing a learning environment which provides a variety of opportunities for students to gain an extensive range of knowledge, skills and understanding of the professions and industries they have entered, or wish to enter. The College's Stand Out Challenge Strategy supports its vision to develop students' employability. There is extensive evidence to demonstrate the College's engagement with employers in the design and development of the higher education programmes offered to ensure students have the necessary knowledge and skills base for their chosen career path.

Programme modules and learning outcomes support employability through assessment activities which demonstrate the application of theory to work-based activity. The College effectively uses its student services to provide opportunities to develop and refine a range of employability skills, through individual support or through attendance at employability-related workshops. Students' comments confirm their programmes of study are employment-focused and provide the knowledge and skills to support them in their current employment, or future job roles.

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

### **About East Berkshire College**

East Berkshire College (the College) is a medium-sized general further education college which offers a diverse range of programmes. It operates in Slough, Windsor, West London and the surrounding areas. The College operates on two main campuses in Langley and Windsor. Langley College houses vocational programmes, including construction, accountancy, engineering, technology, hair and beauty, health and care, and sports. Windsor College, which opened in 2006-07, houses A-Level provision and substantial full-time and part-time vocational programmes in science, business and the creative industries for adults and young people.

The recently completed £31 million Langley redevelopment project is intended to provide work-ready surroundings within a flexible learning environment for vocational learners of all ages. This campus includes new provision in hospitality and catering, a new state-of-the-art lecture theatre and dedicated higher education teaching and study rooms.

As part of the College's strategy to grow higher education, the majority of the College's provision has also been relocated to Langley, and discrete accommodation for Level 4 and 5 students has been progressed as part of the redevelopment project. The HNC/D Performing

Arts is based at Windsor owing to the proximity of the local theatre and the Fire Station Arts Centre.

The College has over 3,000 full-time students and 4,500 on part-time programmes. In 2014-15 there are 214 higher education students on nine foundation degree and Higher National programmes delivered in long-standing franchise partnerships with Buckinghamshire New University, London South Bank University, the University of West London, and Pearson. The College's mission is 'to provide opportunities for all learners to thrive and achieve in life and work'. Increasingly, higher education is a key part of this mission, and is one of six key priorities defined in the College's The Stand Out Challenge Strategic Plan 2013-2016. The College's aim is to be the main provider of higher education in the immediate locality. The College has driven forward growth in higher education and training, including foundation degrees, HNDs, professional qualifications and Level 4 apprenticeships, and sought to improve access and progression opportunities for the local population to higher technical jobs.

The College has made good progress in further developing the four areas of good practice and addressing the three desirable recommendations from its previous QAA review in 2011. A number of these areas are addressed within this report.

## Explanation of the findings about East Berkshire 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 other awarding organisations**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Findings**

1.1 The College delivers five foundation degree programmes in partnership with four degree-awarding bodies and four Higher National programmes validated by Pearson, the awarding organisation. The awarding bodies provide clear guidance in Memorandums of Agreement, Collaborative Agreements, Quality Assurance and Academic Standards Handbooks, and processes for revalidation, to support the College in managing its role and responsibilities. These arrangements allow Expectation A1 to be met in theory.

1.2 The team tested the approach by reviewing documentary evidence, including quality assurance policies and procedures, validation reports, external examiners' reports, and talking to link tutors, senior College staff and others involved in programme delivery.

1.3 The College's awarding bodies and awarding organisation are responsible, through their validation procedures, for setting threshold academic standards. Appropriate learning outcomes ensure that each qualification is allocated to the appropriate level in the FHEQ, and meet relevant subject and professional benchmarks. Assessment activity is aligned to learning outcomes and is approved as an integral part of the revalidation process. Reports from external examiners and link tutors and the annual monitoring process confirm that the College is effectively managing programme delivery and assuring academic standards.

1.4 University-validated programmes are managed by the College through its compliance with collaborative agreements and academic regulations, and through its own internal quality assurance procedures. Higher National programmes are compliant with the guidance provided in the Pearson Quality Handbook and the BTEC Centre Guide to Assessment Levels 4 to 7. The College has taken the strategic decision to align the quality assurance processes for its Pearson provision to those developed by its university partners for foundation degrees; for example, the implementation and recording of examination boards.

1.5 The College's internal cycle of programme review feeds into a self-evaluation process to monitor its own performance in managing delivery of its higher education programmes. Partner universities confirm academic standards and programme delivery through Annual Collaborative Link Tutor Reports and Annual Monitoring Reports. The annual monitoring documentation varies between the College's awarding bodies. External examiners' reports are formally reviewed as part of the annual monitoring process. foundation degrees, which are delivered as part of a consortium, receive programme-specific comments from external examiners. For Pearson programmes the College's internal annual monitoring process is used.

1.6 The College discharges its responsibilities effectively within the context of its agreements with its awarding bodies and organisation. The College meets its awarding bodies' and awarding organisation's threshold academic standards, and has robust internal processes to manage its responsibilities in maintaining threshold academic standards. Partnerships between the College and its awarding bodies and organisation are sound, and working effectively. Overall, the review team concludes that 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 The College's awarding bodies and organisation retain responsibility for ensuring that relevant subject and qualification benchmark statements are used. These are incorporated into module learning outcomes and assessment strategies during the design and approval stages. There are appropriate procedures in place to ensure that academic frameworks effectively support programme management and delivery.

1.8 The College is compliant with the relevant academic regulations of its awarding bodies and organisation, and with the Expectations of the Quality Code. To ensure parity of quality assurance activities, the College has aligned its policies and procedures for its Higher National programmes Pearson programmes to those of its foundation degree-awarding bodies. These arrangements allow Expectation A2.1 to be met in theory.

1.9 The review team evaluated the College's arrangements for securing the academic standards of its awarding bodies and organisation by reviewing external examiners' reports, awarding body policies and procedures, programme handbooks, link tutor reports, annual monitoring documentation, terms of reference and minutes for the Higher Education Steering Group (HESG), programme handbooks, assessment briefs and grading criteria. The team met a range of staff, including link tutors from the awarding bodies.

1.10 The College's governing body and HESG maintain a thorough oversight of the College's management and implementation of its partners' academic frameworks, academic standards and award academic credits. There is good governor engagement in the monitoring and development of the College's higher education provision. University Link Tutor and external examiner reports confirm that the College is making effective use of academic frameworks for the award of academic credits.

1.11 Programme handbooks are detailed and comprehensive, containing information about module specifications, policies and procedures, learning outcomes and associated assessment criteria and grading schemes. Programme handbooks make appropriate reference to both the College and awarding body student-related policies and procedures, and relevant academic regulatory frameworks. Programme handbooks are posted on the VLE, and are issued during induction.

1.12 The College's teaching and learning strategy and the quality improvement plan set out the College's aims and objectives. This ensures that academic standards, subject and professional benchmarks and learning outcomes are met, and students have a positive learning experience. Higher education teaching staff are aware of the academic standards of their awarding bodies and awarding organisation. Student achievement is supported through the use of clear and comprehensive assessment criteria and grading schemes. Link tutor reports, annual monitoring reports and external examiners' reports provide evidence that programmes delivered meet required academic standards.

1.13 The relevant academic frameworks and regulations are in place and are well understood. Responsibility for regulatory frameworks lies with the awarding bodies. The College's governance structure and quality management processes are appropriate,

clearly understood by staff, and interact with the requirements of the awarding bodies and organisation. The review team concludes that Expectation A2.1 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**

1.14 The College works in collaboration with its awarding bodies and Pearson to produce definitive information about its programmes' aims, intended learning outcomes, structure and assessments. For Higher National programmes, Pearson publishes generic programme specifications and detailed unit-level specifications. Course teams translate Pearson national-level documents into contextualised programme specifications. These form one section of programme handbooks, which also contain contextualised College information. For foundation degree programmes, specifications are approved during the awarding bodies' validation processes. Handbooks based on awarding body templates include programme specifications or equivalent information. These arrangements enable Expectation A3.1 to be met in theory.

1.15 The review team evaluated the above processes through consideration of internal documentation, scrutinising information available to students including on the VLE, and discussions with teaching staff, members of the marketing team and students to assess the effectiveness, trustworthiness and accessibility of definitive programme information.

1.16 Course teams review programme handbooks annually, seeking approval from heads of curriculum in conjunction with the higher education coordinator. External examiners comment on the quality of programme information, including handbooks, and awarding bodies formally review programme documentation periodically. In addition to specifications, teaching and marketing staff use a course file database to ensure information is drawn from a single source. The documentation produced by the College and the established procedures for approval and review allow Expectation A2.2 to be met.

1.17 Students receive clear information about their programmes of study, including titles, level of study within the FHEQ, the intended learning outcomes, the structure of core and optional modules, and the relevant frameworks for the award of credit. Students can easily access this information from programme handbooks, available in print or downloadable from the VLE, as well as being briefed during induction.

1.18 Curriculum area reports and self-assessment reviews take account of information given to students. The responsibilities and procedures for modifying and approving programme specifications are well understood by staff and operate effectively, notwithstanding some variation in the comprehensiveness and presentation of handbooks.

1.19 Overall, College staff understand their responsibilities for maintaining a definitive record of each programme. Information about the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected achievement is readily available to students. The review team concludes that Expectation A2.2 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

1.20 Responsibility for the approval of higher education programmes delivered by the College lies with the awarding bodies. The awarding bodies have clear processes and documentation for the design and approval of programmes. These processes are in accordance with their own academic framework and regulations. The *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark* and Subject Benchmark Statements are understood by the College and referenced when writing new programmes.

1.21 The College's Stand Out Challenge Strategic Plan 2013-2016 clearly sets out its mission, aims and aspirations for higher education. The need for programmes in particular discipline areas is established in response to skills shortages identified in the local economic plan and in discussion with employers. The College's commitment to further development of higher education and progression opportunities is further demonstrated by its recent bid to the local authority for support for the development of an institute of higher education in Slough. These arrangements enable Expectation A3.1 to be met in theory.

1.22 The team reviewed documentation supplied in the self-evaluation portfolio and the accompanying evidence, which included programme specifications, validation reports, external examiners' reports, and quality handbooks. The review team also held meetings with representatives of the awarding bodies, staff and students.

1.23 The College has an appropriate internal programme approval and registration process. All proposed programmes are approved internally as part of the annual curriculum and business planning process. New programmes requiring approval during the year, for example those focused on STEM subject areas, must be agreed by the Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality. Prior to seeking approval from the validating body, the College reviews its curriculum in the context of local, regional and national labour market information to ensure new provision leads to real job outcomes.

1.24 Programmes are validated, modified, revalidated and periodically reviewed in accordance with guidance provided by the awarding bodies. These processes are well understood by College staff. Higher National programmes comprise specified core units and optional units designed, approved and validated by Pearson. Some Higher National programmes provide the underpinning knowledge for Higher Apprenticeships. Optional units are selected by the College in consultation with employers and students to align with industry requirements and enhance student employability.

1.25 The Quality Code is explicitly considered as part of the approval and validation processes and is referenced in programme handbooks. Responsibility for programme development and the design of all programmes is shared between the College and its partners and clearly set out in Schedules of Responsibilities with each awarding body and organisation.

1.26 Responsibility for assessment is variable across the partnerships. Awarding bodies set and moderate assessments for franchised provision, with the College setting

assessments for Higher National programmes. Assessments are moderated by external examiners. The College takes responsibility for initial marking and providing feedback on student assessment. This process is informed by an internal verification process overseen by experienced heads of teaching and learning in each curriculum area.

1.27 Overall, there are thorough processes in place to ensure that programme development and design reflect the skills needs of the local community and employers, and that academic standards are set at appropriate levels for the qualifications offered. Higher National programmes provide a flexible approach which is responsive to the specific needs of employers to enhance graduate employability. The review team concludes that Expectation A3.1 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**

1.28 The responsibility for the design of franchised programmes is shared with the College's partners. Ultimate responsibility for the approval of modules, programmes and qualifications, and for assuring that academic standards are met, rests with the awarding bodies. The College applies the standards and criteria of its awarding bodies to all its higher education provision. These standards are fully set out in relevant documentation. The design of Higher National programmes is in accordance with the Pearson Quality Handbook, and relevant subject requirements which specify programme and unit learning outcome. These processes allow Expectation A3.2 to be met in theory.

1.29 The review team examined all the relevant documentation, including the College's Quality Handbook and Framework for Internal Verification, module and programme specifications, validation reports, external examiners' reports and programme and institutional reviews. The team also met a wide range of staff and students.

1.30 The FHEQ level descriptors underpin assessment methods and learning outcomes for all modules and programmes. Schemes of work for each module or study unit explicitly state learning outcomes and clearly indicate key features of the assessment strategy, including information on whether feedback on assessed work will be diagnostic, formative or summative.

1.31 Maintenance of the standards set by the franchising and validating bodies is assured through internal verification of assignments and double marking in accordance with the College's higher education assessment cycle. This document also provides guidance on setting and marking assignments, providing feedback and monitoring and review processes. External moderation is provided by validating bodies through annual reports and external examiners' reports.

1.32 Student achievement is confirmed at examination boards run by university partners in accordance with their academic regulations. The College has aligned its own assessment board processes for Higher National programmes to those of its university franchised provision. The College manages its own assessment boards in accordance with the Pearson Terms of Reference and Guide to Assessment. External examiners' reports are received and responded to by the Higher Education Coordinator and inform the development of action plans at curriculum and programme levels.

1.33 Oversight is provided by the Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality, and the curriculum management team who report to the Curriculum and Quality Committee of the governing body. External examiners' recommendations are reported in an annual higher education self-evaluation report. External examiners confirm that standards are being

maintained and are comparable with those of similar providers, and that assessment processes are supported by appropriate and effective systems and policies.

1.34 Overall, the College has systems in place to ensure that the assessment of students is robust, valid and reliable, and that the award of qualifications and credit is based on the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. Staff demonstrate a sound understanding of internal and external approval, monitoring and reporting processes. Therefore, the team concludes that Expectation A3.2 is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

## **Findings**

1.35 The College manages standards and quality of provision through its curriculum areas. It works within memorandums of agreement and the published guidelines of the awarding bodies and organisation for annual and periodic review of programmes. The College submits annual reports and action plans to its awarding bodies and reviews its Higher National provision internally. This approach enables the College to meet Expectation A3.3 of the Quality Code.

1.36 In reviewing this Expectation the team examined a range of documentation, including memorandums of agreement, guidelines published by the awarding bodies, a range of external examiners' reports, curriculum reports and action plans, and revalidation documents. The team also met senior staff, directors of curriculum and link tutors from the awarding institutions.

1.37 Annual monitoring, review and enhancement of franchised provision are provided through programme reports and action plans prepared by link tutors. These are considered by appropriate quality committees at the awarding bodies. Annual reports include analysis of student retention, progression and achievement, student feedback, learning, teaching and assessment strategies, resourcing, and management of the links between the university and the College. The reports also identify areas of good practice and for further development. There is sound evidence of the internal annual review and reporting process which is considered by the Higher Education Steering Group (HESG) and summarised in the annual self-assessment report and action plan. Effective oversight at College level is provided by the curriculum senior managers who report to the Curriculum and Quality Committee of the governing body. Periodic programme reviews take place every six years as required by the university processes, and meetings with College staff confirmed that these processes are fully understood by them.

1.38 The review team considers that effective monitoring and review mechanisms are in place. The policies, processes and procedures demonstrated by the College adhere to those of its partners and operate effectively in ensuring that the requirements of the awarding bodies and organisation are met. Due account is taken of comments raised in external examiners' reports. The team conclude that Expectation A3.3 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**

1.39 The use of external input and expertise in the design, operation and review of programmes is specified in the regulatory frameworks of the awarding bodies and organisation. Programmes run on behalf of the awarding bodies are written and validated by the individual university, and are franchised to the College. For Pearson programmes the College is compliant with approval processes and the selection of optional modules. These arrangements allow the College to meet Expectation A3.4.

1.40 The College has well established internal programme approval procedures in place that require a detailed analysis of current labour market needs. This analysis ensures that new curriculum proposals are aligned to local, regional and national labour market skills requirements in order to enhance students' employability. The College makes effective use of external examiners' reports to reassure itself and its university partners that the programmes delivered on their behalf, and for Pearson, are maintaining academic and professional standards.

1.41 The review team reviewed course documentation, minutes of programme development meetings, business case proposals, validation and external examiners' reports, programme specifications, annual monitoring and link tutor reports, validation documents, mentoring handbooks, careers information, and assessment briefs. Additionally, the team met staff and link tutors, and those involved in supporting work-based learning through employers and industry links.

1.42 There is sound evidence that the College is working effectively with employers in enhancing the student learning experience. Employer engagement in higher education programme design and ongoing curriculum review is well established, and ensures the higher education provision meets employers' and students' employability skills needs (see also Expectation B10 and Student Theme). Employer requirements have been at the centre of curriculum development and design. For example, the HND/C in Computing and Systems Development includes modules on specific industry-standard software to meet Higher Apprenticeship employer skills needs. To further enhance computing students' employability, the College ran CISCO Systems programmes in parallel with the Higher National Computing and Systems Development.

1.43 The College is active in initiating a range of employability initiatives, including, for example, curriculum vitae writing, leadership workshops, and the introduction of the Genovation Centre, the College's multidisciplinary employment skills initiative. This Centre enables higher education students to engage in real-life business initiatives with guidance and support from the College. An annual cross-College careers fair provides the opportunity for higher education students to meet and discuss future employment options with a range of employers (see also Expectation B10).

1.44 Students who are either in employment, on Higher Apprenticeships, or have an industrial placement as an integral part of their programme use the workplace as part of their programme learning. The College has a mentoring system for students and employers in place. This matter is also addressed under Expectations B4 and B10.

1.45 External examiners are appointed and inducted by the College's awarding bodies and organisation. External examiners' reports are reviewed and actions or recommendations arising are monitored at programme and senior management level. Examiners' comments are an essential element in annual programme review. The College makes use of external examiners' reports as a mechanism to review and maintain the academic standards and currency of the curriculum.

1.46 Overall, external and independent expertise is effective. This is valued by employers, who are able to ensure that students, as prospective employees, have the necessary skills to meet employment sector needs. There is effective use of external examiners' reports to monitor academic and professional standards. The College meets the requirements of its validating partners, and additionally has identified areas where these can be enhanced. Comments from external examiners and other external sources are responded to appropriately. Therefore the review team finds that Expectation 3.4 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

1.48 All the applicable Expectations in this area have been met, and the risk is judged low in all areas. In all sections related to academic standards the College is also required to adhere to the procedures of its awarding bodies.

1.49 The review team made no recommendations and identified no areas of good practice.

1.50 The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards at the College **meets** UK expectations.

## 2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.1 The College aims to be the primary higher education provider in Slough by meeting the needs of employers, students progressing from Level 3 study and the local community. It has partnerships with local sixth-forms and higher education institutions to support progression from both within and outside the College and on to higher qualifications. These aspirations are outlined in the College's Stand Out Challenge Strategic Plan 2013-2016. The Strategy is informed by labour market research and engagement with employers in the selection, development and delivery of Higher Apprenticeships and foundation degrees.

2.2 Responsibility for the design and development of programmes is shared between the College and its awarding bodies and organisation. Programme and module specifications define learning outcomes and approaches to teaching, learning and assessment. Additionally, validation processes of the awarding bodies require mapping of programmes to the Quality Code, articulation of a business case and identification of resource implications. Validation processes are clearly set out in guidance documents provided by the awarding bodies and organisation and documentary evidence. Discussions with College staff and link tutors from awarding bodies confirmed that the processes are well understood and adhered to. The approach the College takes to programme design and approval enables it to meet Expectation B1 of the Quality Code.

2.3 The College engages with employers in the design and delivery of Higher Apprenticeships and foundation degrees. For three years the British Airports Authority (BAA) has been involved in curriculum review and adjustments to the FdEng Building Services Engineering. This approach, together with the flexibility afforded by the unit structure of Higher National programmes, enables the College to design and deliver a bespoke HNC Computing and Systems Development programme for British Airways and to develop customised units which enhance the employability of computing students across the wider College.

2.4 Programme development is also informed by student feedback. This is demonstrated by the recently introduced HND Performing Arts, which includes units designed to enhance student employability. In HNC Computing and Systems the use of industry-standard software has been integrated into units. Employers and students confirmed their contributions to programme development and are positive regarding the responsiveness of the College in adjusting its provision to reflect the changing demands of industry and the career aspirations of students. The review team considers that the high level of responsiveness to stakeholder demands for employment-focused programme development is **good practice**.

2.5 Overall, the College operates effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes in line with the awarding bodies and organisation. There is good practice in the responsiveness of the College to employer needs. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.6 The College is responsible for the selection, admission and registration of all students following the entry requirements and procedures set out by the awarding bodies. The College-wide admissions policy outlines key roles and responsibilities as well as applicants' duties and entitlements. The Director of Learning Services and Senior Management Team review and approve this in a two-year cycle. There is alignment between the College document and the requirements set by the awarding bodies to ensure that successful applicants are suitably qualified. These arrangements allow Expectation B2 to be met in theory.

2.7 The curriculum and admissions teams' roles in the recruitment process are managed centrally by the Head of Admissions. Programme specifications which identify entry requirements and a typical student profile are reviewed and revised annually. The course file database logs programmes' entry requirements, which are in the prospectus and relevant sections of the College website.

2.8 Applicants receive advice from the admissions and student services teams, or programme staff at enrolment events. Following application, course teams interview prospective students to ensure that they enter at an appropriate level. Interviews and initial assessments consider academic suitability, recognition of prior learning and any additional learning needs. The admissions team keeps records of interviews, and verbal offers made at interview are confirmed in writing. Unsuccessful applicants are referred to the relevant areas of the College for guidance. For programmes incorporating Higher Apprenticeships, students are directly recruited through employers. Unsuccessful applicants may appeal in writing to the Director of Learner Services and Communications, as set out in the admissions policy.

2.9 The review team scrutinised internal documentation, including information available to prospective students, the policies and procedures relevant to recruitment, selection and admissions and induction, and discussed the processes with relevant staff and students to examine the effectiveness of the admissions policy and procedures.

2.10 The admissions process is outlined on the website and in student handbooks. Staff and students have a clear understanding of entry requirements and the application process. Successful applicants receive an effective induction, which includes a generic orientation. The induction provides information about the programme, learning resources, policies and procedures and contacts. Applicants also have the opportunity to attend a pre-arrival higher education seminar, which provides an additional opportunity to ensure applicants are fully aware of the opportunities available. Staff are supplied with higher education induction checklists which ensure students receive full information at enrolment.

2.11 Helpful information is provided about progression routes. Staff involved in admissions and careers advice have achieved professional accreditation, or are appropriately qualified to offer impartial guidance. Academic and support staff are effectively briefed on the enrolment and interview processes, and equality, diversity and safeguarding training ensures staff can raise concerns about an applicant's progress or needs.

2.12 The College monitors admissions, retention and progression through the Higher Education Steering Group (HESG) and College annual self-assessment report. Admissions are also monitored and reviewed by senior staff and deliberative bodies and an enrolment report is reviewed termly. Additionally, in 2014-15 the College introduced an induction survey, which is discussed at the HESG, and identifies areas for development. Positive experiences are disseminated and discussed with course teams and students.

2.13 Overall, the team concludes that recruitment, selection and admissions processes are robust, fair and accessible. The College has effective policies in place and the admissions process is well managed, and students reflect positively on their experiences. The team therefore concludes that Expectation B2 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**

2.14 The Higher Education Steering Group (HESG) has oversight of teaching and learning. The College's Stand Out Challenge Strategic Plan 2013-2016, supported by its approach to standout teaching and learning, set out the College's vision for learning and teaching. The development of the DNA of Standout Teaching and Learning was a partnership activity between the College and its students, and is designed to bring transparency to the relationship between teaching activities and student learning, to inspire and motivate students. There is a wide range of policies and procedures which support approaches to learning and teaching. These arrangements allow the College to meet Expectation B3 of the Quality Code.

2.15 The team reviewed College documentation, which included policies and strategy documents, minutes of meetings, staff CVs, self-assessment reports and quality improvement plans, lesson observation data and student questionnaires. The team met senior managers and teaching staff, students from across the provision, and representatives of the awarding bodies.

2.16 The Higher Education Assessment Cycle provides overarching guidance for the assessment process. The Teaching and Learning Strategic Tool, containing the teaching and learning quality improvement plan, is designed to enhance student learning through 'stretch and challenge', and is updated annually. The staff development policy provides clear guidance on the management and scope of internal staff development objectives. The development of teaching and learning skills is supported by a robust process of lesson observations, which are valued by teaching staff as a mechanism for sharing good practice.

2.17 The Diversity and Equality Policy ensures there is parity of student access to teaching and assessment. Students are invited to identify any specific learning or physical needs, and are able to access a comprehensive range of support services, including dyslexia support and academic writing skills. The College is proactive in ensuring that all higher education students have access to learning support activities to enhance their employability skills.

2.18 The Staff Recruitment Policy provides clear and explicit guidance to support the recruitment and induction of appropriately qualified and experienced staff. Induction for probationary teaching staff is managed by the Quality Department. The induction of new staff is well planned and they are monitored over a three or six-month period depending on the nature of the employment contract. On completion of a probationary period new staff undergo a formal appraisal to identify any professional development needs. Staff spoke positively of the interdisciplinary mentoring and peer observations available for those new to higher education teaching. There is a valuable cycle of two-way teaching exchanges and observations between the College and its university partners. The Personal Development Programme identifies developmental needs and clear development targets and actions for internal and external continuous professional development.

2.19 Staff development comprises higher education-specific and generic teaching activities designed to support the development of a range of teaching skills and knowledge. These activities focus on the development of students as independent learners. University partners provide opportunities for College staff to attend relevant staff development activities. A flexible approach to providing teaching cover enables staff to attend these. The College has a termly cross-College staff conference and a Teaching and Learning Conference. Teaching staff use part of the staff conference to hold their own higher education activities, exploring issues of particular relevance. This year's Teaching and Learning Conference included a focus on scholarly activity.

2.20 Students comment favourably on the standard of teaching and learning, and state that taught sessions are engaging, informative and interactive. Tutors are considered knowledgeable and responsive to student learning needs. There is a robust process of management and peer observation of teaching. This supports the classroom experience in providing an effective and challenging learning environment. Students are actively engaged in the lesson observation process. The Teaching and Learning Strategic Tool is reviewed annually and sets targets and actions designed to enhance academic practice. Peer observation through the use of Teaching Squares was identified as good practice in the QAA Integrated Quality Enhancement Review report of 2011. This model is now an established part of the College's culture of improving learning and teaching. Cross-curricular 'Teaching Squares' permit the sharing of teaching and learning strategies, and provide a mechanism for the dissemination of good practice. Peer observation is an essential element in mentoring new tutors. Teaching staff value the learning opportunities provided to them by participation in peer and university lesson observations. Observation of teaching and learning outcomes is reviewed by line managers and the HESG, and is used to identify developmental needs and contribute to annual programme monitoring.

2.21 Overall, the College articulates and implements appropriate processes to ensure that teaching and learning effectively support student achievement. The College has a clear commitment to supporting its students' development and progression. The review team concludes that Expectation B3 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**

2.22 The College has effective procedures in place to support students' professional and academic development and achievement. The Stand Out Challenge Strategic Plan 2013-2016 sets out the College's commitment to providing students with a challenging and positive learning environment. The Quality Improvement Policy provides guidance for continuing enhancement of learning experiences and the learning environment. Outcomes of annual monitoring and student feedback from a range of surveys are used to enhance learning opportunities. The College services and systems provide a support framework which enables Expectation B4 to be met in theory.

2.23 The review team evaluated the arrangements in place by scrutinising documentation, including quality improvement plans, publications, minutes of meetings, student guidance information and programme specifications, and met a range of support staff and students from across the provision.

2.24 The College uses an effective range of activities to support students' professional and academic development. These activities include proactive industry links, access to an extensive range of academic learning resources, experienced student advisers and learning support tutors, comprehensive programme inductions, and effective student representation and engagement processes. Students are able to access a wide range of activities and resources which enhance their employability skills including the Genovation Centre.

2.25 The Learner Services Department holds matrix Standard accreditation for the delivery of information, advice and guidance. All student advisers are qualified to Level 4, with two members of staff working towards Level 6. Students are positive about the comprehensive information on support services and opportunities which is available in both electronic and hard copy. Students are able to access helpful careers advice and guidance.

2.26 Students report that they found the initial advice and guidance they received from the College, both from staff and the website, to be informative and accessible. Students are offered the opportunity to attend a pre-arrival seminar to familiarise them with the requirements of higher-level study. Students are able to attend taster sessions prior to enrolment. There is an annual student Higher Education Conference. During student induction the Head of Student Services provides an overview of the services offered. Overall, students find the induction process helpful, although not all students were informed during induction that the College's policies and procedures are available on the VLE.

2.27 Students value the physical and learning resources provided. The majority of the higher education students are now based at the Langley campus, and are appreciative of the recent refurbishment of the dedicated higher education space, which includes a lecture theatre and dedicated teaching rooms and space for independent study and tutorials. Students contributed to the design and layout of the teaching rooms and report that they are able to access specialist, industry-standard equipment and facilities.

2.28 The College provides structured support to students with learning and physical needs to enable them to reach their academic potential. This is valued highly by students and is available through one-to-one specialist support sessions, as well as being accessible through informative hard copy and e-copy internal publications. All students have access to

pastoral support and academic tutorials, although the frequency and timetabling of tutorial sessions vary between programmes. Students use e-mails and phone calls to discuss issues of concern with programme tutors. The review team considers the high levels of support from staff, which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential, to be **good practice**.

2.29 The College's VLE provides students with access to all learning support and academic skills development publications. Students report that the VLE contains all relevant programme and College information. This information includes programme handbooks, assignment briefs, videos of student presentations and performances, and all lesson information, including presentations and session handouts. Students consider the information held on the VLE highly relevant to their studies, and feel competent in using the resources. Not all students are aware that policies and procedures are available on the VLE.

2.30 The College embeds employability in all its higher education programmes, and provides a range of resources and activities which enable students to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to enhance their professional development and employability. Programme tutors provide ongoing skills development during programme delivery and tutorials.

2.31 A programme of study skills workshops supports student academic development. Student services offer employability skills development opportunities, including customer service skills, confidence building, teamwork and reflective practice. To further support the employability of students, the College developed the Genovation Centre. This enables students to engage in multidisciplinary live team projects to support local businesses. The Centre was purpose designed and equipped with the latest industry-standard hardware and software, and is managed by a staff member who provides student support. Twenty higher education students are currently involved in live projects through the Genovation initiative. The review team considers the wide-ranging resources and activities, which enhance students' employability skills and professional development, to be **good practice**.

2.32 Students studying on foundation degree programmes have access to the university libraries and e-learning facilities. Students are introduced to the learning resource centre (LRC) during induction. The LRC provides students with hard copy texts, e-texts and e-journal access. Students also access e-learning opportunities using mobile technologies. The College has invested heavily in mobile digital technologies, and students state that the College has responded very positively to the learning possibilities offered. Students value the inter-library loan service between campuses. Following students' requests, a silent study room is available in the LRC.

2.33 To support students to proceed to top-up qualifications, the College has timetabled a central slot for GCSE Mathematics and English, which has enabled students who require these qualifications to attend classes.

2.34 Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation B4 is met and the associated level of risk is low. The College offers a wide range of support services, which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. Employability skills are well developed and staff provide high levels of support.

**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**

2.35 The College has a strong commitment to ensuring the views of students, individually and collectively, are captured and addressed. The mission and vision for student engagement is set out in the Student Charter in line with the policy on 'standout teaching and learning'. Information on student engagement opportunities is included in programme handbooks. Students are provided with regular opportunities for direct involvement and feedback through induction, module and programme surveys and the College-wide Student Survey. Students are also involved in initial programme design and annual review processes. They are invited to attend focus groups, the annual Higher Education Student Conference and a number of College committees, including the governing body. The opportunities outlined enable the College to meet Expectation B5 of the Quality Code.

2.36 The team examined documentation relating to the College's policies and procedures including terms of reference and minutes of relevant committees, the Student Charter, student surveys, student representative training information and the Student Submission. Discussions with staff and students clarified how the processes operate and examples of how students had been involved in them.

2.37 All programmes have a student representative from each year. Initial training and ongoing support for representatives is provided by the student services team. Student representatives gather student views and responses are fed back to students through the 'You Said, We Did' mechanism and at the annual Higher Education Conference. College-level survey and National Student Survey data and feedback are discussed at the HESG. At curriculum level feedback is discussed at programme committees and informally with academic tutors and staff.

2.38 The College takes clear, deliberate steps to engage students and to solicit and respond to their views. Staff and students were able to give examples of actions taken by the College in direct response to student feedback and of their involvement in programme design and review. Students are confident in raising issues informally with the College as well as through formal procedures. They are positive about their current opportunities for involvement, feel involved in decision making, and appreciate the feedback loop being closed through existing structures. The review team consider the approachability of staff and the wide range of formal and informal initiatives to gather and respond to student feedback to be **good practice**.

2.39 Although they are sometimes invited to attend, student representatives have not routinely been members of College higher-level committees. Steps are being taken to improve the formal representation of higher education students within the College, although at present it is unclear how the College ensures oversight of student engagement activity. The College plans to include student representatives formally as members of the HESG. A higher education governor was appointed during the review visit. The review team **affirms** the steps being taken to strengthen student partnership in quality assurance and enhancement processes, and in formalising their representation in the deliberative bodies.

2.40 Overall, the College places great value on student contribution and uses a variety of ways to encourage participation, which is widespread. It actively and effectively seeks feedback from its students and responds appropriately. There is a wide range of formal and

informal initiatives to gather and respond to student feedback. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met in both design and operation 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**

2.41 Assessment policies and procedures for all programmes are governed by the regulations of the validating bodies and awarding organisation. These are aligned to the Quality Code and the FHEQ and are communicated to students through programme handbooks. Handbooks also provide advice on coursework submission, plagiarism and academic misconduct, appeals processes, mitigating circumstances, adjustments for disabled students, generic assessment criteria and recognition of prior learning.

2.42 The College operates a six-stage Higher Education Assessment Cycle which is designed to ensure a consistent approach to assessment across all the College's provision. The cycle sets out how assessment should be considered in curriculum design, assessment briefs, grading criteria and marking. The cycle provides information on assessment submission and on internal and external moderation. These policies and procedures enable the College to meet Expectation B6 of the Quality Code.

2.43 Assessment of all franchised provision is subject to the policies and academic regulations of each awarding body, with the College taking responsibility for marking and feedback. Regulations are made available to students in student handbooks and through links on the VLE. Where assessments are set internally on Higher National programmes, the College operates rigorous internal verification processes in accordance with its framework for internal verification, to ensure consistency of assessment across the curriculum. The validity and reliability of assessments is tested by awarding bodies through the programme approval and annual reporting processes, in particular by external examiners. External examiners confirm that the internal verification process is effective and the marking of assessments is fair, consistent and comparable with other institutions.

2.44 Students on Higher National programmes are subject to the Pearson Guide to Assessment and the College's own policies which are outlined in student handbooks. These also provide advice on support for students with disabilities, appeals, complaints, diversity and equality and recognition of prior learning. Students confirm that assessment policies, procedures and criteria are clear and accessible.

2.45 Schemes of work follow a College template and set out the dates and forms of assessment together with learning outcomes in an assessment plan, which is internally verified. College policy in the assessment cycle requires feedback on assignments to be given in a maximum of 15 working days and, although students were mainly unaware of the policy, this is generally achieved. Students confirm that workloads are manageable and assessment feedback is prompt and developmental. Students on Higher National programmes note the positive contribution that formative assessment and feedback provided by tutors made to their achievement.

2.46 Marking of assignments is anonymous with appropriate second marking of samples of work. Assessment practice is overseen and moderated by external examiners in accordance with the requirements of the awarding bodies and organisation. Where assessment is carried out by new staff, they are mentored and supported by experienced

staff and assessments are second marked. Discussions with new staff confirmed that they are well supported.

2.47 Subject assessment, progression and award boards for franchised programmes are held at the awarding bodies. The College runs a formally constituted Academic Board to consider progression and achievement on its Higher National provision. The Board is based on the awarding organisation's terms of reference and assessment regulations. External examiners attend assessment and award boards. Outcomes of assessment processes are evaluated through the annual monitoring reports to awarding bodies and self-assessment reports at curriculum level.

2.48 Students' good academic practice is developed through a variety of mechanisms including written guidance in student handbooks, induction programmes, academic referencing workshops and guidance from tutors. Where possible all assignments are submitted digitally on the VLE and are subject to plagiarism-detection software.

2.49 Applications for recognition of prior learning are considered by the Quality and Higher Education Coordinator in accordance with the policies of the awarding bodies and organisation. Students with learning difficulties and disabilities are identified at interview stage or during induction. Their needs are independently assessed by trained student support staff and appropriate adjustments are made to their assessment if required.

2.50 The team found that the College operates fair, transparent and equitable processes of assessment in accordance with the regulations of the awarding bodies and organisation, and that these allow all students to demonstrate the intended learning outcomes for the programmes of study. The review team concludes that Expectation B6 is met and the risk is low.

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

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.51 The College follows the universities' procedures for the appointment and induction of external examiners. For Pearson programmes, examiners are appointed by the awarding organisation. External examiners review academic and qualification standards, assessment processes and the quality assurance of the programmes. The roles and responsibilities of external examiners are clearly defined in awarding body and awarding organisation guidance. The College has internal procedures to review external examiners' reports and respond to any recommendations or build on good practice. External examiners' reports are reviewed at programme and senior management level and form an integral element of the programme monitoring process. The reports feed into the College's annual higher education self-assessment document. The use made of external examiners enables the College to meet Expectation B7 of the Quality Code.

2.52 The review team considered how the processes outlined above operate in practice by scrutinising selected external examiners' reports and action plans, looking at relevant policies on the induction of examiners and minutes of relevant committees and correspondence, and by meeting staff and students. The team tested how external examiners' reports are used and responded to by the College.

2.53 There is early contact between external examiners and the relevant College programme teams. University partners invite a programme representatives to attend the induction of newly appointed external examiners. All newly appointed external examiners also receive a College and programme induction during their first visit.

2.54 The College has established procedures for managing the external examiner process. The Quality and Higher Education Coordinator receives all external examiners' reports and distributes copies to the College's Directors of Curriculum and programme teams for review and action planning. Awarding bodies have their own regulations in relation to generating and managing responses to external examiners' reports, involving link tutors in the process. College progress made in resolving actions or recommendations is monitored during the annual monitoring process. College programmes which are delivered as part of a consortium receive individual College-specific external examiners' reports. External examiners generally provide oral feedback to the College programme teams at the examination boards. Action plans are formulated which inform the overall programme annual review and evaluation process. Awarding bodies work closely with the College in sharing and responding appropriately to examiners' reports.

2.55 At College level, and specifically for Pearson programmes, external examiners' reports and any associated action planning are reviewed by the HESG, Curriculum School Management Team and programme teams. Pearson external examiners currently make two visits per academic year, and College staff value their readiness to discuss any issues of concern with programme teams. Programme teams discuss relevant information from external examiners' reports with students at course forums or programme committees, although these are not currently made available to students on the VLE.

2.56 Evidence from year-on-year external examiners' reports confirms that the College is addressing recommendations or actions made at programme level. The College is proposing that the HESG will provide increased oversight and monitoring. At present the College does not produce a summary report on the external examining process, nor do the recently

revised terms of reference for HESG explicitly state its role in addressing the comments of examiners. There is no evidence of a systematic process that encompasses all higher education programmes in generating action plans showing how examiners' comments, recommendations and areas of good practice are addressed. The review team **recommends** that by December 2015 the College develops a more systematic approach to providing oversight and management of the good practice and recommendations emerging from external examiners' reports. This matter is also addressed in the recommendation regarding terms of reference for deliberative committees made under Expectation B8, and under Enhancement.

2.57 Overall, external examiners' reports confirm that the College's delivery of its higher education programmes is meeting qualification and subject benchmarks, and its awarding bodies' and awarding organisation's academic standards. While there is good evidence that the College is managing the outcomes of external examining at programme level, there is a lack of a systematic oversight process that encompasses all its higher education provision. The review team therefore concludes that Expectation B7 is met and the level of risk is moderate.

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



**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**

2.58 Responsibility for the management and quality assurance of all academic provision within the College lies with directors of curriculum and support functions. Senior management responsibility lies with the Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality. The College has an established self-assessment programme which identifies a timeline for key quality assurance events such as programme committee meetings, examination boards and collaborative reviews. The approach the College takes to programme monitoring and periodic review enables it to meet Expectation B8 of the Quality Code.

2.59 In testing the College's processes, the review team met senior staff, academic and support staff and students. In addition, it looked at self-assessment reports, and minutes from the HESG and the Curriculum and Quality Committee of the governing body.

2.60 The annual self-assessment process includes critical evaluation and action planning by programme teams at curriculum level. This is summarised in a Higher Education Self-Assessment Report (HESAR) overseen by the HESG. The HESG, chaired by the Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality, provides operational oversight of higher education provision within the College and reports to the senior management team through the HESAR. The HESAR is approved by the Curriculum and Quality Committee of the governing body. Programme teams contribute to the annual review and evaluation processes at partner institutions through their annual reporting processes.

2.61 The HESG comprises Directors of Curriculum, the Directors of Learning and Innovation, and Quality and Academic Standards, heads of teaching and learning, and other staff involved in higher education provision. The HESG monitors quality and standards and reports to the curriculum managers and the senior management team on progress and outcomes of higher education through the HESAR. The HESAR summarises annual curriculum and review within the College and considers student achievement and progression, maintenance of academic standards, external examiners' reports and recommendations, and the results of student surveys and other feedback. However, there is no evidence of action plans arising from this reporting process.

2.62 The College has recently revised the HESG terms of reference which require the group to consider reports from programme committees and examination and assessment boards, receive and approve curriculum self-evaluation reports and action plans, and provide a forum for dissemination of good practice. However, the HESG terms of reference and minutes of meetings demonstrate that consideration is limited to reviews of student surveys, feedback from programme committees, student progression, the identification of student support needs, and the impact of teaching and learning initiatives. There is a lack of systematic evaluation and monitoring of internal curriculum reviews, link tutors' programme reports and external examiners' reports. The review team therefore recommends that the College ensure that, by September 2015, the terms of reference and membership for the key deliberative committee for quality assurance enable effective evaluation of student engagement and feedback, and external examiners' comments. These matters are also addressed under Expectations B5 and B7.

2.63 It is unclear how oversight of the higher education provision provided by HESG informs the HESAR and no action plan has been developed to address issues highlighted. In its current format the HESAR provides only a partial overview, with limited evaluative and reflective oversight of programme management and delivery. The review team therefore recommends that, by December 2015, the College ensures the annual self-assessment process provides more evaluative and effective planning and oversight of provision.

2.64 Overall, there are processes in place for the routine monitoring and review of individual programmes. However, there is limited evaluative and effective oversight at College level, and a need for more robust quality improvement action planning. The views of students and comments from external examiners need to be more explicitly addressed in the deliberative committees. The review team concludes that Expectation B8 is met and the associated level of risk is moderate.

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

**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**

2.65 The College has varying responsibilities for complaints and academic appeals dependent on the awarding body and organisation. A cross-College policy is in place for complaints, and students confirm that they can make a complaint or appeal without being disadvantaged. The differing processes are signposted to students in programme handbooks, the VLE and at induction. These arrangements enable the College to meet Expectation B9 of the Quality Code.

2.66 To test this process the team reviewed information regarding responsibility for complaints and appeals, along with information available to students. The review team also discussed complaints and appeals procedures with staff and students to test how well the policies and procedures are understood and implemented.

2.67 The College has in place fair, effective and timely processes to deal with complaints and appeals, and students are directed to either the College website or College Student Services. The Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality has oversight of complaints and manages the complaints log, although relevant managers investigate complaints and prepare responses. The timeframe for responding to students is clear and appropriate. Students clearly understand the complaints process and know where to find the procedural information. To ensure that the complaints procedure is followed consistently across the College, the Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality provides appropriate oversight.

2.68 Academic appeals follow the policies and procedures of the awarding bodies or awarding organisation. Information is provided in the programme handbooks and on the VLE. Students on Pearson programmes can appeal directly to the curriculum director, as set out in the Quality Handbook. No formal appeals or complaints have occurred in the last two academic years. Students confirm they are aware of the relevant academic appeals process.

2.69 Overall, the College has an effective complaints process in place. This is well understood by students and staff. The academic appeals process is made clear to students within the requirements of the awarding body or organisation. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation B9 is met and the level of 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**

2.70 The College's Stand Out Challenge Strategic Plan 2013-2016 provides clear aims on developing the College's curriculum offer to meet and develop emerging work skills needs for the local area. This includes developing a 'standout' workforce and being responsive and accountable to the local community. These aims are reflected in the College's current higher education provision, which provides work-based and work-related learning opportunities. The College has also demonstrated a responsiveness to local industry needs through its Higher Apprenticeship provision, which uses Higher National programmes to provide underpinning knowledge. The College has responsibility for the effective management of its arrangements with employers and placement providers where this constitutes an integral part of the students' programmes.

2.71 Higher education students are either in employment, undertaking substantial programme-related voluntary work, or on Higher Apprenticeships. Students and workplace mentors receive College monitoring in their workplace. The College actively engages with employers at a local level, and with professional organisations, to ensure that students are provided with a range of opportunities to extend industrial knowledge and gain professional recognition for their skills and knowledge. The College's approach to the quality assurance of placement learning enables it to meet Expectation B10.

2.72 In considering whether the Expectation is met in practice, the review team looked at documentary evidence, including codes of practice from validating partners and handbooks for employers and placement providers. The team discussed with senior managers, staff and students the way in which the College manages its responsibilities for work-based learning.

2.73 The College is committed to enhancing students' employability skills and opportunities through the development of a range of employment-related skills, and the launch of the Genovation Centre in September 2014. Students reported that one of the main reasons they chose the College is that employability is embedded in the curriculum of many of the programmes. The College's recently inaugurated alumni service enables former students to provide guidance and information to current students which supports career selection and an understanding of the needs of their chosen employment sector.

2.74 The College is working proactively to enhance its relationships with employers to consolidate students' employability prospects. Guest speakers make a positive contribution to students' understanding of curriculum issues and employment in the performing arts section. Where students use outdoor locations to participate in employment-related events the College follows its risk assessment procedures. Students on the HND Performing Arts programme spoke positively of the role of guest speakers and workshops delivered by a television presenter, theatre actors and other practising professionals from the creative industries. The performing arts department provides additional support for the development of professional skills through its relations with The Firestation Centre for Arts and Culture, Windsor, and by student participation in the College's internal Theatre in Education project. As a direct result of performing arts students' programme-related participation in local performing arts at a local theatre, two students have been offered employment.

2.75 The Foundation Degree Building Services Engineering programme has accreditation for meeting the academic requirements of the first stage of Incorporated Engineer status from the Chartered Institute of Building Services Engineers and the Energy Institute. On the Foundation Degree in Building Services Engineering there is a long-standing relationship with the British Airports Authority (BAA). The Programme Team has met BAA Training and Development Managers to discuss the foundation degree (FD) programme for the past three years. The programme worked with the Slough Chamber of Commerce and the Aspire Centre to develop an engineering showcase event held in February 2015 which strengthened links between local engineering companies and the College.

2.76 The HNC/D Computing and Systems Development, established in partnership with Oracle, has engaged with companies, including British Airways, and CompTIA. This ensures that College resources available to computing students are current and of an industrial standard and that unit selection and content meets employer and apprentice needs. British Airways have worked proactively with the College in ensuring that the HNC/D Computing and Systems Development modules meet the needs of its apprentices. In response to an employment skills need identified by British Airways, the College has recently incorporated Java and virtualisation software into its programme. New software was purchased by the College to support delivery of these units. As an additional employment-focused approach to programme delivery, the College has run CISCO qualifications alongside the HNC/D Computing and Systems Development programme.

2.77 In HNC/D Construction and Built Environment, unit selection has taken place in partnership with Costain Group PLC. The Costain Training and Development Manager meets programme staff to discuss the industry relevance of proposed unit delivery to support the industrial knowledge needs and skills of their current 11 Higher Apprenticeships on the programme.

2.78 The foundation degrees programmes for Early Years and the Primary Education were developed and validated to meet sector professional and curricular standards. The Foundation Degree Early Years Practice is endorsed by the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years. The programme makes effective use of a 'buddy' initiative which allows students to visit a range of early years work environments. The Foundation Degree Business Management replaced the HNC/D in Business, in response to prospective student feedback which indicated a preference for a foundation degree as it was considered to be more relevant to the local employment sector. The high level of responsiveness to stakeholder demands for employment-focused programme development is identified as good practice under Expectation B1.

2.79 Students on the foundation degrees have a workplace mentor, although guidance for mentors is variable across programmes. Personal tutors make workplace visits to both student and mentor twice annually. The Foundation Degree in Business Management has a brief guide which sets out the role and responsibilities of both the student and mentor. Other programmes rely mainly on oral briefings to support information on the mentor's/employer's role in supporting foundation degree students. The College has a range of documentation which is used by mentors to record student progress and performance in the workplace and provide student feedback. However, this was found to be variable, and in some cases absent, across programmes. The review team recommends that, by September 2015, the College formalises guidance, including programme information, for workplace mentors and ensures that roles and responsibilities are clear.

2.80 The team concludes that the College has policies and procedures in place to manage work placements and there is oversight of the existing provision. There is good practice in engagement with employers, although the guidance for workplace mentors needs

to be formalised. The team therefore concludes that Expectation B10 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

**Findings**

2.81 The College does not offer research degrees.

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

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

2.83 All of the applicable Expectations in this area have been met, although the risk has been identified as moderate in two areas.

2.84 The team identified four recommendations. These include, under Expectation B7, developing a more systematic process for managing the issues and good practice identified by external examiners; under Expectation B8, revising the terms of reference for the key deliberative committees as part of a more evaluative review process, and ensuring greater evaluative oversight and action planning for higher education provision; and within Expectation B10, providing full guidance to workplace mentors.

2.85 There are three examples of good practice. These include the approachability of staff and wide range of feedback opportunities, the responsiveness to stakeholder demands for employment-focused programmes, and the approaches taken to enhancing students' employability and professional skills. Additionally, the team affirmed the College's approach to involving students further in deliberative committees.

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



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

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

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

##### **Findings**

3.1 The College provides a wide range of information for stakeholders including prospective students, current students, staff and employers. The College's mission and core values are set out on its public website. The higher education section is prominent and is a key link on each main page. Detailed information about programmes and support services is available to potential applicants through the website and to current students through the VLE, which is accessible both on and off-campus. As well as programme-specific sections, such as programme handbooks and module guides, the VLE includes a general information section for higher education students. The Deputy Principal Curriculum and Quality is ultimately responsible for approving definitive versions of documents and other information.

3.2 The review team tested that information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy by scrutinising a wide range of information published in hard copy and electronically, on the website and the VLE. Additionally, the team had discussions with students and staff, including the marketing staff team.

3.3 Processes for ensuring that information is fit for purpose, accurate and trustworthy are at present largely informal, although effective in practice. Staff have a clear understanding of processes but these are not formally recorded in an information management policy or procedures. The review team **recommends** that, by September 2015, the College formalise and document the processes for the approval and review of information. Information for the College prospectuses and other printed material is written either by the programme teams and curriculum director or the marketing team. Draft information is checked by the Quality and Higher Education Coordinator and relevant programme teams for accuracy, and sent for verification to the awarding body if required. Course factsheets, made available on the College's external webpages, are produced by relevant curriculum areas and approved by the curriculum director. This information is then stored on the course file database. Prospective students are invited to attend a higher education seminar before enrolment and open days.

3.4 Programme teams review student handbooks annually, seeking approval from the curriculum directors, overseen by the Quality and Higher Education Coordinator. External examiners periodically comment on the quality of programme information, including handbooks and awarding bodies' programme documentation. All handbooks are standardised and follow the template of the awarding body or organisation to ensure appropriate information is included as well as any additional awarding body requirements.

3.5 Students confirm that they receive appropriate information before applying for their programme, including at interview, and that it is generally accurate and helpful. Further information is also available in detailed handbooks. Students are clear about the awarding body or organisation responsible for their programme, where to find information about learning and other support services, and how they can make a complaint. Some students were unaware that external examiners' reports were available to them.

3.6 The VLE provides an additional effective source of information, and is used extensively by both students and staff. The VLE is continuing to develop in response to staff and student suggestions. It is used in a variety of ways, both as a repository for documents and for other interactive teaching and learning activities. It is used for electronic submission of work for assessment and subsequent electronic feedback. Assessment submissions include written documents and video material.

3.7 The College understands the various technologies used by students in accessing information and has put arrangements in place to allow for the use of different platforms. This meets the information needs of students and is much appreciated. The College offers mobile devices to ensure access to learning materials. The College has a clear strategy for the development of the digital interface and is investing in e-books. Staff use tablet computers in teaching, and good practice is shared between tutors on how to use new technologies. The review team consider that the innovative use of new technologies, which ensures that a wide range of information is readily accessible for prospective and current students, is **good practice**.

3.8 Overall, the team concludes that the wide range of information produced for prospective and current students is suitable. There is good practice in the innovative use of new technologies, which ensures that information is readily accessible for prospective and current students. Staff have a clear understanding of the procedures in place to ensure information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy, although no formal information management policy exists. The review team concludes that Expectation C is met and the associated risk level is low.

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

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

3.9 In reaching its positive judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook. The Expectation for this judgement area is met and the associated level of risk is low.

3.10 Information published is generally fit for purpose and trustworthy. Processes for the development and verification of information are understood by staff. However, while processes are generally understood and effective in practice, there is an opportunity to formalise and document the processes for the approval and review of information. Students confirm that information is comprehensive, accessible and helpful to them and that it provides them with sound information to support their learning. The innovative use of mobile technologies to provide information is good practice.

3.11 The review team therefore concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the College **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 In addition to enhancements in provision that have been developed in response to review and monitoring processes, the College is able to demonstrate deliberate steps it takes to enhance and improve the quality of students' learning opportunities. These include gathering and responding to employers' and students' feedback in course design and development, teaching and learning, admissions processes and employability. Some of these activities are identified in the College's recent Enhancement Strategy prepared for the review visit. The arrangements currently in place allow the College to meet the Enhancement Expectation.

4.2 The QAA Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review in 2011 identified the establishment of the Higher Education Steering Group as an area of good practice. HESG brings together Directors of Curriculum, programme leaders and student support services from across the College's provision. It also provides a key forum which enables the sharing of good practice. Recent enhancements HESG has overseen include the development of the College's admissions system to improve the interview process by including personal statements on application forms. Improvements to the availability of digital resources and mobile technologies were developed in explicit response to student focus groups.

4.3 Students value the opportunity to contribute to the design and delivery of their programmes and curriculum, and the College's responsiveness to student feedback. Examples provided included changes to the curriculum in HNC/D Computing and Systems Development and changes to the units in HND Performing Arts. Both of these are designed to enhance the employability of graduates.

4.4 The College demonstrates explicit actions taken to involve employers in the design of programmes and the curriculum. In addition to ensuring that the programmes meet the specific needs of industry and employers, their input has also enhanced student learning and employability. Both students and employers recognised the enhancement these relationships bring to student learning and employability. These matters are also addressed under Expectations B1 and B10.

4.5 The College has worked with the National Engineering Foundation to develop its STEM strategy to expand these areas of study to afford sustainable progression opportunities to students and address the lack of multidisciplinary employees identified by employers. The Genovation Centre encourages student interaction with employers both inside and outside the College, and to develop their multidisciplinary skills. Employers and students are very enthusiastic about the facilities offered by the Genovation Centre and the opportunities it affords students to engage with employers in industry-based projects and to enhance the development of interdisciplinary and employability skills.

4.6 The College's 'Teaching Squares' initiative, designed to enhance professional development among higher education staff and recognised in the last QAA review as good practice, has been rolled out to all curriculum areas. The initiative is facilitated by the heads of teaching and learning and provides cross-disciplinary dissemination of innovative practice. Recently appointed staff particularly noted the contribution that 'Teaching Squares' bring to the development and enhancement of their teaching practice.

4.7 The College has enhanced student feedback by organising Student Conferences and facilitating student-led focus groups, which have considered issues such as how employability is embedded in the curriculum. The College ran the first dedicated Higher Education Conference for student representatives in 2015. This focused on teaching and learning and the student experience, and resulted in a Student Voice Action Plan. Outcomes from these events have informed the College's learning technologies strategy and ways in which digital and mobile technologies are made available to students to enhance learning and provide access to resources.

4.8 Recent strategic enhancements have included the appointment of a Quality and Higher Education Coordinator to support individual students and coordinate development across the College. Staff noted how effective this development is in bringing together the higher education team and HESG to provide operational oversight. The provision of dedicated teaching and social spaces for higher education students at the Langley campus enhances both their learning and the student experience. The College is also bidding for funding to support an initiative to establish an Institute of Higher Education in Slough.

4.9 However, the recently developed Enhancement Strategy does not demonstrate that a strategic process has been put in place to encourage a culture of enhancement across the College. There is limited oversight of higher education and quality improvement planning. The review team therefore **recommends** that, by December 2015, the College consolidate and articulate a more systematic and explicit approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities.

4.10 Overall, the team concludes that the College meets the Expectation and that the associated level of risk is low. Deliberate steps are being taken to improve the quality of learning opportunities and there are many improvement activities. There is evidence that some initiatives are having a positive impact, but there is a lack of a systematic approach and further work to consolidate the various improvement activities would provide a more strategic framework.

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

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

4.11 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified. The team considers the Expectation to have been met, based on the extent to which the College has introduced and integrated a set of initiatives to enhance the quality of students' learning opportunities.

4.12 However, the College's approach to the monitoring and review of enhancement activity is at an emerging stage. Enhancement is driven informally rather than systematically consolidated. Further work to consolidate the various improvement activities would provide a more strategic approach.

4.13 Therefore, the team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

## 5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

### Findings

5.1 The College's learning environment provides a variety of opportunities for students to gain an extensive range of knowledge, skills and understanding of the professions and industries they have entered, or wish to enter. The College's Standout Challenge Strategy articulates the College's vision and intent to support students' employability development. There is extensive evidence to demonstrate the College's engagement with employers in the design and development of the higher education programmes offered to ensure students have the necessary knowledge and skills base for their chosen career path. Programme modules and learning outcomes support employability through assessment activities which demonstrate the application of theory to a work-based activity.

5.2 The College effectively uses labour market intelligence to inform itself of current and future skills needs in its local business and industrial base. Through this intelligence the College keeps abreast of developing growth and priority areas for local, regional and national demand. The STEM Strategy enables the College to respond to employer demands for employees to be competent to GCSE level in Mathematics and English. Where possible the College seeks to contextualise these skills in students' programmes of study.

5.3 The College effectively uses its student services provision to provide opportunities for students to develop and refine a range of employability skills, through individual support or through attendance at employability-related workshops. Careers advisers are appropriately qualified and experienced to offer an extensive range of individual and group employability support such as curriculum vitae and application writing, job searches, and interview techniques, as well as assisting students to gain work experience and identify opportunities to participate in volunteering activities.

5.4 The College's innovative Genovation Centre provides students with an opportunity to work with students from other disciplines on live projects. Students share their knowledge and expertise while being exposed to multidisciplinary knowledge, practical skills and team working. Participating students gain real-world project management skills.

5.5 Student comments confirm their programmes of study are employment focused and provide the knowledge and skills to support them in their current employment and future job roles. Students state that staff with industry experience provide clear and effective examples of the link between theory and practice. The exposure to a wide range of people, such as lecturers, guest speakers, and fellow students from different work environments, has enhanced their learning experience and employability.

## 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 to 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](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality).

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

### Academic standards

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

### Award

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

### 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.

**QAA1313 - R4090 - Aug 15**

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Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786