Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of EThames Graduate School Ltd

April 2016

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at EThames Graduate School Ltd. The review took place from 12 to 13 April 2016 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Christopher Mabika
- Dr Anya Perera
- Mrs Sala Kamkosi Banda-Khulumula (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) the QAA review team:

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

In reviewing EThames Graduate School Ltd, the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland. The themes for the academic year 2015-16 are Student Employability and Digital Literacy,[2] and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

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 5.

The QAA website gives more information about QAA and its mission.[3] A dedicated section explains the method for Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers).[4] For an explanation of terms see the glossary at the end of this report.

---

[1] The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code
[2] Higher Education Review themes:
www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2859
[3] QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us.
[4] Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers):
www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Educational-Oversight-.aspx

Key findings

QAA's judgements about EThames Graduate School Ltd

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at EThames Graduate School Ltd.

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards **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 feature of **good practice** at EThames Graduate School Ltd.

- The high levels of student engagement throughout the College which support the continuing improvement of the student learning experience (Expectation B5).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendation** to EThames Graduate School Ltd.

By October 2016:

- measure the effectiveness of enhancement initiatives using institutional benchmarks that are distinctive to the College's strategic goals (Enhancement).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The introduction of the new process for the approval of new courses to ensure future provision is aligned with the College's current strategic vision (Expectation B1).
- The steps being taken to strengthen the admissions process to match applicants to courses more effectively (Expectation B2).
- The steps being taken to allow online learning students to benefit more fully from the range of available support mechanisms, to enable completion (Expectation B3).
- The steps being taken to appoint an Employer Engagement and Work-Related Learning Coordinator to support students in gaining parity of work experience and careers advice (Expectation B3).

Theme: Digital Literacy

Overall, EThames Graduate School Ltd (the College) has clearly expressed ambitious strategic plans for its approach to embedding digital literacy into its teaching and learning. Commitment to the development of student's digital literacy skills is reflected in the College's Strategic and Growth Plan 2015-18 and articulated in the Digital Literacy Strategy 2015-18.

The College seeks to embed digital literacy in the curriculum through the delivery, assessment and support mechanisms.

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

About EThames Graduate School Ltd

EThames Graduate School Ltd (the College) is a private education provider founded in 2004 and located in Gants Hill, a district of Ilford in the London Borough of Redbridge in northeast London. The Chief Executive Officer and the Academic Principal lead 17 academic staff and 22 professional services staff. Five academic staff have permanent full-time or fractional contracts and 12 academic staff have sessional contracts. All of the 22 professional services staff have permanent full time contracts. The College mission is to 'create a dynamic environment to stimulate students' interest and capabilities through teaching and scholarship which will advance their knowledge, skills, understanding and future careers'.

There are 566 students studying higher education courses at the College. Of these, 46 students are enrolled with the University of Bradford. There are 520 students enrolled at the College on Pearson Higher National awards, of whom 478 study full-time and 42 study part-time. The College also has 11 students enrolled on a further education Open College Network (OCN) Access to Higher Education Diploma.

The College recruits students from the UK and the EU and no longer admits students from overseas. The College's decision to change its recruitment strategy and surrender its Tier 4 licence in June 2015 resulted in some fluctuation in student numbers when compared with recent years. The current total of 566 students represents an increase of 68 per cent when compared with the 336 students enrolled at the time of the Review for Educational Oversight (REO) monitoring visit in April 2014. However, the current total of 566 students is 60 per cent fewer than the 1,416 students enrolled at the time of the QAA REO in March 2012.

At the time of Tier 4 licence revocation, there were five students due to complete a Pearson Extended Diploma in Strategic Management and Leadership in October 2015, and a further 22 students due to complete in January 2016. Appropriate arrangements were made in agreement with the students. Arrangements included certification following early programme completion supported by intensive teaching delivery, receipt of transcript and partial refund.

Recent key changes include senior management restructuring, staffing and changes in partnerships. A new Chief Executive Officer is in place to oversee College operations. A new Academic Principal is in post following the previous Principal's departure towards the end of 2015. A new Student Services Manager/Registrar replaces the previous postholder and an appointment is made to the newly created post of Quality Manager. The College's partnership with the University of Greenwich ceased in 2014 due to the low level of overseas student applications.

The College cites its greatest challenge as student recruitment in light of the funding through student loans, the expense of tuition fees, and the number of institutions competing for students in the Greater London area. Strategies to address these challenges include continuing to offer vocational courses with direct route into employment and to top-up degrees, and an approach to recruitment and admissions that aligns with the widening participation agenda.

The College offers courses in partnership with the University of Bradford (the University) and Pearson. The partnership between the University and the College is planned to cease in

2017, coinciding with the scheduled completion date of the cohort of students currently enrolled on the franchised BSc Health, Wellbeing and Social Care (Top-up). The College is seeking new partners for undergraduate and postgraduate provision. The College offers four Higher National awards accredited by Pearson. Access to Higher Education Diplomas are offered in conjunction with the Open College Network (OCN).

At the time of the REO annual monitoring visit in April 2014, the College was judged to have made 'commendable' progress in addressing each of the two points of good practice and nine recommendations arising from the initial QAA review in 2012.

Explanation of the findings about EThames Graduate School Ltd

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

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

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

a) ensure that the requirements of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (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.

Findings

1.1   The College is responsible for delivering programmes offered in partnership with the University of Bradford and Pearson. The College does not hold degree awarding powers or design its own awards. All programmes offered at the College are subjected to the approval processes of its awarding partners. Academic standards are set with consideration of the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements during the design and validation procedures of each respective partner, and for the awarding organisation, accreditation procedures that are linked to the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF).

1.2   For Pearson validated Higher National awards, qualification specifications developed by Pearson identify threshold academic standards and learning outcomes and these are approved by Ofqual. For University awards programme specifications are prepared by the University.

1.3   The College's awarding partners retain overall responsibility for standards, while the College is responsible for meeting the requirements of its awarding partners and for resourcing and delivering its provision. For University of Bradford awards the responsibilities of the College for maintaining academic standards are set out in the partnership agreement. The College's own arrangements and its use of the awarding body and Pearson regulatory frameworks would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.4   The review team examined a range of documentation including quality assurance documents, external examiners' and standards verifiers' reports, review reports, and

partnership documents. The review team held meetings with College staff, students and representatives from the University of Bradford.

1.5   The evidence demonstrates the arrangements to be effective in practice. The College's Academic Principal is responsible for monitoring compliance with institutional responsibilities that underpin the management of academic standards. The Academic Principal has oversight of provision and reports to the Curriculum Management Group.

1.6   The College's arrangements for managing the standards of the awards it delivers are clearly articulated in its own quality assurance manual. The EThames Quality Assurance Handbook details the College's own internal policies and procedures and these reflect the quality assurance expectations for Pearson provision.

1.7   For Pearson provision, assessments are set and internally verified by the College. A sample of assessments is externally verified by the Pearson-appointed standards verifier to confirm that they are set at the appropriate level and cover the intended learning outcomes. The Pearson Academic Management Review and external examiner processes are used to confirm that academic standards are appropriate. These awards comprise the largest proportion of the College's established provision.

1.8   For University awards, assessments are set by the University. The University has oversight and monitors academic standards to ensure that its requirements are met. The appointed link tutor from the University visits once each semester. The University-appointed external examiner reports confirm that student work meets the learning outcomes and is at the appropriate level and standard.

1.9   The awarding partners have ultimate responsibility for ensuring adherence to the relevant external reference points. The College works effectively within its partnership agreements to manage its own responsibilities for ensuring adherence to external reference points. This is confirmed through, for example, quality review reports and the conclusions from external examiner and standards verifier reports. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation 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

1.10   The regulatory frameworks of the awarding partners determine academic standards and award of credit for each award. Awards are devised by the University and Pearson respectively and are subject to review by each awarding partner. Awarding partners have responsibility for academic frameworks and regulations and for any changes to programme specifications and module descriptors. The College is required to deliver and assess programmes in accordance with the frameworks and processes set out in the awarding partners' regulations, guidance and partnership agreements.

1.11   For the University award, module descriptors are contained in the University-devised course handbook. University staff set assessments and moderate or second mark the first marking undertaken by College staff. Examination boards take place at the University. The College is also subject to reviews conducted by the University.

1.12   For Higher National awards the College uses the unit descriptors devised by Pearson. Assessments are set and internally verified by the College, and a sample externally verified by the Pearson-appointed standards verifier. The College's Policy and Procedures Framework sets out the requirements for the management of the assessment and these align with the BTEC Guide to Assessment Levels 4 to 7. The College is subject to annual review by Pearson. The College convenes examination boards to confirm that students have met the requirements of their award. These arrangements would permit the College to meet the Expectation.

1.13   The team scrutinised documentation including course, unit and quality handbooks, and reports arising from partnership reviews, standards verifiers and external examiners. The team also tested understanding of standards through meeting with senior and teaching staff.

1.14   The evidence reviewed shows the procedures to be effective in practice. The respective responsibilities of the College and the awarding partners are clear and the team learned that the College adheres to the frameworks and regulations in the award of credit and qualifications. For the University award, a link tutor at the University has oversight of provision. The link tutor, who provides a source of advice about learning outcomes and assessment, visits the College each semester and supports the College in adhering to University frameworks and regulations as appropriate.

1.15   For Pearson awards, the College's course and unit handbooks contain the course specification with the learning outcomes, modes of assessment and unit level descriptors. Course handbooks are updated annually and unit handbooks are updated each term; these are made available on the College's virtual learning environment (VLE). The College's own policies and procedures framework includes procedures for assessment, arrangements for assessment and grading, internal verification, appeals, academic misconduct and recognition of prior learning (RPL). These documents are helpful in enabling the College to manage the awards in accordance with the expectations of the awarding organisation including the award of academic credit and qualifications.

1.16   The awarding partners have responsibility for academic frameworks and regulations. Within the context of partnership agreements the College operates appropriately to uphold the regulatory frameworks and regulations. Therefore the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.17   Responsibility for maintaining the definitive record for each course and qualification, in the form of programme specifications, rests with the University and Pearson respectively. For Pearson provision the College has responsibility for producing contextualised course specifications with reference to the definitive information provided by Pearson. Responsibility for the administration, management and delivery of the provision rests with the College. The generation of certificates and records of study in both cases is the responsibility of the awarding partner, while the College keeps specific information on the students' grades and credit achievements. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.18   The review team evaluated the effectiveness of these arrangements by examining course partnership agreements, specifications, course and unit handbooks, the College website and its VLE. The team also held meetings with senior staff, academic staff, support staff, students and representatives from the University.

1.19   Overall, the evidence reviewed demonstrates arrangements to be effective in practice. The responsibility for the maintenance of definitive records is clear. Each course has a designated Course Manager and responsibility for ensuring that accurate records are maintained rests with the College Registrar. The College produces handbooks for the Pearson awards, which align with Pearson requirements. These handbooks include programme specifications, assignments and learning outcomes. The College has a formal internal verification process for all assignments. Some assignments are also sampled through the external verification process to ensure adherence to Pearson's requirements. For the University award, the College's arrangements are supported by a University link tutor whose role includes maintaining all documentation relating to the management, assessment and amendments to the programme. The College works closely with the University link tutor to adhere to the academic arrangements.

1.20   Within its partnership agreements the College fulfils its responsibilities for maintaining definitive records. The College works closely with its awarding partners and information is made available to students in College handbooks, University-devised handbooks and on the VLE. The review team concludes that the College meets the Expectation 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

1.21   Responsibility for the approval of programmes offered at the College lies with each awarding partner. The College delivers franchised provision validated by the University and also delivers Pearson Higher National awards. The responsibilities of these awarding partners include programme design, approval, modification, and ensuring that academic standards are set at an appropriate level in accordance with their academic frameworks and regulations. The University and Pearson approve the College to deliver their programmes and ensure that the frameworks within the College work. These arrangements would enable the College to meet the Expectation.

1.22   The review team explored the effectiveness of these arrangements by examining documentary evidence of partners' academic frameworks and regulations, partnership agreements, annual and periodic review reports, standards verifier and external examiners' reports, and the College's Academic Standards Policy. The team also held meetings with senior and academic staff, support staff, students and representatives from the University.

1.23   Annual approval by Pearson indicates satisfaction with the College's management of its responsibilities in this area. The University is satisfied that the management of academic standards is secure. Deliberations at meetings between the review team and College staff showed that participants understood, and were able to articulate, the division of responsibilities between the College and each awarding partner, and the processes by which the College discharges its responsibilities. No concerns about threshold standards are expressed in standards verifier and external examiner reports.

1.24   The review team concludes that, within the context of the partnership agreement with its awarding body and the arrangements with the awarding organisation, the College fulfils its responsibilities in programme approval. The College understands its responsibilities and operates appropriately to comply with academic frameworks and regulations. Therefore the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.25   The College is required to operate within assessment regulations established by its awarding partners, each of which provides the definitive specifications for the delivery of its programmes. For the University provision, assessments are set by the University and responsibility for first marking rests with the College. Assessment decisions are internally moderated at the University and external moderation is undertaken by examiners appointed by the awarding body. Results are confirmed at examination boards convened at the University.

1.26   For Pearson provision, the awarding organisation outlines the intended learning outcomes for each unit, and provides the assessment criteria for each outcome and generic pass descriptors. The College is responsible for preparing assessments, first marking and internal verification. Responsibility for establishing an assessment framework, with specific policies including procedures for extenuating circumstances, reasonable adjustment and malpractice, and mechanisms for checking, including assessment boards, also rests with the College. The College has an Assessment Policy outlining various procedures, including the Procedure for Assessment and Grading, Assessment and Assessor Expectations document, Internal Verification and Moderation Procedures, Procedure for Assessing Group Work and procedures for RPL. These documents are mapped to relevant expectations of the Quality Code.

1.27   The awarding organisation checks that these arrangements are in place during the annual management review and standards verifier visits. The Pearson-assigned standards verifier also checks and approves a sample of assessment briefs and assessment decisions. These arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.28   The review team explored the operation of the arrangements by examining the procedural documents of the awarding partners and the College, including assignment briefs and internal verification reports on the assignment briefs, examination board minutes, and standards verifier and external examiner reports. The team also held meetings with senior and academic staff, support staff, students and representatives from the University.

1.29   The College's assessment procedures are articulated in its Assessment and Grading Procedure document, which makes reference to Ofqual and QAA guidance. Course handbooks show intended learning outcomes and how these link with specific assessment criteria. Handbooks are updated annually and made available for staff and students. The Quality Assurance Handbook provides detailed guidance on application of credit and makes reference to the use of the FHEQ. A recent staff development programme incorporated sessions on effective assessment and good practices. The College holds exam boards to confirm results, and from September 2015 has introduced subject assessment panels to give more time for the discussion of matters including similarity scores and malpractice.

1.30   From the documentation and meetings, the review team found that the College's management of responsibilities within partnership arrangements is effective. For Pearson provision, assessment design and methods are appropriate and provide suitable opportunities for students to achieve the learning outcomes. Therefore, the review team concludes that the College manages its responsibilities for the award of credits and qualifications effectively. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3.3): 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

1.31   For the University provision, the University specifies processes for review that explicitly address academic standards. The College is required to complete the University-devised Programme Enhancement Plan template each semester and this contributes to the annual monitoring of the programme by the University. The College is also required to participate in the University's periodic review process. For Pearson provision, the College is responsible for ensuring that appropriate procedures are in place for programme monitoring and review. The College applies its own arrangements and explains these in the detailed Course and Institution Annual Monitoring Reports Procedures Manual. Pearson also issues an annual Academic Management Review Report on the College's management of its provision. These arrangements would enable the College to meet the Expectation.

1.32   The review team explored the operation of the College's arrangements by examining documentary evidence, including review and monitoring reports and the minutes of relevant College committees. The team also held meetings with senior and teaching staff, and students. The team also met University representatives.

1.33   Overall, the arrangements for programme monitoring and review are effective. For the University provision any issues and recommendations arising from the monitoring process by the University are reported and discussed with the link tutor.

1.34   The College's annual monitoring process is clearly evidenced in the Annual Institution Monitoring and Enhancement Report, drawing upon contributors to the review process including course reports, which discuss student performance, external examiner reports and associated actions, good practice and improvements in assessments and internal verification processes. Other inputs to the monitoring process include matters raised in course boards, which include consideration of, and response to, external examiner and standards verifier reports, exam boards, and course team meetings, which review actions arising from the external examiner and standards verifier reports.

1.35   Overview, monitoring and evaluation of academic standards and quality at course and College level is achieved through regular meetings of the Curriculum Management Group. Oversight across the provision is maintained by the Academic Principal, who receives course reports and reports matters arising to the Curriculum Management Group and reports key points to Academic Board. Annual monitoring processes by Pearson indicate satisfactory results.

1.36   The team found that the evidence demonstrates that the College is managing its responsibilities for monitoring and reviewing its programmes effectively by participating in the review processes of its awarding partners. The review team also saw evidence that the College's own processes for monitoring and review are effective. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.37   The two awarding partners, the University of Bradford and Pearson, are ultimately responsible for making use of external and independent expertise to set and maintain academic standards during the design, development, and validation or approval procedures. To provide external expertise and scrutiny, and to report upon whether threshold academic standards continue to be set, delivered and achieved appropriately, each of the awarding partners appoints external experts.

1.38   The College's use of external examiner and standards verifier reports to support the maintenance of threshold academic standards is articulated and embedded in the College's framework of policies and procedures, with which the College maintains oversight of its provision in accordance with its delegated responsibilities. The College's quality procedures are mapped against the Quality Code and identify the staff responsible. These arrangements would allow the College to meet the Expectation.

1.39   The review team examined a range of documentation including partnership documents, College procedures, review reports, and standards verifier and external examiner reports. The team met senior and teaching staff, including those with course management responsibilities, and representatives from the University.

1.40   The review team found that these arrangements work effectively in practice. For the College, standards verifier and external examiner reports are the primary source of independent external expertise on the awards they deliver on behalf of their awarding partners. Within their delegated responsibilities the College makes effective use of the external expertise and scrutiny provided by the standards verifiers and external examiners to maintain threshold academic standards.

1.41   External examiners and standards verifiers moderate assessment decisions and their reports confirm the achievement and maintenance of threshold academic standards. Review of standards verifier and external examiner reports, and progress with the associated planned actions for the awards of both partners at Curriculum Management Group, provides the College with coherent oversight of academic standards and quality. The College's external examiner protocols set out procedures that reflect that the standards verifier and external examiner reports are integral to the quality processes. The Periodic Partnership Review by the University in 2014 also confirmed that there were no concerns with the management of standards and quality of learning and teaching.

1.42   Overall, the evidence from documentation and meetings shows that, within its delegated responsibilities, the College manages its responsibilities for maintaining academic standards and making use of external and independent expertise effectively. The awarding bodies have ultimate responsibility for setting and maintaining academic standards and for making use of external and independent expertise when doing so. The College meets the requirements of its partners and this is confirmed by standards verifier and external

examiner reports. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation 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/or other awarding organisations: Summary of findings

1.43   In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. Of the seven Expectations in this judgement area, all are met with the associated level of risk for each identified as low. No affirmations or recommendations are identified in this area.

1.44   The review team therefore 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   Responsibility for the design, development and approval of programmes resides with the University and Pearson. The College's Senior Management Team (SMT) has responsibility for the approval of proposals for new provision. A process for the approval of new courses has recently been developed. The College's adherence to the procedures specified by its awarding partners, together with its own processes, would enable the College to meet the Expectation.

2.2   The team reviewed the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by examining minutes of meetings, programme documentation and the College's protocols. The team also held meetings with senior and teaching staff, and held a telephone meeting with University representatives.

2.3   Overall, the arrangements for the design and approval of programmes are appropriate. The College has no responsibility for development of provision. The College's existing Pearson provision consists of modules selected from the standard lists using the rules of combination. The new protocols for the design and approval of programmes provide guidelines on the basis of the design of new courses. These include a clear rationale, demand shown through the skills shortage in the College's target markets and employability opportunities, and expertise to deliver the teaching and learning supported by the needs of the student. The protocols also require that intelligence regarding demand, employability, progression and resources with a focus on Greater London is carried out. However, the College has not introduced any new higher education programmes in the last four years; therefore, the process has not been implemented and thus the team was unable to review evidence of the protocol in operation. The team therefore **affirms** the introduction of the new process for the approval of new courses to ensure that future provision is aligned with the College's current strategic vision.

2.4   Overall, the College adheres to the procedures of its awarding partners. Its own new processes for the design, development and approval of programmes are appropriate. The team made an affirmation concerning the recent introduction of the new process for the Approval of New Courses to ensure future provision is aligned with the College's current strategic vision. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk 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 to Higher Education*

Findings

2.5   For the University award, the College is responsible for recruitment and the final admissions decision is made by the University. The College has responsibility for recruitment, selection and admission of students for the Pearson awards.

2.6   The College has a recruitment and selection procedure that is underpinned by the Strategic and Growth Plan. This is guided by the Widening Participating and Social Inclusion Statement. An Admissions Policy is in place and is accessible on the website for potential applicants.

2.7   All applicants undertake a literacy test which includes English language skills assessment, with Pearson requirements of an International English Language Testing System 5.5 score, GCSE English at Grade A-C, and Key Skills or Functional Skills in English/Literacy at Level 2. Where students do not have a certificate they are required to complete the College's internal English assessment that ensures they meet the awarding partner's requirements. The National Academic Recognition Information Centre (NARIC) is used by the College to check academic qualifications; RPL, Recognition of Prior Experiential Learning (RPEL), work experience and relevant experience are also taken into consideration. Applicants without relevant academic qualifications have to undergo a risk assessment interview with an academic tutor to determine whether they meet the set requirements.

2.8   Applicants are notified in writing of the outcome of their application, with offers made subject to student loan funding. The College allows students to enrol while awaiting final confirmation of their student loan. Non-successful applicants are notified within 20 days. Admissions appeals entail a review of the full application with a final decision made within 14 days of the appeal being received.

2.9   The effectiveness of the College's procedures is monitored by the Admissions Manager, reviewed annually by the Academic Principal and discussed by the SMT. The College has appropriate arrangements in place to permit the Expectation to be met.

2.10   The review team tested the operation and effectiveness of recruitment, selection and admission by considering information including that contained in the College's policies and procedures, and information produced for applicants and current students on the College website and the VLE. The team also held meetings with students, senior, academic and support staff and University representatives.

2.11   Procedures for recruitment, selection and admission work effectively in practice. The College's new strategic direction has resulted in the increase of non-traditional higher education applicants, creating a multi-cultural student community with a broad age range. The admissions interview checklist for non-standard applicants details whether requirements are met; applicants complete an academic suitability form and undertake an academic suitability interview prior to admission. One-to-one consultation is provided to applicants by an Admissions Officer. Students are recruited through both standard and non-standard

routes and confirm their participation in the academic suitability interview. The admissions team highlighted that the College is refining its RPL portfolio requirements to ensure that students have achieved the required experience.

2.12   On admission, students undergo a comprehensive induction process where they meet members of the teaching staff, are made aware of relevant policies and receive relevant programme documentation and required training. Students are also invited to provide feedback on the admissions process. The College regularly trains and updates its admissions staff. Those responsible for recruitment, and academic staff involved in the academic suitability interview, receive training and updates internally from senior management.

2.13   The College data identifies some high drop-out rates for some cohorts recruited in 2013 and early 2014. The College largely attributes this to student finance not being approved and the recruitment arrangements in place for applicants to the online Higher National Certificate Computing. It is also acknowledged that achievement rates are not high when compared with initial recruitment. Non submission of work is also identified as an area of concern. Following a review of admissions, a revised Admissions Policy and procedures were implemented in 2014. This new strategic initiative includes refinements to pre-interview, interview, pre-assessment and identification of support needs. Measures taken also include the recent appointment of a Welfare Officer. Cohorts recruited after October 2014 have not yet completed their courses; therefore, final retention and achievement cannot be reviewed. Improved in-year retention rates are recorded. The team therefore **affirms** the steps being taken to strengthen the admissions process to match applicants to courses more effectively.

2.14   The team found evidence that the College's recruitment, selection and admission procedures adhere to the principles of fair admission. The team did make one affirmation regarding the steps being taken to strengthen the admissions process. Overall, procedures are successful in offering appropriate support to those who require it. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.15   The College's strategic approach to learning and teaching is enshrined in its Enhancement Strategy, which specifically highlights teaching quality as one of three key areas on which it wishes to focus. This strategy is underpinned by the Learning and Teaching Standards and Quality Procedure, which articulates the College's approach to learning and teaching and provides an operational reference point for teaching staff. These, in conjunction with the Quality Assurance Handbook, support the College's mission statement 'to create a dynamic environment to stimulate students' interest and capabilities through teaching, research and scholarship which will advance their knowledge, skills, understanding and future careers'. The College considers that student engagement is central to its strategic approach.

2.16   Review of academic provision takes place through the College's deliberative structures. The Academic Principal has oversight of teaching and learning and reports to the Curriculum Management Group and to Academic Board. To support continuity in the new management structure, a new Quality Manager has been appointed, who reports directly to the Academic Principal and is a member of the SMT. As the senior College Committee for the review and management of academic provision, Academic Board makes recommendations to the SMT and the Board of Directors. The remit of all key groups is set out in the Quality Assurance Handbook, available to students and staff on the VLE.

2.17   Arrangements to monitor and improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment include internal annual review at course and College level, teaching observation and internal verification. The Learning and Teaching Standards Procedure is supported by policy and procedural documents that cover all aspects of learning and teaching. These are cross-referenced to the Quality Code. Systems are in place to monitor student engagement with their programme, which identify students at risk on the basis of attendance and achievement. The College's policy and procedural documents encourage a shared understanding of the expectations relating to learning and teaching. The College's arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.18   The review team scrutinised documentation including College policies and procedures, standards verifier and external examiner reports, AMRs, enhancement plans, meeting minutes, staff CVs, training records and appraisals. The review team considered student feedback from questionnaires, progression and achievement data. The team also held meetings with senior and teaching staff, professional support staff, full-time and part-time students, and University representatives.

2.19   The arrangements the College has in place are effective in practice. The Teaching and Learning Standards procedure incorporates a formal graded teaching observation procedure supported by peer observation. Course managers and the Academic Principal are responsible for these observations. Course managers are members of the Curriculum Management Group where staff development is discussed with the SMT, identifying institutional priorities. The regular staff development programme is well attended; there is a focus on cross-College issues and frequent linking to the Quality Code. There is little

evidence of research-led teaching. Staff engage in ongoing dialogue on teaching and learning with their peers. Teaching quality is discussed as a part of the staff's continual professional development and features in staff recruitment and selection. The Curriculum Management Group is identified as the forum to identify best practice and whole staff development needs.

2.20   The College and its teaching staff are mindful that student entry profiles differ, and that diverse learning styles arise from the College's Widening Participation and Social Inclusion approach. A variety of learning techniques are used in lesson planning and staff adhere to the lesson planning procedure, with lesson plans prepared at least two weeks in advance. Course managers review lesson plans at least termly and these are a formal part of the teaching observation process. Staff met by the team share an understanding of the importance of learning and teaching and a commitment to continual improvement. Staff are consulted termly on the resources they require and this is discussed at the Curriculum Management Group and by the SMT. Full-time students appreciate staff support and feel that the learning culture promotes their success. Diversity of assessment methods is endorsed by standards verifiers and external examiners. Students value the support and formative feedback they receive and understand how grading decisions are reached.

2.21   For Pearson awards, assessment design is in accordance with the internal verification procedure. Course managers internally verify assessments and samples are sent to the standards verifier as required. Contextualised grading criteria are available, although the College acknowledges that refinements are in progress, and students receive both summative and formative feedback. Course and unit handbooks containing course specification, learning outcomes, modes of assessment and unit level descriptors are available on the VLE. For the University award, University-devised course handbooks direct students to information held on the University's VLE. Course managers are responsible for checking the resources on the VLE and minimum expectations are well understood. Students confirm that the VLE is accessible and is used to support their learning. Assessments are submitted electronically through plagiarism-detection software and some feedback is provided using the VLE.

2.22   Diagnostic testing at induction identifies students' individual learning needs and accompanying support is provided as required. English, information technology, group work and academic writing are included. An introduction to the College's VLE is also used to support students' learning. Further support is provided to students in their first term by the mandatory study skills sessions. The impact of these support measures on students' learning is often anecdotal and there is an absence of data captured to monitor and evaluate improvements.

2.23   Tutorials are perceived by both staff and students as being a key means of supporting learning, with students entitled to two tutorials per module per term and an embedded referral procedure for additional support if required. Assessment tracking sheets are used to track the development and performance of each student. Additional tutorial support given to students deemed 'at risk' due to lack of academic progress and poor attendance is an intervention implemented for full-time learners. The College has acknowledged some high drop-out rates for part-time students who study online and has no plans to continue its contract with Acquire Learning, through which the students were recruited. The small number of part-time students interviewed by the team gave qualified support to their online learning experience. They appreciated the changes made by the College to improve their distance learning experience, but would welcome more opportunities to interact with their peers. Mechanisms are in place to support those students still enrolled on the course and the review team **affirms** the steps being taken to allow online learning students to benefit more fully from the range of available support mechanisms, to enable completion.

2.24   Tutors provide careers advice. Work-based learning is a requirement for students on two courses. Where students do not have a suitable work placement a simulated experience may be offered at the College. The review team acknowledges that the responsibility for acquiring work placement rests with the student and recognises the potential for inequality of experience. Therefore, the review team **affirms** the steps being taken to appoint an Employer Engagement and Work-Related Learning Coordinator to support students in gaining parity of work experience and careers advice.

2.25   As part of the Student Engagement Procedure, students complete initial and end-of-term evaluations which form part of the quality assurance cycle, as well as end-of-unit questionnaires and end-of-course surveys. Students met by the team consider that the College listens to them and gave examples of responsiveness to matters they had raised.

2.26   The College has an integrated approach to developing the quality of teaching and learning. The team made two affirmations regarding the steps being taken to allow online learning students to benefit more fully from the range of available support mechanisms to enable completion, and the steps being taken to appoint an Employer Engagement and Work-Related Learning Coordinator to support students in gaining parity of work experience and careers advice. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.27   The College's general approach to fostering the independent learner is embedded in the Teaching and Learning Policy, Teaching and Learning Standards Procedure, the Academic Standards Policy and associated procedures. Course and institutional monitoring processes are documented in the College's procedures manual, with data on student performance and attendance considered at course boards. The College's overarching Institution Monitoring and Enhancement Report, produced annually by the Academic Principal, draws on course Annual Monitoring Reports and includes commentary on student achievement, retention and quantitative analysis of survey data. This is received by Academic Board along with additional reports as required.

2.28   Student support is seen by the College as crucial to academic success for its students entering higher education with a diverse entry profile. Support needs are identified through the programme of study support and academic skills development launched at the start of the course. The College provides academic, pastoral, and study skills support, including English, to help meet the needs of its diverse student entry profile.

2.29   As part of the induction process, students undertake a diagnostic English and information technology test. Students with non-standard entry profiles are invited to discuss learning needs at interview prior to the start of the course. The use of the induction assignment is designed to encourage peer support through group work and to allow tutors to give early formative feedback and identify skills needs. A post-induction survey identifies any transition issues and an induction programme tailored to the needs of students returning to the second year was introduced in 2015 to help students understand the academic expectations of Level 5 study. The College's arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.30   The review team tested the effectiveness of the College's arrangements and resources by scrutinising documentation including policy and procedural documents, assessment tracking sheets, including those used for information technology and English, course and unit handbooks, and student questionnaire results. The team also met a range of senior, teaching and professional support staff, students, and representatives from the University.

2.31   Overall, the College's arrangements operate effectively in practice. The College has a Student Support Policy and the appointment of a College Welfare Officer is a strategic decision taken by the SMT to strengthen the pastoral support provided by tutors, to help address underperformance. Student attendance is monitored and intervention meetings are held for those students who are deemed to be at risk of not progressing. The effectiveness of this new initiative is yet to be fully evaluated.

2.32   Staff encourage students to be independent, autonomous learners and this is introduced through the mandatory study skills sessions and reported on through end-of-unit surveys. Diagnostic testing is incorporated into student induction with assessment of information technology and English, academic writing skills, group work and presentation skills. This is accompanied by support including the interactive, online self-study grammar resource.

2.33   Students are encouraged to complete a reflective log to document the acquisition of skills and Professional Development Plan (PDP) portfolios are being introduced. The end-of-term student evaluations allow students to comment on whether the course has given

them the opportunity to develop as independent learners and the end-of-unit evaluations allow them to reflect on their skills acquisition. Student evaluation of induction also takes place within the first three weeks and gives students the opportunity to record their views of their introduction and overall experience of the College. The Student Support Policy, Equality and Diversity Policy and Equality Opportunities Policy are reviewed as part of the Pearson Academic Management Review reports and staff are mindful of the need to create and maintain an inclusive learning environment to allow achievement and to reflect the diversity of learners in its student body.

2.34 PDPs are a new introduction, designed to enhance student reflection of their own development and support the established mechanisms used to track progress. Digital literacy is seen as important to the future planned use of electronic professional development planning and greater interactive use of the VLE.

2.35 Unit descriptors and schemes of work are provided and published on the VLE. Checks undertaken by course administrators ensure that unit and course handbooks are populated and uploaded; updates to handbooks are reported to the Curriculum Management Group. The VLE is seen as an important learning resource by both the College and its students. The College responded to student feedback about the lack of library facilities by subscribing to online library resources.

2.36 The Student Services team directs students to careers advice and external services such as diagnosis of learning support needs. Currently, students tend to seek advice on careers through their tutors and guest speakers invited from relevant industries and professional associations. This approach will be supported by the appointment of a dedicated Employer Engagement and Work-Related Learning Coordinator. Student Services are also responsible for ensuring that students have information about their programme's administrative requirements.

2.37 Student support is seen as a key means of securing achievement by facilitating students' progress academically, personally and professionally. Student support is seen as good by standards verifiers and is valued by students. The mandatory study support provision is supplemented by academic writing skills, study skills and additional English support. External visits and speakers have been arranged for some courses and additional workshops on IT, English academic writing, and study skills are provided.

2.38 The College offers timetabled tutorials and welfare support through tutors and a trained counsellor. Students have individual learning plans and individual support is mandatory for those not meeting progression requirements and who are deemed to be at risk. External agencies provide diagnostic services for dyslexia and other learning support needs and the College has a Special Needs Arrangements Procedure.

2.39 The College acknowledges that achievement rates are not high when compared to initial recruitment. Revisions to the recruitment and admissions procedure, including the introduction of initiatives such as diagnostic testing at induction and the effect of accompanying interventions on student progression and achievement, have yet to be fully evaluated and quantified. It was unclear to the review team how some data currently being collated through the quality cycle is used to internally benchmark against identified key performance indicators or to inform enhancement activities.

2.40 Overall, the College has effective arrangements to enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. The review team therefore concludes that the College meets the Expectation and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B5: Student Engagement*

Findings

2.41   The College's Student Engagement Policy, which is underpinned by the Teaching and Learning Standards and Quality Procedures and the Policies and Procedures Framework, outlines the engagement of students through consultation, participation and representation. The College also has in place a Student Support Policy that includes the newly introduced role of Welfare Officer to support students with personal and pastoral matters. The College's generic student handbook outlines general student information including student conduct, student support, student life, and student representation. The Student Charter also includes information about how students can engage with the College. Students are made aware of support available through email, the College VLE and timetables.

2.42   The College's arrangements to engage students include provision for student representation and the Student Council. Involvement includes participation of students in formal College structures including termly Course Boards, Academic Boards and monitoring and review meetings. Student representatives are peer elected in each class, and given a course representative handbook and a short briefing session. Student council meetings are chaired by the Registrar/Student Services Manager and students are encouraged to take an active role. Students' representatives are also invited to attend the staff development sessions that contribute to teaching and learning strategies and student support.

2.43   Students feed back formally and informally through their student representatives, end of unit questionnaires, end of course surveys, suggestion box, online survey desk, post-induction surveys, and tutorials. Information from these sources feeds into the course managers' termly reports, which feed into the AMRs that are submitted to the Academic Principal and reviewed by the Curriculum Management Team. The College provides feedback to students of action taken through the Course Board, Academic Board and Student Council meetings; minutes are published on the VLE.

2.44   Students have access to standards verifier and external examiner reports, course AMRs and the Institution Monitoring and Evaluation Report. Students on Pearson awards meet with the standards verifier, while those on the University award meet with their link tutor. These arrangements would allow the College to meet the Expectation.

2.45   The team reviewed the effectiveness of the arrangements to engage students by examining documentation including the College's Policies and Procedures Framework, the Student Engagement Policy, minutes of meetings and reports, student handbooks, evaluation forms, standards verifier and external examiner reports, and the VLE. In addition, the team met the principal, senior and teaching staff, students, and representatives of the University. The team also had a demonstration of the VLE.

2.46   Overall, the arrangements to engage students work effectively in practice. Students are engaged individually and collectively in the range of ways described in College policy and procedural documentation. Students confirm the support and training provided for their roles and their active participation in the College's formal deliberative committees. Students also confirm their involvement in a project to ascertain the suitability of an online provider of video resources and their involvement in staff development days. Students met by the team are well informed, confident and engaged, providing examples of how they play a role in the

quality process and citing their active participation. The College deliberately engages students. Students appreciate actions taken arising from their feedback; actions include the College's subscription to an online library to increase the accessibility of learning resources and the recent purchase of laptops. The team notes the deliberate steps that the College takes to engage all students, individually and collectively, as partners in quality assurance and enhancement. The arrangements resulting in high levels of student engagement throughout the College, which support the continuing improvement of the student learning experience, are **good practice**.

2.47   Overall, the College has effective arrangements in place and actively engages students as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. The review team identified one feature of good practice regarding student engagement. Therefore, the team concludes that the College meets the Expectation and that 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

2.48   The College is required to apply the assessment regulations established by its awarding partners as set out in the partnership agreements and associated documents. For Pearson awards, the College is responsible for setting, marking and internal verification of assessments. Pearson sets the pass criteria, and the College contextualises the generic criteria for higher grades. For programmes awarded by Pearson, the College is responsible for RPL. For the University award, the College is responsible for first marking. The University sets and second marks assessments. The University has detailed guidelines on external examination with details of processes to be followed in the assessment, checking and approval of assessment decisions. The university's Faculty of Health is responsible for processing applications for RPL.

2.49   The College assessment procedures and guidelines are provided in the Assessment Policy, the Quality Handbook, the Internal Verification and Moderation Procedure document, and the assessment procedures. These documents provide the guidelines for assessment, the maintenance of academic standards through assessment, and regulate the fairness and transparency of assessment decisions. The Assessment and Grading Procedure defines the assessment strategies and different types of assessments the College uses. Together with the General Student Handbook and Course and Unit handbooks these documents outline conditions such as the resubmission of student work and controls put in place for late submissions. The Assessment and Assessor Expectations procedure outlines the expectations placed on the assessors, including competency levels, communication with students, giving feedback to students and internal verification processes. Some of these matters are also highlighted in the Marking, Feedback and Moderation Procedure. A guide for assessing group work clearly demands that group work should be translated into individual performance through the assessment of the processes rather than the product of the work. The external examination protocols document provides guidelines for checking for plagiarism and places limits on the size of the unreferenced portion of student work, and outlines procedures and responsibilities for implementing actions arising from the standards verifiers' and external examiners' reports. All procedures for assessment and grading and internal verification and moderation are mapped to the Quality Code.

2.50   For Pearson awards the Curriculum Management Group reviews assessment strategies, timings and requirements to support broad consistency across subject areas. The Academic Principal assumes oversight of all assessments while course managers ensure that assessments are appropriate to the requirements of the courses and units. Internal verifiers ensure that assessments are fit for purpose. Unit lecturers develop and mark the assessments. Course administrators ensure that students have access to the assessments and monitor the submission of work and the Quality Manager manages the timings. Examination boards are convened to approve the assessment decisions. For the University award the examination boards are convened at the University and matters are discussed with the link tutor where appropriate. The arrangements would enable the College to meet the Expectation.

2.51   To test how the College discharges its responsibilities for assessment, the team examined the effectiveness of the procedures in the preceding paragraphs by reviewing the documentary evidence, including documents related to assessment regulations, and scrutiny of assignment briefs and completed student work, records of marking and verification, the minutes of assessment boards, and standards verifier and external examiner reports. The review team also held meetings with senior and teaching staff, and students.

2.52   Overall, the evidence reviewed showed the procedures to be effective in practice. Students confirmed their understanding of the nature and purpose of assessments, stating that they benefited from induction and from in-class activities used to enhance their understanding of assessment. Students also confirmed their satisfaction with the content and timings of feedback they receive on assessments. Assignment briefs for courses awarded by Pearson address the specific assessment criteria under each learning outcome. When students work in groups two staff give both individual and group feedback to the students, and evaluate group work. The College follows its processes for the internal verification of assignment briefs and assessment decisions.

2.53   Standards verifier reports comment on individual assignment briefs and the assessment processes within each unit, and confirm the judgements of the internal verifier and markers. The College carries out standardisation processes, and staff development activities include assessment. Some training has been provided on referencing the FHEQ level descriptors in teaching and assessment.

2.54   The College's Student Selection and Admissions Procedure and the RPL document contain the guidelines for RPL and RPEL. The applicant submits evidence of previous qualifications, including transcripts of achievements, to the admissions team. Course managers consider the application and supporting evidence and make recommendations to the Academic Principal, who approves the applications. The link tutor is responsible for RPL and prior experiential learning of the applicants for the University award. Course handbooks explain that mitigating and extenuating circumstances can be applied where students cannot submit their work in time and arrangements are available on the VLE.

2.55   Pearson Academic Management Review reports, standards verifier reports and external examiners' reports confirm that the College carries out its responsibilities for assessment effectively. The College implements plans arising from the actions and recommendations of these monitoring processes.

2.56   The review team finds that the College has reliable and effective arrangements in place to ensure the opportunities students have to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the award of credit or qualification. The review team concludes that the College's assessment processes are appropriate and that students are supported to demonstrate their learning through assessment. Therefore the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code*, Chapter B7: External Examining*

Findings

2.57   External examiners or standards verifiers are appointed by the relevant awarding partner, who defines both the role and criteria for approval. For the University award the University appoints external examiners who sample and report on students' work, which is submitted electronically through the University's VLE. The response to the external examiner is written by the University's Programme Manager and the accompanying course action plan is monitored through the University. Copies of reports are received by the College and the action plan is also monitored through the College's Curriculum Management Group. Visits each semester from the University's link tutor supports the arrangements.

2.58   The standards verifiers appointed by Pearson visit the College annually and responses to their reports are made by the Academic Principal. Action plans produced in response to the standards verifiers' reports are monitored by course boards, which are attended by student representatives. Updates on progress are provided to the Curriculum Management Group meetings chaired by the Academic Principal.

2.59   The University provides a handbook for external examiners and the College has an external examiner protocol. Course managers produce Annual Monitoring Reports and these include plans to address recommendations raised in standards verifiers' and external examiners' reports. The overarching Institutional Monitoring and Enhancement Report draws on course reports. Action plans are received and monitored by the Curriculum Management Group. The College's arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.60   The team reviewed the effectiveness of these procedures by considering documentation including standards verifier and external examiner reports, associated action plans, minutes of meetings, AMRs and the Institutional Monitoring and Enhancement Report. The team also held meetings with students, teaching and senior staff and University representatives.

2.61   Overall, the evidence reviewed showed the procedures to be effective in practice. For Pearson awards standards verifiers visit the College at least annually and sample work across units. Reports include comment about the procedures, the effectiveness of assessment instruments and assessment records, and provide feedback on the sampled work. Standards verifiers also meet both staff and students and specifically consider student support. These reports demonstrate confidence with standards and identify good practice, such as the tutorial support and study skills provision, the quality of course documentation, formative feedback and internal verification, while also making recommendations such as the use of contextualised grading criteria and individual contributions to group work. Course boards consider and respond to standards verifier and external examiner reports and produce a summary action plan. Senior staff and academic staff confirm that actions on comments, such as those related to feedback and contextualised grading, are monitored through Course Boards and at the Curriculum Management Group. For the University award the external examiner's report template includes a specific section for commentary on partners.

2.62   Standards verifier and external examiners' reports are disseminated to staff. For Pearson awards, standards verifier reports are available to students on the VLE. For the University award, students can access the external examiner reports through the University's VLE.

2.63   Overall, the College's processes are appropriate and the College makes effective use of standards verifier and external examiner reports to inform improvement. Therefore the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (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

2.64   For Pearson provision the College is responsible for ensuring that appropriate processes for routine programme monitoring and periodic review of the programme are in place. An Academic Management review is also conducted annually by Pearson. The University requires the College to complete a Programme Enhancement Plan each semester, which includes an action plan linked to external feedback and priorities based on course manager and standards verifier reports. The College draws together the findings from review and evaluation in its Institution Monitoring and Enhancement Report. The arrangements in place would allow the College to meet the Expectation.

2.65   The team tested the effectiveness of the programme monitoring and review arrangements by examining documentary evidence including monitoring reports and the minutes of relevant College committees. The team also held meetings with senior and teaching staff, professional support staff, students and University representatives.

2.66   The evidence reviewed showed annual monitoring to be effective in practice. The College outlines its procedures for monitoring and review of its provision in its Quality Assurance Handbook, Annual Monitoring Reports Procedure Manual, Quality Assurance Handbook procedure for Annual Monitoring, and the Academic Standards Policy.

2.67   The Curriculum Management Group has responsibility for monitoring processes through monthly meetings and for ongoing review. All courses produce an Annual Monitoring Report. During the monthly Curriculum Management Group meetings each course manager provides updates on key developments, which reflect student feedback, the quality of assessment, external feedback and ongoing actions linked to course action plans. Course board meetings also reflect upon course reviews. Annual Monitoring Reports contain information about student enrolment, retention and achievement rates and some evaluation of the data. Content includes discussion about the progress of action plans to address areas of good practice and areas for improvement, including those where underperformance is identified. The Academic Principal collects end-of-unit surveys and end-of-term course reports for discussion at course boards, attended by student representatives. The outcomes of these activities are drawn into the Institution Monitoring and Enhancement Report; strategic initiatives and the impact of measures already taken are recorded in the associated action plan. The College's procedures for monitoring and review occur in tandem with the monitoring and review requirements of the validating body and organisation. From positive comments in awarding partners' reports, a meeting with representatives from the University, and scrutiny of the College's own monitoring reports, the review team concludes that the College discharges its responsibilities for monitoring and review effectively.

2.68   The College implements appropriate procedures for programme monitoring and review and manages its responsibilities effectively. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.69   For University awards the College shares responsibility for handling appeals; the University has responsibility for complaints and matters are referred to the link tutor. Arrangements follow University regulations and the College's procedures. Arrangements are set out in student handbooks and accessible on the VLE.

2.70   For Pearson awards the College is responsible for complaints and appeals. The College's complaints procedure and the appeals procedure are available on the VLE or as a hard copy by request from Student Services. Both are staged processes - following initial investigation complainants receive the first response within five working days and appellants receive the first response within seven days. Students are made aware of these procedures at induction and are directed to them in the student handbook.

2.71   Staff are made aware of these procedures at their induction and in the staff handbook. The College's procedures and adherence to the arrangements of its awarding partners would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.72   The review team tested the effectiveness of the College's policies and procedures by examining documentation including key policies and procedures related to complaints and appeals, student and staff handbooks, complaints, and the complaints tracker. The team also met senior staff, teaching and professional support staff, students and University representatives.

2.73   Overall, the processes for academic appeals and student complaints work effectively. Formal complaints are forwarded to a member of SMT. Academic appeals are received by the course manager and copied to the Academic Principal, who maintains an overview. The link tutor considers academic appeals for students on the University programme. Formal complaints are kept by the Student Services Manager and are logged into a complaints tracker. The Student Services team or administrative staff provide initial support for students to ensure their complaint or appeal is dealt with appropriately. The VLE and handbooks make reference to the availability of the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education if the formal process has been exhausted.

2.74   Students confirmed their awareness of the complaints procedure and the appeals procedure and where they may find both. Students and staff concur that most concerns raised by students are resolved informally due to the open communication environment that the College promotes, and thus few reach the formal procedures. Students reported that their concerns and complaints are acted upon and provided examples. The College's tracking system for complaints and academic appeals shows no appeals. No trends can be identified from the four formal complaints which occurred within the last two years. The College uses the information gathered from complaints and appeals in its quality assurance cycle as part of its ongoing enhancement strategy; this information feeds into the AMR.

2.75   The review team concludes that the academic appeals and student complaints procedures are clear and accessible. Informal opportunities are available to enable students to resolve their concerns at an early stage. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk 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

2.76   The College has responsibility for designing and implementing key quality assurance processes to ensure the quality of student learning opportunities with placement providers for Pearson awards. Pearson has oversight of this through standards verifier reports and annual academic management review. For the University of Bradford BSc Health and Social Care award, the College has some responsibility for delivery to the requirements set by the University. The University has oversight through external examiner reports and periodic review.

2.77   The Pearson Higher National Health and Social Care course has a work placement requirement of 200 hours in a care setting as part of the Personal and Professional Development unit. The University BSc Health, Wellbeing and Social Care has a minimum of 72 hours work-related learning as a requirement of the Enterprise, Employability and Entrepreneurship module. Handbooks are in place which describe responsibilities and expectations and some support is provided during discussion with unit tutors. These arrangements would allow the College to meet the Expectation.

2.78   The review team tested the College's arrangements for implementing and managing work-based and work-related learning opportunities by scrutinising documentary evidence, including partnership arrangements and handbooks, such as the College's Work Experience and Placement Handbook. The team held meetings with senior staff, academic and support staff and with students from a range of programmes.

2.79   The team found that the College's arrangements are effective in practice. The College's Work Experience and Placement Handbook articulates expectations and covers the responsibilities of the College, the employer and the student, including health and safety. Students complete a placement log book, including reflective practice, and an opportunity for employers to comment on the student's performance is provided. While it was not possible for the team to meet employers and test their understanding of the requirements of the work placement, it was clear that employers do not have any role in summative assessment. Emphasis is placed on the students' role as observers rather than part of the work force, but the review team noted that a standards verifier had required further evidence of the 200 hours. The review team was made aware of the alternative arrangements that are put in place for those students unable to secure placements. The opportunities to find a placement as an employee are supplemented by voluntary positions and, when required, a simulated work experience has been provided in the College.

2.80   BSc Health, Wellbeing and Social Care students are provided with the Enterprise, Employability and Entrepreneurship unit handbook and a Work-Based Learning Handbook, which includes space for the placement hours to be signed off by the work placement mentor. There is also guidance from the University in the form of exemplars. BSc students can also access a University Employability Hub which includes a database of placements. For Pearson Higher National Health and Social Care students, the College's own Work Experience Placement Handbook outlines the responsibilities of the College, the student and employer, with agreements for both the student and employer.

2.81   Students on both programmes are encouraged to find their own placements and complete a work log and reflective journal. Students are able to discuss placements with their unit tutor and can complete the placement on a voluntary or paid basis. There is no assessment in the work place, but the work experience is integral to units assessed in College. The College supplies a letter to the employers to outline the requirements of the work placement if required. The College's reflective log includes an end of placement evaluation completed by the student. Employers are invited to comment on the student's overall standard of performance, including strengths and areas that require further development. BSc students follow requirements by completing a learning contract and the University's self-evaluation form.

2.82   Overall, the review team found that the College fulfils its responsibilities and has in place appropriate arrangements to manage the work-based and placement learning. The affirmation of activity already underway that the team made in Expectation B3, concerning the appointment of an Employer Engagement and Work-Related Learning Coordinator to support students in gaining parity of work experience and careers advice, will strengthen the College's approach in this area. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation 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

2.83   The College does not offer research degrees, therefore this Expectation is not applicable.

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.84   In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. Of the 10 applicable Expectations all are met and the associated risk to each is low.

2.85   The review team makes four affirmations in this section which relate to the introduction of the new process for the approval of new courses to ensure future provision is aligned with the College's current strategic vision (Expectation B1); the steps being taken to strengthen the admissions process to match applicants to courses more effectively (Expectation B2); the steps being taken to allow online learning students to benefit more fully from the range of available support mechanisms, to enable completion (Expectation B3); and the steps being taken to appoint an Employer Engagement and Work-Related Learning Coordinator to support students in gaining parity of work experience and careers advice (Expectation B3).

2.86   The team highlighted one feature of good practice, the high levels of student engagement throughout the College, which support the continuing improvement of the student learning experience (Expectation B5). There are no recommendations in this area.

2.87   The review team therefore concludes that, overall, the quality of 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 For the University award, responsibility for the production of definitive information, including programme specifications, rests with the University. Pre-course information to potential applicants on the College website is matched to that used by the University. Information provided to students is produced using University templates and the University produces most course materials. The College website is checked periodically by the University marketing team to confirm the accuracy of published information relevant to its award. For Pearson awards the awarding organisation is responsible for providing the definitive information, including the overall qualification specification, and the College is responsible for providing a tailored course specification, learning materials and associated information.

3.2 The College website is the key platform for information for potential students and includes outlines of the curriculum offer, the application and admissions processes. The website allows potential applicants to apply online and clearly signposts additional support services with contact details. A translation facility is included, which is monitored by the marketing team. The College also prints marketing materials such as leaflets for use at local libraries, information events and open days.

3.3 Overall responsibility for the management of the information for which the College is responsible is shared between the Principal and the Chief Executive Officer. All information produced by the College is governed by appropriate policy and procedural documents. Guidelines on the information to be made available to students and other interested parties on the website and in print are included. Public and programme information follows a linear three-step checking process to ensure appropriate scrutiny and approval. The marketing and Admissions Team regularly updates the website with current information, with authorisation from the Chief Executive Officer. The team also maintains a Public Information Register to update and monitor information provided on affiliate websites and to track and log all subsequent changes. The College's arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

3.4 The review team tested the effectiveness of the College's arrangements by reviewing the policies that govern information and the associated authorisation and monitoring documents. The team also reviewed documentation including marketing and admissions materials, handbooks, the College website and VLE. The team also held meetings with students, senior staff, teaching and professional support staff. The team also met with representatives of the University.

3.5 Overall, the College processes are effective in practice. The student handbook, Student Charter and course handbooks, which are provided to students at induction, are updated annually. Unit handbooks are updated each term. These documents are checked by course managers and approved by the Academic Principal. Electronic copies of course and unit handbooks are also made available on the College's VLE. Other information disseminated to students on the VLE includes relevant policies and procedures, assessments, standards verifier and external examiner reports, course AMRs, handbooks

and course materials. Policies and procedures are made accessible to staff on the College intranet.

3.6   The College uses its internal verification processes to sign off assignments prior to distribution. The College also uses the three-stage checking process to formally sign off handbooks and other information, including leaflets, advertisements, the prospectus and website content, to verify accuracy.

3.7   The College provides training for those students who feel they need additional help to use the VLE. Students confirm the support and know where to access relevant policy documents online, including standards verifier and external examiner reports, handbooks and other learning materials. The marketing team monitors and reviews the use of the VLE and identity areas requiring improvements. The team also collates market research data for use in decision making and quality control. Action plans that involve the improvement of the quality of information are detailed within the action plans for the VLE and in the Annual Institution Monitoring and Enhancement Report.

3.8   Overall, the College's arrangements for producing information about its higher education provision are appropriate. The team concludes that the College's processes for checking that information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy are appropriate and therefore the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

3.9   In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The Expectation is met, with a low level of risk. No features of good practice are identified and there are no affirmations or recommendations.

3.10   The team concludes that overall 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 The College's Enhancement Strategy identifies enhancement in relation to teaching quality, students' support, communication and information. The Learning Standards and Quality Procedure and the Assessment Policy and Procedures are seen as supporting this strategy and enhancement is seen as being fundamental to all its activities and procedures. The College models its enhancement activities on the Toolkit published by QAA.

4.2 Course board meetings convened each term review course management matters. The Curriculum Management Group, chaired by the Academic Principal, oversees the development and implementation of new initiatives and enhancements at the operational level. The Group also monitors the effective and consistent management of learning, teaching and assessment across the College.

4.3 The College conducts a formal evaluation of progress and the impact of improvements at the end of each academic year through Annual Monitoring Reports produced by each course manager. The College's Institution Monitoring and Enhancement Report draws on these course reports and review of progress against previous action plans, including those linked to standards verifier, external examiner and review reports, and sets out organisation-wide areas for development. Key areas for development are set out in the Institution Monitoring and Evaluation Report action plan. The College offers training to staff on enhancement. These arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met.

4.4 The team reviewed the effectiveness of these arrangements by examining documentary evidence including strategic and procedural documents, course Annual Monitoring Reports, term course reports, and the Institution Monitoring and Enhancement Reports. The team also convened meetings with senior management, senior and teaching staff, professional support staff and students.

4.5 The review team found the College's arrangements to be effective in practice. Managers assert that the students' learning experience is central to the College's enhancement strategy. Priorities for enhancement include the continuous improvement of resources, and in-house and external staff development. There is general agreement between senior management and all staff groups that the College's enhancement strategy is driven by student needs and takes into account best practices in the sector and how these fit into the College ethos. Student feedback, retention and achievement, and feedback from awarding partners through the external verification and annual monitoring processes, are also key enhancement drivers.

4.6 There is leadership with a clear vision for enhancement, and deliberate steps are taken and understanding is shared. Each member of staff articulated their own contribution to enhancement. The College's Annual Monitoring Reports and Guidance gives details of institutional priorities. The Guidance makes reference to data including that related to performance, progression, attendance and student satisfaction, and the expectation of data inclusion in course reports. Data included in course reports is not quantified in a way that enables year-on-year progress to be readily quantified. The Institutional Monitoring and Evaluation reports require commentary on key areas including student achievement, progression, retention, and employability against benchmarks as appropriate. The quantitative analysis on student satisfaction data is not course specific and it is unclear how

targets for these metrics are set at both institutional and course level. Not all action plans include specific, measureable targets, thus aims and the progress achieved is not always clearly expressed. In addition, some initiatives, including baseline assessment and intervention meetings, are too new to be evaluated and may be the means to assess progress towards targets, or be used to set aims. The team therefore **recommends** that the College measures the effectiveness of enhancement initiatives using institutional benchmarks that are distinctive to the College's strategic goals.

4.7   Overall, the review team concludes that the College takes deliberate and effective steps to enhance the quality of student learning opportunities. The College's quality assurance processes and strategic approach to continuous quality improvement generates an ethos of enhancement across the College. However, the team did make one recommendation, that the College measures the effectiveness of enhancement initiatives using institutional benchmarks which are distinctive to the College's strategic goals. Despite the recommendation the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.8   In reaching its judgement about the enhancement of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The Expectation in this area is met and the level of risk is low.

4.9   The review team made one recommendation which relates to the following: measure the effectiveness of enhancement initiatives using institutional benchmarks which are distinctive to the College's strategic goals. No features of good practice are identified and there are no affirmations.

4.10   The review team therefore concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

5 Commentary on the Theme: Digital Literacy

Findings

5.1 The College's vision for digital literacy is articulated in the College's Digital Literacy Strategy 2015-18, and defines digital literacy as 'the confident and critical use of information and digital technologies to enhance academic, personal and professional development'. The College's overall aim is to develop the skills students require as professionals in the workplace. Digital literacy is part of the College's teaching strategy and a strategic goal is to embed digital literacy in the curriculum.

5.2 Digital literacy is embedded in the curriculum through the College's delivery, assessment and support mechanisms. Students' digital literacy skills and knowledge is tested during induction. Those identified as requiring additional support participate in workshops to assist them to develop the essential skills. For new students, attendance is mandatory at study skills workshops delivered in the information technology laboratory; these workshops include additional support in using online information. During induction students are also introduced to the College's VLE and the online library, which is a central information resource.

5.3 Support to enhance students' digital literacy skills and knowledge is provided through teaching sessions and during academic skills sessions. All classrooms are equipped with interactive whiteboards, and computer rooms and open learning areas are equipped with information technology resources to enable students to progress their assignment work. Recently purchased laptops for classroom group work increase access to digital technology. These arrangements support students in their development of the necessary digital literacy skills to support their learning.

5.4 The promotion and use of digital literacy by teaching staff is monitored during course managers' review of schemes of work and lesson plans. New staff are supported in their use of the VLE as required. Discussions around the use of learning communities and discussion are included in staff development. Teaching and administrative staff receive support from technical staff in developing new materials or interactive exercises. Online guides and tutorials allow the staff to develop their own IT skills. Teaching staff use electronic journals and websites in their teaching and students are given tasks that require engagement with video lectures, online research, online library resources and plagiarism-detection software. Voting pads are used to test students' knowledge in formative tests.

5.5 Students produce video recordings and presentations as part of their formative activities. Student presentations are recorded and uploaded for future online reference. There is some student use of discussion forums for group work and class activities, but this is not extensive. Some students find the digital aspects of their learning challenging; the College identified the need for more support and increased the number of weekly support classes. Students met by the team confirmed their digital literacy skills development.

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 22-25 of the
Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) handbook

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

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

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

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

Awarding organisation
An organisation authorised to award a particular qualification; an organisation recognised by Ofqual to award Ofqual-regulated qualifications

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.

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.

Self-evaluation document
A report submitted by a higher education provider, assessing its own performance, to be used as evidence in a QAA review.

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.