Higher Education Review of Lakes College West Cumbria

March 2014

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Lakes College West Cumbria. The review took place from 8 to 10 March 2014 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Helen Corkill
- Dr Elisabeth Cook
- Joshua Wright (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review the QAA review team:

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

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 8.

In reviewing Lakes College West Cumbria the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland. The themes for the academic year 2013-14 are Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement and Student Employability,[2] and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

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

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[1] The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode.
[2] Higher Education Review themes: www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/higher-education-review-themes.aspx.
[3] QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus.
[4] Higher Education Review web pages: www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/higher-education-review.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Lakes College West Cumbria

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Lakes College West Cumbria.

- The maintenance of the threshold academic standards of the awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding body and awarding body **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information produced about its provision **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at Lakes College West Cumbria.

- The arrangements for enabling the progression of students from pre-entry through to further study or employment (including promotion within existing employment) which meet the needs of students and the local community (Expectation B4).
- The variety of opportunities for active student involvement at all levels and the responsiveness of staff to student feedback (Expectation B5).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Lakes College West Cumbria.

By September 2014:

- establish contextualised definitive programme specifications for students relating to all higher national programmes which comply with Pearson's requirements and which include clear information on the number and level of credits required in each year of each programme (Expectation A3, Part C)
- ensure the consistent application of the Internal Quality Assurance of Assessment (Verification) procedure for all higher education programmes (Expectations A6 and B6).

By January 2015:

- establish effective arrangements for making the name, institution and position of external examiners available to students and for making their reports available in full to students for all higher education programmes (Expectation B7)
- strengthen arrangements for taking deliberate steps to enhance the quality of students' learning opportunities, including increasing the engagement of staff with the Quality Code (Enhancement).

Theme: Student Employability

The College's mission statement is to work in partnership to develop the skills and prosperity of its communities, and its higher education provision has a strong vocational emphasis and aims to meet the demand from employers for higher-level skills. Programmes offered have expanded to new vocational areas to meet local needs, and growth areas are within civil engineering, environmental science, advanced manufacturing and health and social care.

A strength of the College lies in raising its students' aspirations to continue their studies at higher levels and to provide 'positive destinations' for those seeking work and for those already in work. The College has links with over 400 employers and draws teaching staff from industrial backgrounds. Employers spoke very positively about how easily they were able to liaise with College staff and the opportunities for giving and receiving feedback, and the College is connected to several stakeholder forums. Employability is embedded into curriculum design and assessment, and several examples were offered of employers having shaped the content of programmes.

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

About Lakes College West Cumbria

Lakes College West Cumbria (the College) is a medium-sized college located on the west coast of Cumbria between Workington and Whitehaven. The College draws its students from a wide geographical area that broadly coincides with the boundaries of the Allerdale and Copeland borough councils. This represents approximately one third of Cumbria's total population, with 15 per cent of the population living in areas defined as 'sparse population' and 30 per cent in areas defined as 'super sparse population'.

The College has been involved in the delivery of higher education for nearly 40 years. Its mission is: 'Working in partnership to develop the skills and prosperity of our communities', a key aim being to raise aspirations 'through effective education and training routed at all levels'. The College recognises that the majority of its prospective students are people in employment with limited time available for studies and who wish to study part-time in the local area.

The College faces challenges posed by operating in an area where participation in higher education remains significantly below the national average and where there are economic, practical and cultural barriers to progression to higher education. It is focused on developing higher education provision which will support the economic regeneration of the area, with particular emphasis on engineering, construction, nuclear industries and management and leadership skills.

The College's higher education provision involves a suite of higher national certificates and diplomas (HNCs/Ds) awarded by Pearson and two foundation degrees, a Certificate in Education and a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) awarded by the University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN). A programme leading to a Foundation Degree in Business awarded by the University of Cumbria is in its final year of delivery.

The College underwent a QAA Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) in 2009. The current review team considered the ways in which the College is building on features of good practice identified in the IQER and noted that:

- the College has in place an effective quality cycle which enables the review of programmes and for improvements to be identified and implemented
- effective support is provided to students engaged in work-based learning through regular contact between tutors, students and employers
- the College continues to invest in resources to support student learning evidenced in particular through the opening of the Imaginarium and Special Education Centre
- the College continues to provide clear and accurate information to prospective and current students which is valued by both groups
- the College has continued to develop tracking systems which contribute to an effective approach to identifying and supporting students who are or might be at risk.

The 2009 IQER team considered it advisable for the College to:

- review the implementation of procedures to ensure the accuracy and completeness of public information and inform all students of their entitlements and responsibilities.

The current review team concluded after reviewing all relevant evidence that the information produced by the College relating to its higher education provision is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The College creates factsheets for each programme and has

standardised information within programme handbooks and module guides. It has created a Student Charter and a Higher Education Induction booklet and these documents are discussed with students by members of the senior management team during the College's induction week. The student submission confirms that the quality of information given to students in relation to their programmes is accurate and clear. Very specific examples of inconsistency were identified, for example in applying handbook templates and in providing contextualised programme specifications for Pearson awards, but this does not detract from the effectiveness of the actions taken by the College to address this recommendation.

The 2009 IQER team considered it desirable that the College:

- embed the revised internal quality management procedures and reporting arrangements at institutional level, to ensure its responsibilities for the management and delivery of standards are discharged fully, and can be audited.

The Quality Improvement Committee (QIC) is now fully embedded into quality monitoring/reporting processes, overseeing a higher education quality cycle which is itself embedded. Relevant procedures have recently been reviewed and updated, and the summative review process is used to identify good practice. The College's approach is supported by the use of key performance indicators and a balanced scorecard in the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy (LTAS).

- monitor the development of the higher education forum that will inform the management of academic standards and promote good practice across the provision.

The College disbanded the higher education forum and replaced it with course leader meetings, good practice forums, staff development days and the use of Learning & Teaching mentors. The current review team identified the value of the College strengthening its arrangements for taking deliberate steps to enhance the quality of students' learning opportunities, building on the changes it has made since 2009. In relation to the management of academic standards, the QIC has been established and is embedded (as noted above) and the review team judged that the College is meeting the Expectations regarding the maintenance of academic standards.

- evaluate the new procedures for the conduct of assessment boards and the role of external examiners to ensure alignment with the *Code of practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education* and avoid possible conflicts of interest.

Assessment boards and external examiners are the responsibility of the awarding bodies. The College fulfils its responsibilities to each awarding body and has reviewed all of its quality management procedures since 2009, with oversight provided by the QIC. Conflicts of interest are addressed through the awarding bodies and through independent moderation.

- monitor the implementation of feedback systems to ensure students are informed of the actions taken by the College in response to issues they have raised.

The personal tutor system is endorsed as the most effective way of gathering and responding to student feedback, though the College uses other methods of student feedback as well: module evaluation questionnaires (collated/reported in summative reviews) and general College surveys. The student submission indicates that the College's systems for feeding back to students have improved, and the College has been proactive in encouraging

and developing student representation. Students consider themselves well informed and again oversight is provided by the QIC.

- evaluate the implementation of the revised tutorial system to ensure consistency across the provision.

The College has established its tutorial system as a valued and consistent mechanism for supporting students, especially those judged to be at risk, for giving students opportunities to raise issues and for reporting back (as noted above). Interviews with course leaders also feed into the tutorial system. The College is committed to strengthening further these arrangements, including through establishing a consolidated personal tutor team and through the use of the tracking system.

- ensure an appropriate virtual learning environment is available to all students and encourage all staff to engage fully with the new technology.

The College continues to work on the development of the virtual learning environment (VLE) to take it beyond its current point as essentially a document repository, with some isolated examples of it not being used by all students. Limited examples of interactive engagement were provided but the College has recently introduced the 'Moodle medals' approach as a way of benchmarking its use and evaluating future developments. Students endorsed the value of the VLE.

Explanation of the findings about Lakes College West Cumbria

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

1 Judgement: Maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards

Expectation (A1): Each qualification (including those awarded through arrangements with other delivery organisations or support providers) is allocated to the appropriate level in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ).

Quality Code, *Chapter A1: The national level*

Findings

1.1 The College offers two types of higher education qualifications: Pearson HNCs/Ds and foundation degrees delivered as part of consortium arrangements with either UCLAN or the University of Cumbria as the awarding body. This provision, which the College describes as standard approved qualifications, aligns with the FHEQ. Higher national awards generally follow the pattern of eight 15-credit modules per level. Foundation degrees comprise a mix of 20 and 40-credit modules and curriculum skills maps within these programme specifications illustrate how individual programme learning outcomes are met and covered across the range of modules.

1.2 The review team tested the College's approach by surveying programme handbooks, specifications and module guides, sampling external examiner reports and talking with staff and students about their understanding of the FHEQ. While handbooks did not use details specifically drawn from the level descriptors within the FHEQ, they outlined clearly how qualifications were awarded on the basis of achievement of outcomes. Similarly, while staff were not familiar with the literature available in relation to the FHEQ, they and the students did have an understanding of how programmes of study built on learning from earlier levels and provided progressive challenges. External examiners' reports confirmed that standards achieved were appropriate for the level, and that aims, outcomes and assessments were articulated and set at the appropriate level.

1.3 On the basis of the evidence assessed, and in particular the views expressed in a range of external examiners' reports, the team concluded that the Expectation is met. The risk is judged to be low since the College offers no bespoke programmes and works instead with the specified awarding bodies and awarding organisation.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A2): All higher education programmes of study take account of relevant subject and qualification benchmark statements.

Quality Code, *Chapter A2: The subject and qualification level*

Findings

1.4   Foundation degree programme specifications are provided by the two awarding Universities and make reference to relevant subject benchmark statements, qualification statements and other external influences. Higher national programme handbooks provide links to Pearson's BTEC higher national (generic) specifications, which themselves make appropriate reference to professional benchmarks. In two cases the review team found that the information was missing or provided an incorrect link. External examiners' reports confirm that programmes are aligned to, and address, relevant subject and qualification benchmarks.

1.5   The review team explored the familiarity of College staff with programme specifications, subject benchmark statements and professional and statutory regulatory body (PSRB) requirements. There was some evidence of individual involvement with the design or revision of programme specifications with the relevant University or with Pearson. Working knowledge of subject benchmark statement and PSRB requirements appeared limited, though staff outlined the ways in which the Nuclear Engineering Foundation Degree had been designed to meet industry requirements, in particular the involvement of the Nuclear Skills Academy.

1.6   Although knowledge within these areas was limited, it was clear to the team that the College worked as part of a wider consortium to deliver programmes designed by its awarding partners and was not responsible for designing its own provision, and that external evidence confirmed that academic standards were not being compromised. The team therefore concluded that the Expectation is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3): Higher education providers make available definitive information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements for a programme of study.

Quality Code, *Chapter A3: The programme level*

Findings

1.7 Programme specifications are in place for foundation degrees, and handbooks for higher national qualifications provide links to Pearson's BTEC higher national specification. Course leaders are responsible for maintaining accurate information for current and prospective students and programme handbooks and module guides for higher nationals follow a standard template. Handbooks set out learning outcomes for the programme, the qualification's aims and the higher-level skills/abilities that students will develop, while module guides set out module aims and learning outcomes. Programme handbooks outline what students need to do to meet the requirements of the different classifications (whether pass/merit/distinction or pass/fail).

1.8 Materials are updated at the end of each academic year. Students are provided with handbooks and module guides during their induction period and these are placed on the College's VLE. Documentation in relation to higher education tutorials specifically logs whether students have received College handbooks, programme handbooks and module descriptors. The student submission confirms that the information given to students in relation to their programmes is accurate and clear and external examiners' reports confirm the soundness of guidance for students in module guides.

1.9 The review team tested the College's approach to the provision of definitive information by comparing templates with the examples of handbooks and module guides provided, checking the processes for updating and disseminating this information with staff, and seeking the views of students with regard to the quality and accuracy of the information they received.

1.10 Handbooks for higher national qualifications generally conform to the College's template though they do not make uniformly clear the requirement in section 2.1 to explain the credits required to achieve the award. Some lack clarity in outlining the spread of units across semesters and since none of the programmes scrutinised offer a pattern of 120 level 4 credits in the first year and 120 level 5 credits in the second, the bullet point statements in relation to the number and level of credits required in each year of the programme do not match the overviews later provided. Procedures for calculating the overall result of pass, merit or distinction are included. The two foundation degree handbooks are inconsistent in that one does not follow the template while the other does (though omitting some of the recommended sections, including the programme specification, probably to avoid duplication with the University's handbook). Some module guides include information on assignment briefs while others make these available to students as separate documents. Generally, these guides conform to the College's template with only occasional local inconsistencies (omitting contact details for the module leader; omitting information in the moderation of work section).

1.11 There are some issues with the provision of accurate information for the outgoing Foundation Degree in Business with the University of Cumbria (module guides not in the required format; no programme handbook available for partner college moderation visit in February 2014), though the reasons for this were clarified and students confirmed that their handbook had been available at the start of the academic year. The summative review process drives the annual updating of documentation and any delays in providing revised literature are followed through with individual staff.

1.12 The effectiveness and currency of the College's information were endorsed strongly by the students who met the team. Handbooks were described as extremely useful and module guides were felt to have exactly the right amount of information. However, contrary to staff indications, students found the links to the Pearson specifications cumbersome, given the length and generality of these. Pearson's own guidance (Specialist Paper 4 Programme Specification: Guide for External Examiners and Centres) is that the standard (nationally devised) BTEC higher national specifications are generic and therefore do not capture the 'local dimension' that each centre's combination of mandatory and optional units produces. Centres are expected to devise a centre-specific specification based on Pearson's source material. To make specifications more user-friendly, and to conform with national guidance, the team **recommends** that the College establish contextualised definitive programme specifications for students relating to all higher national programmes which comply with Pearson's requirements and which include clear information on the number and level of credits required in each year of the programme.

1.13 Students are unfamiliar with the term programme specification and the specification for the Nuclear Engineering Foundation Degree was deliberately not made available to students to reduce potential confusion.

1.14 In spite of the recommendation above, the team is confident that the necessary information is clearly provided to students in other formats, and so concludes that the Expectation is met. The risk is judged as moderate since students do not currently have access to higher national specifications that are relevant to their particular programme of study or that outline how many credits are needed, and at which level, to progress or gain their qualification.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

Expectation (A4): Higher education providers have in place effective processes to approve and periodically review the validity and relevance of programmes.

Quality Code, *Chapter A4: Approval and review*

Findings

1.15   The College's overarching process for approving new provision is the Academic Approvals (Internal Validation) procedure which includes higher education provision. The College describes this as 'well-established and understood'. A further procedure for course design and delivery is also used. Requests for new provision are submitted using a standard two-stage template to an Academic Approvals Group, whose members are drawn from the QIC. Requests are returned to QIC for final endorsement and are processed by the Quality Manager. Qualifications awarded by the two Universities go through additional processes, steered by the relevant course leader and programme area manager working in conjunction with each awarding body.

1.16   The College's procedures provide little evidence of how the College supports staff involved in approval and review and does not articulate the role of external participation. However, the LTAS sets as one of its aims the valuing of employers' contributions to the programme design process.

1.17   The review team sought to clarify a number of issues to evaluate the effectiveness of the College's approach in practice: by scrutinising an evidence trail for a recent validation; by questioning how approval and review processes, particularly for University-approved provision, were described and communicated to staff involved in preparing for these; and by clarifying the extent and effectiveness of employer participation in approval and periodic review processes.

1.18   An evidence trail was provided for the Nuclear Engineering Foundation Degree which was a reconfiguration of an existing programme and therefore partly new and partly reapproved. The College is part of a consortium of six institutions teaching this industry-led programme. Documentation began with the report of the validation event, which included an external academic panel member; follow-through material showed how the various conditions and recommendations had been met by the College and final approval was granted by UCLAN for the programme to commence.

1.19   Course leaders were involved to differing extents in approval and review preparations with partner Universities: this was greater with UCLAN programmes in education and children/young people and less extensive with the Nuclear Engineering Foundation Degree. Where collaboration was close, staff confirmed that support in preparing for approval and periodic review events came principally from the partner University and endorsed the strength of this. The review team did not see first-hand evidence of employers contributing to approval and periodic review - processes not directly led or managed by the College - though they did hear several examples of employers involved in shaping the content of programmes. This is outlined in the section on student employability (paragraphs 5.1 to 5.4).

1.20   In reaching a conclusion about this Expectation, the team notes that as yet there have been relatively few periodic reviews of programmes offered through University partners, and that since much of this curriculum offer is in the nature of consortium provision, the College does not assume the lead in either approval or periodic review processes. Given the College's working relationships with its University partners, the team judges that the Expectation is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A5): Higher education providers ensure independent and external participation in the management of threshold academic standards.

Quality Code, *Chapter A5: Externality*

Findings

1.21 External examiners are appointed to higher national programmes through Pearson and by the appropriate University for foundation degrees. Their reports cover the elements indicated in *Chapter B7: External examining* and, specifically, ask for comments on the management of academic standards and overall academic standards. The College has a policy for monitoring external verification which outlines the processes for recording, disseminating, monitoring and actioning these reports. There is some further use of externality in programme approvals and reviews reflecting *Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review* of the Quality Code.

1.22 The team tested the College's approach to the use of externality in the management of threshold academic standards by clarifying the involvement of independent expertise in approval and review processes, exploring the extent to which employers are involved in quality assurance processes and the management of standards, scrutinising external examiners' reports and clarifying the ways in which the College makes use of and responds to these to check and maintain standards.

1.23 A combination of the limited number of approvals and periodic reviews and the College's involvement in the consortium led by UCLAN made it difficult for the team to judge the effectiveness with which independent expertise was used by the College. However, the most recently revalidated programme (Foundation Degree in Nuclear Engineering) included an external academic panel member. During meetings it emerged that while the College aims to be responsive to employers' needs by inviting employer feedback as part of course quality review processes, and while employers provide some input into shaping programme content, they are not involved in the assessment of students and do not play any direct, formal role in any of the College's review processes. However, employers financing their employees' studies at the College are quite actively involved in supporting these students through liaison meetings with the College and workplace initiatives.

1.24 The review team clarified the College's approach to monitoring and actioning external examiners' reports, which was to collate, analyse and grade these centrally and send corrective action plans to course leaders and programme area managers. There is dialogue between the central Quality Office and those involved in course delivery about the formulation of actions to be taken, and the central coordination of responses to externals' reports was considered helpful by course leaders. The evidence base provided a mixture of incomplete and fully completed corrective action plans. The QIC receives, as a standing agenda item, an update on all external examiners' reports, a process that enables individual issues to be discussed. Recent external examiners' reports testified to academic standards being 'appropriate', 'comparable', 'good' and 'high'.

1.25 Overall, the review team concludes that the College's involvement of independent and external participants in the management of threshold academic standards is effective and therefore the Expectation is met. The risk is deemed to be low since, with small exceptions in relation to the completion of corrective action plans, processes are judged to be sound.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A6): Higher education providers ensure the assessment of students is robust, valid and reliable and that the award of qualifications and credit are based on the achievement of the intended learning outcomes.

Quality Code, *Chapter A6: Assessment of achievement of learning outcomes*

Findings

1.26   The College has several procedures in place to ensure rigour and consistency in the assessment of students. There are written procedures for the assessment and marking of students' work, late submissions, resubmissions, Internal Quality Assurance of Assessment, academic misconduct and assessment malpractice. Programmes leading to awards of the two Universities follow the assessment regulations and examination board procedures of these institutions.

1.27   The College has a five-year LTAS, the aims of which include ensuring that learners are well prepared for their learning, appropriately supported and given access to fair, robust and appropriate assessment opportunities by ensuring that assessment matches the awarding body standards. The College's Summary Self-Assessment Report for 2012-13 judges that assessment and verification is well managed and supported across the College with an outstanding profile maintained.

1.28   Each course leader prepares an internal quality assurance (IQA) of assessment strategy identifying and assessing risk factors. Assessment pre-delivery approval forms enable course teams to check the clarity of assessment strategies, outcomes, tasks, criteria and scheduling. Assessment schedules are set up using the College's E-Tracker system to ensure a reasonable and even spread and an annual assessment schedule must be in place for every course. Internal Quality Assurance of Assessment feeds through into Quality Review.

1.29   Module guides and course handbooks include statements about malpractice/ plagiarism and appropriate academic conduct. Induction and training for new higher education staff in examination and assessment is provided via the Quality Manager, as is staff development in assessment design/alignment.

1.30   The review team tested the effectiveness of the College's assessment procedures and practices by discussing with students their experience of assessment, exploring with staff their understanding of differences in assessment at higher education and further education levels and opportunities for staff development, probing further the processes underpinning IQA of assessment, discussing the LTAS and reviewing external examiners' reports.

1.31   Students are aware of the different processes across the College's provision (for example, in granting extensions and mounting appeals), find assessment schedules useful and note improvements in the variety of assessment tasks and spread of deadlines in response to their feedback. Staff articulated clearly the differences in assessment approaches across further and higher education, mainly in respect of the conduct of moderation and granting extensions and reassessments. Recent changes in Pearson requirements have resulted in informal staff development undertaken by the Quality Office. QIC minutes indicate that this happened sooner in some departments than others. Staff confirmed that the IQA assessment policy was long standing and had been revised (rather than created) in September 2013. The Quality Office confirmed their central oversight of the implementation and effectiveness of IQA processes, especially through receiving all internal moderator reports, and through this is able to recognise and react to issues as they arise. The reasons for one particular issue in Higher National Construction were explained.

Externals' reports note assignment briefs that are effective in enabling students to meet the learning outcomes appropriate to each level and confirm the soundness of assessment and internal verification.

1.32   The review team concludes that the College's extensive procedures for assuring and maintaining standards through robust, valid and reliable assessment are operating successfully in practice, with only the occasional local difficulty, and are thereby ensuring that the award of qualifications and credit is based on the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. The judgement is, therefore, that the Expectation is met and the risk low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

1.33   In reaching its judgement about threshold academic standards, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex two of the published handbook. All Expectations relating to the College's maintenance of threshold academic standards are met, and the risk is low in all but one case.

1.34   The team identified some weakness in the provision of definitive information for students about the programmes for the HNCs/Ds, with the College not adapting the generic information provided by Pearson to reflect the actual programme structures and selection of optional units for each programme. However, the review team considers that students' opportunities to achieve the academic standards are not compromised because of the range of information provided through other sources.

1.35   Evidence evaluated by the team also indicates that there is inconsistency in the application of the IQA of Assessment (Verification) in relation to higher education programmes, leading to a recommendation to address this. Again, it is evident that the College is responsive when issues arise and that feedback from external examiners verifies that academic standards are secure.

1.36   The review team concludes that the maintenance of the threshold academic standards of the awards offered at the College on behalf of its awarding bodies and awarding organisation **meets** UK expectations.

2   Judgement: Quality of student learning opportunities

Expectation (B1): Higher education providers have effective processes for the design and approval of programmes.

Quality Code, *Chapter B1: Programme design and approval*

Findings

2.1   The College offers standard programmes leading to Pearson HNCs/Ds and does not devise its own units. Programmes are also offered that lead to foundation degrees awarded by the University of Cumbria and UCLAN. These programmes are the standard offer of and approved by these awarding bodies with no alterations made by the College to the modules or programme structure. The College does not design the content of the programmes they offer.

2.2   There is a clear Academic Approvals Process which is additional to awarding body approval and is used to approve new provision and re-approve existing provision at College level. The QIC has oversight of this process with responsibility for programme approval delegated to the Academic Design and Approvals Group. Standard approval forms are used by the College as part of this process to ensure that there is effective discussion and oversight of proposed programmes and to formally record sign-off by the programme team and the College. This process ensures academic coherency of programmes, that appropriate resources are in place and that the required approval by the relevant awarding body has been received. Each programme approved has an automatic review date set when internal re-approval must be sought.

2.3   The College's Course Design and Management Policy provides an overview of the College's approach, expressing the overall aim of programme design and delivery, the responsibilities of the College in relation to each programme and the importance of all programmes having a link to the Strategic Plan. The Course Design and Delivery Procedure sets out roles and responsibilities and makes clear that all programmes should be approved using the College's Academic Approvals Procedure.

2.4   The review team tested the College's approach to programme design and approval by discussing the procedures and processes with staff and, where relevant, requesting further documentary evidence and clarification. The review team explored this process in more depth and were particularly keen to understand the role that employers play within it.

2.5   Discussions with senior staff confirmed the operation of the programme design and approval process and that engagement with employers often takes place. It was made clear that a need for a programme is identified from labour market intelligence information and often through talking with employers. The Higher National Certificate in Business, which stemmed from discussions with Sellafield Ltd, was highlighted as an example of employer engagement. Programme area managers and course leaders were responsible for pulling the programme together and seeking the necessary approval in line with the College process. Awarding body approval was sought prior to internal approval.

2.6   The review team received evidence demonstrating that the student voice has influenced programme design processes. Student feedback is reflected in the summative review process, which can inform the delivery of the programme for the next session, and staff often respond informally to feedback from students and programme representatives. Students also gave a positive example of influencing the choice of units in some Pearson programmes.

2.7   The review team received examples of completed AA1 and AA2 forms for a number of programmes which confirm that each new programme has been signed off by the College using the process described in paragraph 2.2. It is clear that the process is working as intended, that the College is considering necessary factors before approving programmes and that there is adequate oversight at provider level.

2.8   The review team concludes from the evidence analysed and the discussions held with staff, students and employers that this Expectation is met. There is a clear procedure in place and the evidence demonstrates that it is being followed, indicating that the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B2): Policies and procedures used to admit students are clear, fair, explicit and consistently applied.

Quality Code, *Chapter B2: Admissions*

Findings

2.9   The College has a thorough and well developed approach to the admission of students to its higher education programmes. This approach is outlined clearly in the College's detailed Admissions Policy and Admissions Procedures. The policy and the procedures are aligned to the Impartial Advice and Guidance Procedure.

2.10   The College takes care to ensure that policies and procedures for admissions are clear and explicit to staff, external stakeholders and prospective students and designed to aid a timely response to students and enable progression to an appropriate programme. A system of service-level agreements covers the admissions process and this is monitored through the College's management information system.

2.11   The administration of the admissions system is the responsibility of the Head of Student Support Services. All programme enquiries are responded to within two working days. A formal admissions appeal and complaints procedure is in place.

2.12   The review team scrutinised the Admissions Policy in conjunction with the linked procedural documentation and looked at the operation of the Admissions Policy and its allied procedures by talking to staff, current full-time and part-time students and employer representatives.

2.13   The College has a clear commitment to raising aspirations, widening participation and progression. As part of this ethos, the College takes especial care to explain to prospective students that higher education is not appropriate for everyone. There are clear procedures to ensure that all prospective students can demonstrate the appropriate skills and aptitudes to enter higher education. The College endeavours to ensure that prospective students study the appropriate programme at the appropriate level. To aid retention, in cases where students are felt to be unprepared for higher education, they are advised to undertake a level 3 programme first.

2.14   The College's Admissions Policy and procedures require all students to be interviewed individually prior to an offer being made. Interviews are carried out by course leaders or staff trained to undertake this role. The interview includes a detailed discussion to ensure the appropriateness and level of the intended programme. Declared learning needs are considered at interview. Identification of learning needs and styles takes place for all students during induction.

2.15   The outcomes of all interviews are recorded on the management information system. The College is carrying out a project on transition and retention by monitoring and mapping admission through to week 6 of programmes.

2.16   The College makes effective use of its admissions processes to identify prospective students with particular learning and support needs. These processes are linked to diagnostic testing carried out as an integral part of the induction process and through into the formal tutorial system. In cases of known learning needs, a member of the Additional Learner Support team attends the interview.

2.17   All prospective students are required to undertake a piece of subject-specific written work, designed to test both levels of writing and analysis. There were examples of imaginative assessments, for example in art and business, among those viewed by the

review team. The College offers a Passport to Higher Education scheme in certain subject areas, where prospective students undertake a five-day full-time course to prepare them for higher-level study. Admissions processes are embedded within this.

2.18   Full-time students are required to apply through UCAS and also to make a direct application to the College. The College considers that the information collected through UCAS is not sufficient to meet its particular needs. All full-time students confirmed that they had submitted a College application form, but less than half had also submitted an application through UCAS. The Admissions Policy states in error that part-time students are also required to apply through UCAS.

2.19   Students reported some inconsistencies in the way the admissions policy and procedures were applied. Some did not recall being interviewed formally while others reported taking part in a general discussion about their intended programme. A few students reported an admissions discussion by telephone, rather than in person. Not all students considered that they had undertaken a written test. Another few students confirmed that they had been admitted following the Passport to Higher Education route. Others said that they had applied the same day that they started their programme.

2.20   The College also holds advice and enrolment sessions twice yearly, as well as a range of 'walk-ins', 'phone-ins' and online events. Students and employers confirmed the readiness of the College to engage with information, advice and guidance on admissions.

2.21   The review team concludes that, overall, the Expectation is met. There is an effective policy and associated procedures in place. The College provides accurate, current and accessible information for applicants, including clear policies and procedures on entry requirements and selection. The College supports applicants well in making informed choices about programmes and through the admissions process. However, information on admissions for part-time students is not as clear or comprehensive as that for full-time students, and there is evidence from some students of some variability in the way procedures have been applied. However, there is no evidence that students have been disadvantaged as a result of this variability and therefore the risk is deemed 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

2.22   The College articulates and systematically reviews and enhances the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices through a variety of mechanisms. These opportunities are articulated principally through the LTAS, but also through policies on Teaching and Learning Observations of Staff and Qualifications, Competencies, Continual Professional Development and Professionalism of Staff.

2.23   The review team looked at the operation of the LTAS together with the above policies. The team talked to staff involved with management, teaching and support, and to students and employers. The team noted the way in which the College works together with students and employers.

2.24   The College's strategic approach to learning and teaching is articulated principally through the LTAS. Although the strategy is a thorough document and the College claims that it is actively used and referenced during programme quality reviews, curriculum reviews and self-assessment processes, the way in which this influences the practice of staff was not clear to the review team. The College claims to be innovative in developing approaches to learning, teaching and assessment. The approach for achieving this is not clearly articulated, and there are no clear approaches for implementing other aspects of the LTAS, such as for technology-enhanced learning. The review team was informed that a strategy for the development of the VLE was being developed but this had not been shared widely at the time of the review.

2.25   The College provides a VLE. Although the platform has been available for several years, its use remains variable across higher education programmes. For most of the programmes it acts as a basic repository of information. One programme does not appear to make use of it at all. Some areas are not yet live.

2.26   There is little evidence of interactive use of the facility, contrary to the expectations of the LTAS. The College recognises the need to develop the scope and potential of the VLE to provide a high-quality teaching and learning tool. Targets have been set to achieve this, initially through a star rating system for course teams. Use is monitored through the key performance indicator system.

2.27   Most students confirmed that they found the VLE helpful for accessing lecture notes and lesson handouts. Part-time students find the ability to access it from home useful. Interactive forums within the platform are not well used, with external social networking sites being preferred in their place.

2.28   All academic staff are recruited and appointed centrally. Many staff are recruited direct from industry, often without an academic background. The College is proactive in offering higher education opportunities to new staff, including vocationally focused staff recruited into shortage areas. This results in some staff members studying one level ahead of the higher education students they are teaching. It also serves to ensure a sustainable source of staffing for the future.

2.29   There is a mandatory probationary period of one year for new staff, which is monitored against teaching targets. A Certificate in Education or Postgraduate Certificate in Education and maintenance of continuing professional development (CPD) are mandatory requirements for all teaching staff. Staff qualifications and professional development records are considered within the summative review process. The College observes professional standards for teaching and learning as required in the lifelong learning sector, but there is no reference to the UK Professional Standards Framework for higher education. There is good support from UCLAN, including moderation days used to enhance staff development.

2.30   Full-time staff are required to undertake 35 hours and part-time staff 22 hours of prescribed CPD over an academic year. This may include the acquisition of further academic qualifications, professional updating and scholarly activities, and is linked to College strategic priorities. The College provides some sessions of mandatory in-house training for higher education staff. Teaching staff undertake a range of activities, including industrial visits and first and higher degrees. All staff are required to maintain a CPD log, which is regarded as a reflective document. Teaching staff also consider the summative review process to be reflective. Changes for the year ahead are considered on the basis of such reflection.

2.31   The LTAS sets out a detailed 'balanced scorecard' system of performance indicators and scoring criteria for monitoring teaching performance. Teaching is systemically reviewed and evaluated, principally through a well developed system of management observation. Observations take place a minimum of once per year. Observation is linked to the Ofsted Common Inspection Framework and performance review. The outcomes and identified training needs of observations are fed into the annual staff review. Staff who have been assessed to be 'outstanding' share good practice. The College encourages staff to participate in developmental observations, which are ungraded, and operates a series of themed 'learning walks' every year as an additional mechanism for checking the quality of teaching.

2.32   The College is active in encouraging the mentoring and development of teachers. New staff are supported by learning and teaching mentors through their first year at the College. Staff are appreciative of this support. Various formal and informal staff forums operate within the College, and these provide further support mechanisms for a wide range of staff. Staff are supported through the Imaginarium for the development of technology-aided learning. The importance of teaching is recognised and rewarded through the College's Teaching Awards Scheme.

2.33   The College has yet to articulate and develop fully a strategic approach to the enhancement of its learning and teaching practices, as articulated in the Quality Code. There are examples of enhancement within teaching and learning, such as the creation of more imaginative learning objects for the VLE. Some enhancement initiatives remain aspirational at present, including more innovative and interactive use of the VLE. There is evidence of staff enhancing their own practice, but this is not being undertaken at a strategic level. Teaching and learning meet the needs of employers as a result of deliberate steps taken by the College.

2.34   The team concludes that, overall, the College's design and delivery of learning and teaching meet the Expectation. The risk is judged to be moderate as while there are examples of sound practice in many areas, such as monitoring teaching quality, there are aspects that are less strong: a strategic approach to the enhancement of learning and teaching is not yet developed fully, and the VLE requires further development.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

2.35   The College has an effective approach to supporting and monitoring students throughout their higher education journey. The College's QIC has oversight of strategic and operational planning as well as quality assurance and enhancement. Annual summative reviews for higher education programmes are the key means of monitoring and evaluating student development and achievement, as well as resourcing, at programme level.

2.36   The College has a clear ethos around progression. It aims to ensure that all students are enabled to develop their academic, personal and professional potential to progress to higher levels of academic or vocational achievement.

2.37   The review team tested out operational aspects of the QIC's work by talking to students and staff and scrutinising minutes of meetings. A selection of annual summative reviews were viewed and discussed with senior and teaching staff. Resources were discussed with senior management, support staff and two groups of students.

2.38   The QIC oversees the College's strategic approaches to planning and monitoring. The College also uses live key performance indicators to monitor and evaluate its systems. All higher education programmes produce an annual summative review which is reported to the QIC. Course quality reviews play a major role in identifying resources that may be needed to support students.

2.39   The College employs a rigorous and multilayered approach to monitoring students. Retention data are closely monitored and provide a standing item on the agenda for the QIC. Students deemed to be at risk are identified and closely monitored though one-to-one tutorials and through reports to the QIC. They are also considered formally through the course quality review system and through other meetings, such as subject board meetings. Destination data and progression outcomes are carefully monitored.

2.40   The College has introduced an electronic tracking system, a recording system which enables staff and students to monitor attendance and assignment submission. Some full-time students find this useful for monitoring submission and achievement but part-time students were unaware of the system. Teaching staff gave a mixed response to the system and consider that it is mainly a recording tool that does not fit so well with higher education programmes.

2.41   The College places great importance on raising educational aspirations and enabling progression onto and through different educational levels. This is demonstrated through outreach activities for local schools, sponsorship of two Academy schools and a university technical college, employer engagement activities and facilitating the potential of students to degree level and beyond. As an integral part of facilitating progression, there is a focus on supporting students in transition.

2.42   The information and application stages for prospective students are treated as being very important, focusing on ensuring that students are assisted to study the right programme at the right level. For some part-time students in employment, the application process can include a pre-application stage arranged between their employer and the College. Some employers also invite the College to help them select suitable candidates for apprenticeships.

2.43   The process of testing prospective students during the admissions process feeds into a thorough induction process, which in turn becomes part of the tutoring system. Students meet three times per year with allocated tutors, who are drawn from outside the students' own academic programme. The system provides an additional layer of support for students and facilitates problem solving when programme-based issues arise. Students confirmed the usefulness of this approach.

2.44   Attendance at tutorials is rigorously monitored, and students who miss a meeting are followed up. Students' attendance, progress and attainment are all regularly monitored and recorded through a rigorous tracking system. A traffic light system is in use. Students identified as being at risk are carefully monitored. The College is in the process of introducing a new electronic tracking system to assist with this process. Some higher education students were already using the new system, which facilitates the monitoring of achievement.

2.45   Students confirmed the support they received in making the transition from level 3 to level 4 study, which they considered to be a large step change. They also reported the helpfulness of the Passport to Higher Education scheme, taken over a number of days. Students felt well prepared for their higher education programme. The College uses modelling of previous students' work to act as exemplars.

2.46   The arrangements for enabling the progression of students from pre-entry through to further study or employment, which meet the needs of students and the local community including promotion within existing employment, are **good practice**.

2.47   The College is committed to providing learning environments and resources that enhance student learning and support employer educational needs. It has invested in several major new centres and facilities over the past four years, including the Energy Coast Construction Skills Centre.

2.48   The LTAS advocates the use of various resources for learning, including a balanced score card of performance indicators. Resourcing for capital items is identified formally through Course Quality Meetings, and then entered into a bidding process for purchasing and allocation of resources. Bids have to meet the College's strategic objectives. Tutors and students can request additional resources, should a special case arise. Employers are appreciative of the College's provision of additional resources when there is a special case.

2.49   The summative review and Summary Self-Assessment Report processes are used to highlight resource issues that may impact on the higher education student experience, for example the need to develop further the VLE. The Student Council raises issues about resourcing and these are reported to the QIC.

2.50   Resources required for individual modules are articulated through module guides. Reading lists are updated annually and reflected in handbooks. Feedback on resourcing is considered through the summative review system, module evaluation questionnaires, the tutorial system, and the internal student survey and external National Student Survey (NSS). NSS scores on library and IT resources are moderate and also show a decline in scores between 2012 and 2013 for access to specialised equipment and facilities. The Summary Self-Assessment Report process records innovative use of resources.

2.51   Access to library resources is variable across the College's programmes. All students have access to the College library, which holds a basic book stock appropriate to each programme. Students regard the level of book stock as an issue. The College holds a limited stock of journals and e-journals. Students report a lack of journal access for science subjects. Additional access to some e-journals is available through subscription, or by tutors posting individual papers onto the VLE. Students identified that wider access to specialist

journals is required in some subject areas. Students on programmes involving the two Universities have variable access to resources at the relevant University, and cited specific examples of difficulties, although staff reported on their close working with library staff at the two Universities.

2.52   Higher education students are offered the opportunity for enrichment as part of their personal and professional development. The types of extracurricular enrichment activities are very varied and range from lectures by guest speakers to trips and residential stays in the UK and abroad.

2.53   Overall, the review team regards the design and operation of the College's approach to providing, monitoring and evaluating arrangements and resources, which enable the development of academic, personal and professional potential, as generally effective. There is one feature of good practice relating to the College's approach to supporting the progression and transition of students, and the tutorial system is particularly thorough. The team therefore concludes that the arrangements meet the Expectation. The level of risk is low, notwithstanding evidence of some variability of arrangements for access to more extensive library resources.

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

2.54   The College takes deliberate steps to provide all of its students with a range of opportunities to engage in the quality assurance and educational enhancement of their programmes. The Learner Engagement Strategy defines the College's approach and intention that students will play an active role in contributing to assurance and enhancement. The strategy was written in 2012 to align with the Ofsted Common Inspection Framework and the 'Strategic Golden Thread of Equality and Diversity'. It has not yet been revised to reflect the sound practice in *Chapter B5: Student engagement* of the Quality Code.

2.55   The review team looked at the operation of the Learner Engagement Strategy and the Student Charter (see also the section on Expectation C). The review team talked to full-time and part-time students and staff, considered the student submission, read minutes of a variety of student meetings and looked at student feedback questionnaires. This showed that the College employs a wide range of mechanisms to engage its students, both individually and collectively. A variety of opportunities are presented for students to make their voice heard and to engage with the College management and governance.

2.56   The College provides an environment where effective student representation is made possible and encouraged, a view confirmed by students. The system of student representation is multilayered and well embedded. Each class elects a student representative in the first weeks of semester 1. In 2013-14 there are over 20 elected representatives. Some higher education programmes have chosen not to have a student representative due to the small size of the cohort. A small amount of training is provided for student representatives. Student representatives described the role being outlined and where support could be found, if needed.

2.57   There is a Lead Student Representative for higher education. This role enables the role-holder to play an active part in representing higher education students within the College. The Lead Student Representative chairs a meeting of the higher education student representatives and minutes are fed back to senior management. No staff are present. The Lead Student Representative is a member of the Student Executive and shares higher education issues with student governors.

2.58   Student representatives attend a number of forums. There is a Student Council and a higher education Student Council. The Higher Education Council meets termly and twice yearly with level 3 programme representatives. The Principal attends on some occasions. The Student Council meetings are all minuted. There is an annual Student Conference for the Student Council and senior managers, and a post-survey focus groups. Students are provided with feedback from Council meetings through a dedicated part of the intranet, television screens located around the College and minutes circulated through tutors and course representatives.

2.59   Student Council matters are fed upwards to the QIC although students are not represented on this Committee. Monthly minuted meetings are held between the Student Executive and the College Executive Team. Monthly strategic meetings are held with the Principal, who encourages an open-ended agenda to allow for freedom of discussion. Student representatives feed into termly Quality Review Reports. The governing body of the

College includes one student representative. While the elected student is drawn from further education, he/she works closely with the Lead Student Representative for higher education.

2.60   The College employs a variety of systems for considering and evaluating student feedback. Internal questionnaires are used three times per year, using a College template to which course teams can add course-specific questions. There are module evaluations at the end of each module. Students describe more informal opportunities for course feedback which has resulted in changes being made, including spreading assessment deadlines, consistent deadlines being set and ensuring that annual assessment schedules are provided. Students are generally positive about opportunities to give feedback on their course, although some students have not yet completed a module evaluation questionnaire.

2.61   An internal version of the NSS is used for all first-year higher education students. The College's analysis suggests a significant rise in NSS scores compared with the previous year. Students are made aware of the outcomes of feedback. Changes are indicated through 'you said, we did' posters.

2.62   The College has considered carefully what impact the recent increase in student voice and active participation, especially at strategic levels, may have on diverse areas of College practice. Links to the wider citizenship agenda, including the national framework of Youth Councils and the Youth Parliament, are also being considered.

2.63   Based on the evidence provided, the review team considers that the variety of opportunities for active student involvement at all levels and the responsiveness of staff to student feedback is **good practice**. The team further concludes that the Expectation is met based on the range of opportunities the College is providing for students to engage, individually and collectively, in the assurance and enhancement of the higher education provision. These opportunities are underpinned by a commitment to, and culture of, seeking to be responsive to students, and a number of examples were provided by staff and students of issues being raised and improvements introduced. The examples of variability of practice, for example in arrangements for student representation and module evaluation questionnaires, are not considered by the review team to compromise the overall conclusion, nor to outweigh the feature of good practice, and therefore the risk is deemed to be low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B6): Higher education providers ensure that students have appropriate opportunities to show they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the award of a qualification or credit.

Quality Code, *Chapter B6: Assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning*

Findings

2.64   The College follows the assessment regulations and policies set by the two degree-awarding bodies for the foundation degree programmes offered. For Pearson programmes the College has in place a set of assessment regulations. These regulations detail information on annual assessment schedules, summative assessments, the approach to module guides, information on the late submission of work, referral and deferral, extenuating circumstances, submission of work and assignment briefs. The guidelines to staff and students on assessment practice and the requirements and process of seeking extensions and resits are clear and thorough.

2.65   Each student can access their personal timetable, module assessment schedule and learning outcomes via the standard programme handbook and module guides. Programme handbooks include detailed information on assessment. They outline arrangements for assessment of students with disabilities and assessment strategies generally, including the use of different approaches and the role of feedback in assessment. Module guides clearly set out the assignments, including the structure and aims of the assignments and clear information on dates for submission.

2.66   The College has in place an Assessment and Marking of Learners' Work policy. This procedure describes the actions and responsibilities of staff relating to assessment and marking of work. For example, it details the College's 10 working-day deadline for the return of feedback to students on their coursework. It also clearly sets out where responsibility lies for assessment from the strategic level to the operational level. There are clear procedures in place for appeals against assessment decisions and a standard Assessment Cover Sheet and Feedback Form. There is an Assessment Malpractice policy and a separate Academic Misconduct (Plagiarism) policy. There is also a Late Submission of Work for Assessment policy.

2.67   The College has in place an Internal Quality Assurance of Assessment (Verification) policy. This is a rigorous policy with clearly defined procedures designed to ensure that the College assesses students to the standards required by the relevant awarding body. It ensures that assessment schedules are in place, that all assessments have been checked as being fit for purpose and that assessed work is verified according to the agreed strategy in place. This policy and associated procedure is the main way that the College quality assures the assessment of students.

2.68   The review team tested the provider's approach by speaking to students and staff, reviewing external examiners' reports and requesting additional information where necessary. The team focused on evidence of how these policies and procedures are implemented and monitored and how the College ensures consistent implementation.

2.69   Discussions with students and a review of external examiner and external verifier reports, especially for engineering, construction and chemistry, identified some course-specific problems which indicate that, at times, the Internal Quality Assurance of Assessment Policy and the summative review process were not working as intended. In the meetings with students it was evident that some students from different programmes had experienced bunching of assessments and at times deadlines were not always clear. It was

recognised that once problems were identified, tutors often responded quickly and positively to find appropriate solutions. Some students have received assessment schedules for the academic year but others have not. A minority of students indicated that they had not received feedback within the College's 10 working days timeframe. However, overall, students reported a positive experience of assessment.

2.70   External verifier reports for engineering, construction and chemistry all highlighted minor problems with assessment. These included issues with bunching and the setting of assignments against learning outcomes. The College is aware of certain local issues with assessment and these are being dealt with. Oversight of assessment schedules and internal quality assurance strategies is through the summative review process and the completed documentation indicates this. The QIC also receives updates on assessments and the Quality Office maintains central oversight of internal quality assurance processes. It is evident that the College has in place mechanisms to monitor assessment of students, and that it is able to detect issues when they arise and deal with them effectively. However, due to the issues outlined above in terms of variability of its application, the review team **recommends** that the College ensure the consistent application of the Internal Quality Assurance of Assessment (Verification) procedure for all higher education programmes.

2.71   Students are given a variety of opportunities to reflect on feedback, monitor progress and engage with various types of dialogue with staff. Dialogue around specific assignment feedback occurs collectively in class and informally on an individual basis. Formal tutorials with non-programme staff are held three times per year to monitor progress.

2.72   The review team concludes that the Expectation is met. It is clear that the College has in place robust policies and procedures for the assessment of students. The summative review process, QIC, senior managers and the Quality Office ensure that there is oversight of the College's policies and procedures in relation to assessment. Based on the evidence of the inconsistent implementation and monitoring of the Internal Quality Assurance of Assessment (Verification) procedure, giving rise to a recommendation relating to this, the risk is deemed moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External examining*

Findings

2.73   Responsibility for the appointment and management of external examiners and verifiers rests with the College's University partners and with Pearson in respect of higher national awards.

2.74   The College has in a place an External Verification - Monitoring procedure which clearly describes the processes involved in recording, disseminating, monitoring and actioning reports from external examiners and verifiers. It also clearly demonstrates where responsibility lies for this process, including the central role of the Quality Office and Quality Manager. The Quality Administrator maintains a system for monitoring action plans along with providing summary reports on actions completed.

2.75   The review team assessed the implementation of the College's procedure by reviewing relevant College documents and external verifier reports and speaking to staff and students. The team also reviewed the information available to students about external examiners/verifiers and the availability of their reports.

2.76   Evidence of how the College uses external examiner/verifier reports, and the management of actions, is detailed under Expectation A5. Scrutiny of the reports demonstrated that appropriate information is being provided to the College using the forms provided by the awarding bodies.

2.77   A review of information available to students revealed that the names, positions and institutions of external examiners/verifiers are not consistently detailed in College handbooks. In handbooks for foundation degrees there appears to be no information about the external examiners/verifiers. Within the higher national programmes the information provided is inconsistent.

2.78   The review team was also unable to find evidence that external examiner/verifier reports are routinely shared with students. Discussions with students confirmed that external examiner/verifier reports have not been made available to them. Some students reported that tutors would sometimes discuss outcomes from reports with them, but on the whole this was inconsistent. Due to these inconsistencies the review team **recommends** that the College establish effective arrangements for making the name, institution and position of external examiners available to students and for making their reports available in full to students for all higher education programmes.

2.79   From the evidence provided, including that detailed under Expectation A5, the review team concluded that the Expectation is met and that the risk to the quality of learning opportunities is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B8): Higher education providers have effective procedures in place to routinely monitor and periodically review programmes.

Quality Code, *Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review*

Findings

2.80   The College has three main mechanisms for routinely monitoring and periodically reviewing programmes. These include Termly Course Quality Review, Curriculum Review and summative review. The Quality Reporting and Curriculum Review procedure describes the key quality reporting processes and procedures, although this does not include details on summative review. The College has in place a higher education quality cycle that has been operational since 2011-12.

2.81   All programme performance is quality reviewed at least three times a year through Course Quality Reviews. In addition to quality reviews, there are termly curriculum review meetings involving members of the senior management team, the Quality Manager and relevant programme area managers. The main aims of curriculum review are to evaluate performance against key performance indicators and departmental quality improvement plans. In addition to quality reviews and curriculum reviews there are higher education summative reviews. These meetings take place in July and involve the relevant course leader, Programme Area Manager, the Lead Student Representative, the Senior Manager for Higher Education and the Deputy Principal - Curriculum and Quality. These are the main mechanisms for monitoring and reviewing higher education programmes. For programmes leading to UCLAN awards annual monitoring reports are completed using that University's template.

2.82   The review team tested the College's approach by reviewing selected documentation which evidenced completion of the review mechanisms as described, requesting further evidence where required and talking to senior staff and teaching staff about the processes in place. The team were keen to explore how the review mechanisms complemented each other and how they worked in practice.

2.83   The review team received numerous examples of completed documentation which demonstrated that, on the whole, the review processes are working as intended. The summative review process, which is applicable only to higher education programmes, is designed to monitor and review programmes at the end of the academic year and to ensure that relevant materials, such as handbooks, are in place for the next academic session. A number of reports along with student feedback are considered as part of this process. From the examples received it was clear that the process was working effectively. Areas for concern are referred to an action plan. The external examiner report in HNC/D Fine Art also confirms that quality review processes are working effectively for that provision. The QIC has oversight of this process and while it was difficult to find evidence of discussion of these reports, it was clear that they were received and noted.

2.84   Senior staff provided examples of how the processes have led to improvements. Examples include changes to the delivery of the Teacher Education programmes, changes to the tutorial process and the use of standard templates for module guides. Teaching staffed confirmed their engagement in monitoring and review activities, including their use of College templates for summative review. Staff are aware of, but have not yet participated in, awarding body processes for periodic review.

2.85   The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the risk is low. It is clear from the processes and procedures in place, and the evidence provided of their

implementation, that the College is effectively monitoring and reviewing its programmes, and, where applicable, meeting the requirements of the awarding bodies.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B9): Higher education providers have fair, effective and timely procedures for handling students' complaints and academic appeals.

Quality Code, *Chapter B9: Academic complaints and student appeals*

Findings

2.86   The College's approach to academic complaints and student appeals is detailed in its Student Complaint procedure, Student Appeals policy and Academic Appeals procedure. The Student Complaint procedure encourages early and informal resolution; complaints are monitored by the Quality Office and reported to the QIC to ensure central oversight. Students are made aware of the Complaint procedure and how to appeal an assessment board decision within the programme handbook. Further information on the Complaint procedure is included within the higher education induction booklet.

2.87   For the HNC/D programmes, students appeal initially to the assessor, then to the internal verifier, then to an assessment appeals panel and finally to the awarding organisation. For the programmes approved by the Universities, College policies and procedures in relation to appeals adhere to those set by these Universities. Students are informed of the appeals procedure during their induction programme and the student submission confirms that procedures enabling appeals and complaints are clear to students. Advice and guidance on making a complaint is provided by Student Services.

2.88   The review team tested the College's approach by speaking to students as well as checking QIC minutes to ensure that effective monitoring was in place. As yet there has not been a formal academic appeal for an HNC/D programme and as such it was not possible to evidence the College's procedure in practice. Discussions with students confirmed that the majority know where to find information about complaints and appeals for all programmes and that tutors are very open about discussing any issues informally. QIC minutes confirmed that there is central oversight and monitoring of complaints and appeals. Having reviewed all of the documentation it was not clear how students would find out about the formal support and guidance available to them from Student Services, as detailed in the student submission, when making a formal complaint or appeal.

2.89   Having reviewed all of the evidence, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met. Due to clear and robust procedures in place and evidence of ongoing central monitoring, the risk is deemed to be 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

2.90   Work-based learning and work placements do not form part of the HNCs/Ds delivered by the College. Some working students do carry out projects at their place of work. Work-based learning does form part of the foundation degrees and teacher education. The College has in place a procedure for managing quality and learning in the workplace. This details the responsibility of the course leader and business account managers in assuring work-based learning opportunities. Procedures ensure that the appropriate checks are carried out, including health and safety, before students undertake placements. The College has in place a clear health and safety appraisal template that is used.

2.91   The review team tested the College's approach by speaking to relevant staff and discussing work-based learning with students, as well as reviewing other relevant documentation. Meeting with senior staff confirmed that the Work Placement Supervisor supports programme area managers in establishing placement opportunities and this ensures a central overview. A Health and Safety Officer as well as a Health and Safety Committee ensure oversight of this area. Students are visited once a term when on placement. In the meeting with students those students on placements did not raise any concerns and were generally content with the process of finding a placement, the support available and their general experience. The review team could not find any evidence of guidance or other general information that was supplied to employers, either about the College or generally for those supporting students on placements. The employers that the review team met were also not aware of any such information.

2.92   The review team is satisfied that, as a result of the evidence provided and discussions with staff, the Expectation is met and the risk is low. The College has a clear process and numerous staff to support this activity.

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

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

Quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.94   In reaching its judgement about the quality of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex two of the published handbook. All Expectations relating to the quality of learning opportunities are met, and the risk is low in most cases.

2.95   The team found significant features of good practice in the areas of student transition and progression, and student engagement. The College is committed to supporting students from pre-entry through to completion and evidences this commitment in the documentary and one-to-one guidance provided to applicants - for example, ensuring that students are accepted onto the right programme at the right level - and to students throughout their programmes. In particular, there is careful monitoring of students at risk or with additional needs, and effective arrangements for tutorial support throughout each year of the programme.

2.96   The College has developed a strong culture of valuing student involvement in the assurance and enhancement of its higher education provision, which is put into effect through a range of opportunities for students from module level through to the Student Council and College governance. Staff are responsive to students and students in turn are confident that if they raise issues these will be taken seriously and, where appropriate, acted upon.

2.97   There is some variability of practice in implementing otherwise effective College procedures. This is the case for the moderation of assessments and assessed work in terms of the application of the Internal Quality Assurance of Assessment (Verification) procedure.

2.98   In the case of external verifiers and examiners, the provision of information about their names, positions and institutions and the provision of their reports to students are either incomplete or inconsistently achieved. Where further action is recommended, the review team concludes that the risk involved to each aspect of the quality of student learning opportunities is moderate.

2.99   Overall, the review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

3 Judgement: Quality of the information produced about its provision

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

Quality Code, *Part C: Information about higher education provision*

Findings

3.1 The College provides a range of information for prospective and current students and for the wider public through its website. The website enables access to the College's strategy, profile and Student Charter.

3.2 The marketing department manages the quality and accuracy of information produced by the College and is responsible for the strategic development of the College's internal and external communications. The marketing department works closely with course teams and senior managers responsible for higher education to ensure that key messages and information about programmes are accurate in marketing materials and on the website. The student submission confirms that the quality of information given to students is accurate and clear and endorses the user-friendliness of the College's website. This was endorsed by the students who met the review team.

3.3 There is a clear and well articulated process for developing and updating the information presented in the prospectus, with sections signed off by all relevant academic staff. The example prospectus seen by the review team included information on entry requirements and details of how to apply for a programme. The College produces a short Guide to Applying for Full-time Higher Education - but not an equivalent one for prospective part-time students - and offers help at any stage of the process through Student Services. Factsheets are available for each programme and there are procedures for the preparation of these. The marketing department is responsible for checking their completeness. The student submission commented favourably on the consistency and accessibility of these factsheets, a view endorsed by full-time students who met the review team.

3.4 The College identifies a range of information provided for prospective students, including information on learning disabilities. Details of programme costs, financial support, attendance schedules and expected conduct is made explicit for prospective students.

3.5 A written induction guide to the College helps new students to orientate themselves during their first week. This includes a learning style questionnaire and an A-Z of the College. Presentations are also made during induction week.

3.6 The review team tested the College's approach to providing information by speaking to students and relevant staff to ensure that information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy and that processes are being followed correctly. The team also reviewed relevant documentation as described above.

3.7 Meetings with students confirmed that pre-entry and admissions information is helpful and all had received the information they felt they required. In general, students confirmed that information provided during the programme was relevant and up to date. The programme handbooks are the main source of information for students.

3.8   It is not clear to the team if there is a defined process for quality assuring marketing information relating to higher education. However, discussions with the Marketing Manager reassured the team that the College is proactive in ensuring that information is correct.

3.9   All higher education students are provided with information that specifies the learning opportunities and support available to them. All students are provided with a Student Handbook, which is valued by students. Students on University-approved programmes are provided with programme specifications, programme handbooks, module guides and ancillary materials produced by the partner University.

3.10   Students also receive a programme handbook which follows a standard template and module guides. There is a standard template for the production of module guides. Documentation in relation to higher education tutorials specifically logs whether students have received College and higher education handbooks, the assessment schedule, module descriptors and the higher education Student Charter. The summative review process is used to check content and adherence to templates for handbooks. The Student Charter is used during induction to ensure that students are aware of their entitlements and responsibilities.

3.11   The College issues a standard template for programme and module handbooks for higher national programmes. Information on the achievement of unit outcomes and the computation for final programme grading is not provided consistently in accordance with the College's handbook template. A minority of programmes do not adhere to the published handbook format, resulting in less detailed information being made available to these students.

3.12   As indicated in paragraph 1.12, the College does not produce contextualised programme specifications for its higher national programmes. While much of the required information is provided elsewhere, students are not advised consistently of all required aspects of their programme.

3.13   The College has recently introduced a Student Charter, which outlines the rights and responsibilities of students and the College. The new Charter does not include a section on how students might engage in the quality assurance and enhancement of their programmes. It defines expectations of service levels and behaviours rather than students as partners in quality matters.

3.14   The College, working with its University partners, provided the required information for the Key Information Set (KIS). This information has not been published through the KIS site due to the very small cohort sizes for the College's programmes.

3.15   Overall, it is clear that relevant and trustworthy information is provided to the public, applicants and students throughout their student journey. The College's use of standard templates for programme handbooks and module guides ensures consistency of application and the summative review process is used to quality assure the information provided and to check that relevant information is ready for the following academic session. The marketing department is responsible for information provided through the College website and assures the quality of that information.

3.16   Due to all of the measures described, it is clear that the Expectation is met and the risk is low because of the College's procedures, the central oversight provided by the marketing department and the evidence provided by students.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

3.17   The College provides a range of information through its website and in printed materials for prospective and current students which meets their needs and is quality assured through a number of related College procedures, and centrally through the marketing department. Students who met the review team confirmed that they value the information provided in helping them to choose an appropriate programme and to progress through that programme. For these reasons the review team concludes that the quality of the information produced by the College about its higher education provision **meets** UK expectations.

4   Judgement: Enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1   The College does not have a fully developed understanding of the concept of enhancement as a strategic and systematic driver at the provider level. It considers the LTAS, the Learner Engagement Strategy and the annual summative review process to be its key drivers of strategic enhancement activity. Quality assurance processes are not yet being used fully to identify opportunities for enhancement. This notwithstanding, there is some evidence of enhancement being driven at a strategic level and other examples of enhancement being driven from programme level upwards.

4.2   The review team considered the operation of the LTAS, examples of action plans from annual summative review reports and minutes from the QIC. The team discussed the College's understanding of, and approach to, enhancement with senior staff. The review team also explored the range of enrichment activities and opportunities for sharing good practice with senior staff, teaching staff and students.

4.3   The LTAS does not refer explicitly to enhancement. Senior staff view the strategy as a live strategy which acts as a driver for development at programme level. The LTAS places great emphasis on the use of mobile and Web 2.0, 3.0 technologies as a means to enhance collaborative learning, and electronic portfolios to enhance progression from College-based learning to the workplace. Students confirmed a few examples of these approaches embedded within their programmes.

4.4   The College makes use of quality assurance procedures to drive cycles of continuous improvement. While the system is largely performance driven with a focus on compliance, some enhancement measures are identified and driven through this. The College regards its performance management system, centred on live key performance indicator metrics, as playing a key developmental role. The key performance indicator metrics help with the identification and rewarding of good practice.

4.5   Neither the summative review process nor the QIC provide explicitly for the identification of enhancement, although areas for enhancement may be identified within the summative review process.

4.6   The College has taken deliberate steps to improve the quality of the learning environment. Over the past four years, the College has made substantial investments in terms of new facilities, designed around specialist functions. The East Coast Energy and Construction Skills Centre was opened last year at a cost of £7 million, designed to encourage progression and enable students to think differently about trades. A further £1 million rebuild of the College is currently underway. Both initiatives include enhancement of learning environments used by higher education students. A recently opened Special Education Centre includes a 350-seat lecture theatre. Staff consider that this has enhanced higher education provision by providing an environment that parallels that found at a university. The space permits the delivery of formal lectures and enrichment activities, such as talks from guest speakers.

4.7   The Imaginarium was introduced in 2010, designed to provide a central resource through which to aid the development of technology-based learning. Staff consider that it facilitates and enhances the training of teachers. The use of the Imaginarium is reported to

the QIC. Higher education students were divided in their use of the Imaginarium, with some borrowing e-resources and using it for webinars and others unaware of its function. Staff reported that it provided an open door for technology help, such as the preparation of presentations.

4.8 Enrichment provides one example of a strategically driven enhancement initiative. Enrichment forms part of the curriculum entitlement for further education learners but has been extended to include higher education students. Enrichment is viewed as part of their personal and professional development. The range of extracurricular enrichment activities includes overseas art study trips, an art residential in London and work experience weeks.

4.9 The College has developed a strong ethos to serve the population and industry within the distinctive geographical setting of West Cumbria. As part of this ethos, the College has a distinctive focus on enabling and supporting progression opportunities and students in transition. It has taken deliberate steps to support progression through various educational levels in the immediate geographical area. The College is actively supporting progression from junior into secondary education by sponsoring two Academy schools and a local university technical college.

4.10 The College has a strategic aim to ensure that the academic portfolio is flexible, attractive and responsive to the external environment. It works directly with local employers for future planning to identify options for progression into and through higher education. The College aims to ensure that the learning environment is relevant to meet the needs of local employers as well as the population as a whole.

4.11 The College offers various mechanisms for the identification and sharing of good practice. There is a termly staff development conference. A minority of the content is focused specifically on teaching and learning within higher education, but much of the content is relevant to staff delivering higher education. In December 2013, the Lead Student Representative co-presented a session on the Higher Education Review.

4.12 The College intends its system of teaching and learning observations of staff as a mechanism to identify and support excellence. Staff who score an outstanding grade are required to disseminate good practice to peers. The College operates a teaching awards scheme to celebrate good practice. In December 2013, the College's Curriculum Team of the Year award recognised and rewarded the Health, Social and Childcare Studies team for the provision of a student experience which is enriched, stretching and leading to positive outcomes.

4.13 There is variable knowledge and understanding of the Quality Code across the College. The College has not yet undertaken a systematic exercise to consider its practices against the Expectations and the sound practice of the Quality Code. The Quality Code is not being used fully in relation to marketing or activities covered by Student Services. Some teaching staff are aware of elements of the Quality Code. The Quality Code is introduced in the induction for new teaching staff, but some tutors seemed unaware of this.

4.14 Overall, the review team considers that the Expectation is met, but that there is a moderate risk posed by the level of understanding of and strategic approach to enhancement. The review team **recommends** that the College strengthen arrangements for taking deliberate steps to enhance the quality of students' learning opportunities, including increasing the engagement of staff with the Quality Code.

4.15 There is scope to extend the use of quality assurance procedures to identify opportunities for enhancement. However, the College has a well articulated ethos which expects and encourages enhancement of student learning opportunities related to

progression and transition. It also provides initiatives such as that of enrichment which enhances the student experience.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

Enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.16   The College is engaged in a number of initiatives that are and will continue enhancing the quality of students' learning opportunities, including significant capital investment. This is supported by a range of examples of the sharing of good practice and a specific focus on providing enrichment activities for students. However, there is scope for the College's approach to be more strategic in driving enhancement at College level to enable opportunities for enhancement to be more systematically identified, including drawing on strengths in specific programmes to benefit all students, developing the emphasis in quality procedures to include a sharper focus on enhancement and engaging a broader range of higher education staff in the Quality Code.

5   Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1   The College's mission statement is to work in partnership to develop the skills and prosperity of its communities. Its *Strategic Direction 2011-14* document therefore emphasises the importance of strategic alliances and partnerships, and sets as one of its objectives the maximising of the College's contribution to the social and economic success of its communities. Higher education has a strong vocational emphasis and aims to meet the demand from employers for higher-level skills. Programmes offered have expanded to new vocational areas to meet local needs, and growth areas are within civil engineering, environmental science, advanced manufacturing and health and social care. A £7 million Energy Coast Construction Skills Centre opened in 2012-13 to meet the needs of the new nuclear power station and enhance students' learning experiences.

5.2   A strength of the College lies in raising its students' aspirations to continue their studies at higher levels and to provide 'positive destinations' for those seeking work and for those already in work - around 33 per cent of the College's students are employed. Students provided examples of how their employment opportunities had improved, or how they envisaged these would improve, as a result of their College experiences: two had earned promotion (one now managing apprentices also studying at the College); one could be hired out at a higher rate by their employer; another had developed the knowledge and confidence to consider developing a career beyond the nursery workplace and into community services. The usefulness of a higher national module in personal and professional development was highlighted.

5.3   The College has links with over 400 employers and draws teaching staff from industrial backgrounds. Contact is regular with both formal employer meetings (with course leaders and programme area managers to discuss student progression and assessment) and informal interactions, including staff visits to employers. Employers spoke very positively about how easily they were able to liaise with College staff and the opportunities for giving and receiving feedback. The College is also connected to several stakeholder forums, including the Nuclear Skills Council, Cumbria County Council Early Years Strategy Group and the National Forum for Engineering Centres. A team of business account managers has a remit to liaise with employers to identify training needs and current gaps in skills and then with programme area managers to discuss potential future provision.

5.4   Employability is embedded into curriculum design and assessment, and several examples were offered of employers having shaped the content of programmes: a part-time HNC in Business offered to Sellafield employees (started in January 2014); the Nuclear Engineering Foundation Degree; and discussion with employers over which optional units would provide the best fit within higher nationals (Applied Chemistry; Engineering). Employers are proactive in supporting the students they sponsor over the duration of their studies.

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 27 to 29 of the Higher Education Review handbook.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

e-learning
See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or **e-learning**)
Learning that is delivered or supported through the use of technology.

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

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

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