



# Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of London College of Business Sciences Ltd

February 2017

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## About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at [London College of Business Sciences Ltd](#). The review took place from 13 to 15 February 2017 and was conducted by a team of 2 reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Mark Atlay
- Ms Brenda Eade.

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

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

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

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#).<sup>2</sup> A dedicated section explains the method for [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).<sup>3</sup> For an explanation of terms see the [glossary](#) at the end of this report.

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

<sup>2</sup> QAA website: [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk).

<sup>3</sup> Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers): [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education).

## Key findings

### Judgements

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

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

### Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following feature of **good practice**.

- The extensive support, linked to individual learning plans, which enables student development and achievement (Expectation B4).

### Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations**.

By September 2017:

- refine the lines of reporting and terms of reference of committees to more effectively support and accurately reflect their role in the Governance of the College (Expectation A2.1)
- review the College's approach to academic integrity to ensure that academic practice is consistent and coherent (Expectation B6)
- strengthen the procedure for consideration of students' grades and profiles prior to recommending these for approval by the awarding organisation (Expectation B6)
- ensure that the committee reporting structure reflects the importance of standardisation meetings in evaluating the learning experience and monitoring student attainment (Expectations B8 and B6)
- revise the complaints procedure to make it distinct from that for appeals and amend the appeals procedure to clearly state the responsibility of the College for decision making and the entitlement of the student to be present and supported (Expectation B9).

### Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms** the following action already being taken to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to students:

- the steps being taken to develop the College's website to ensure that the information provided is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy (Expectation C).

## About London College of Business Sciences Ltd

London College of Business Sciences Ltd (the College) is a private education provider which was established in January 2010 and recruited the first cohort of students in April 2011. The College is in West Silvertown in the London Docklands regeneration area.

The Board of Governance which heads the College includes independent members, the Principal, senior managers and the Directors who are also owners of the company. The responsibilities delegated from the Board of Governance to the Principal include academic leadership and oversight. The Principal leads a team of seven academic staff all of whom have part-time sessional contracts. The team of nine administrative staff includes the Principal and Directors, of these, five have permanent full-time contracts and four have part-time contracts.

The College's mission is that the 'London College of Business Sciences will meet learner aspirations through excellence in education and training'. The aim of the College is to provide educational services to students wishing to study on QCF level 3 to 7 programmes in Business Management and in Education and Training.

Matrix Standard accreditation for information, advice and guidance was gained by the College in December 2015. A successful Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) annual monitoring review took place in September-October 2016. The College also holds British Accreditation Council (BAC) accreditation.

At the time of this review there are 66 students enrolled on the Pearson Diploma in Education and Training course. Of these, 50 students are studying full-time and 16 study part-time. When the Specific Course Designation monitoring visit took place in February 2016 the College had 60 international students enrolled. Thus, in comparison, the current total of 66 home and EU students represents an increase of ten per cent in total number and a change in student profile. The current total of 66 students represents a 120 per cent increase when compared to the 30 students enrolled at the time of the QAA Review for Specific Course Designation in October 2014.

The change in student profile since the Specific Course Designation monitoring visit in 2016 follows the UK Visas and Immigration decision to revoke the College's Tier 4 sponsorship licence in May 2016. Only students from the UK and the EU are admitted and students from overseas are no longer recruited. The College has also changed its provision by ceasing to offer management and business programmes and commencing the level 5 Pearson BTEC Diploma in Education and Training in April 2016.

At the time of Tier 4 licence revocation there were 29 students enrolled. Of these, 10 students were enrolled on the Pearson Level 7 Extended Diploma in Strategic Leadership and Management, two on the Level 5 Pearson HND in Business, nine on the ATHE Level 6 Diploma in Management, five on the ATHE Level 7 Diplomas in Healthcare Management and three students on the ATHE Level 7 Diploma in Healthcare Management. Following revocation, 15 of the 29 students were unable to complete. The College arranged for 10 students to gain certification and four students are continuing to work towards certification.

The College cites its greatest challenge as student recruitment considering the funding through student loans, the expense of tuition fees, and the number of institutions competing for students in the Greater London area. Strategies to address these challenges include a focus on the provision of vocational courses that may lead to direct employment or to the opportunity to progress to top-up degree qualifications.

The College is approved to offer Pearson BTEC qualifications and currently only recruits to the Level 5 Pearson BTEC Diploma in Education and Training. The College is also an approved centre for Awards for Training and Higher Education (ATHE). The College includes ATHE programmes on its website but no students are enrolled. The College is seeking new partners for undergraduate provision.

At the time of the QAA annual monitoring visit in February 2016, the College was judged to have made acceptable progress in addressing each of the three advisable and three desirable recommendations arising from the initial QAA review in 2014. The Quality Improvement Plan provides commentary of recommendations, actions proposed in response, dates for completion and summary of how actions will be evaluated.

## Explanation of findings

This section explains the review findings in greater detail.

### **1 Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding organisations**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### **Findings**

1.1 The College is approved by two awarding organisations, ATHE and Pearson. Currently only the Pearson BTEC Diploma in Education and Training is delivered. During programme design and validation Pearson sets the learning outcomes, ensures alignment to the FHEQ and the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF), takes account of QAA's guidance on qualification characteristics and the relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. Pearson is responsible for awarding qualifications which mark the achievement of the learning outcomes defined in the programme specification. Pearson maintains oversight of academic standards through its monitoring, review and verification processes.

1.2 The College relies on the clearly defined and well-established procedures of the awarding organisation for the positioning of the qualification at the appropriate level and aligning programme learning outcomes to that level. Pearson's procedures are used to name the qualification in accordance with titling conventions of the higher education framework and for awarding qualifications to mark the achievement of learning outcomes. Delivery of

the qualification is closely monitored by Pearson which maintains oversight of standards. These arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.3 To evaluate the effectiveness of these arrangements the team referred to programme approval correspondence with Pearson, scrutinised the programme specification, Pearson Academic Management Reviews, and Subject Verifier reports. The team also examined minutes and notes of meetings including those of the Board of Governance, Academic Board, and standardisation meetings. The review team held meetings with independent members of the Board of Governance, the Principal, and College staff.

1.4 The evidence demonstrates the arrangements to be effective in practice. The awarding organisation secures threshold standards and sets programme learning outcomes and unit learning outcomes in the programme and unit specifications. The College Course Rationale provides a customised version of the programme specification indicating to students the seven modules which they are required to complete. This complies with Pearson's requirements.

1.5 The College is responsible for maintaining standards at the operational level, which it does through its quality assurance framework and committee and management structures. The effectiveness of the College's processes and procedures are monitored by the awarding organisation. This occurs through regular engagement with the College by the Pearson appointed Standards Verifiers, the Centre Quality Manager and the Academic Review Manager. The outcomes of these engagements are recorded in the Pearson Centre Development Plan and the College's Quality Improvement Plan both of which are discussed and monitored by Academic Board.

1.6 Certification of the award of credit to learners who successfully demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes is the responsibility of Pearson. The College is responsible for the design of learning materials and assessment briefs, and for marking and internally verifying assessments to enable students to demonstrate that they have met the learning outcomes set by the awarding organisation. Pearson confirms that the learning outcomes have been met and threshold academic standards have been secured through the external verification process.

1.7 Pearson has ultimate responsibility for securing threshold academic standards and ensuring adherence to the relevant external reference points. The College's delivery of the programme is monitored through the established processes and procedures of the awarding organisation. Frequent monitoring visits by the Pearson-appointed Standards Verifiers, the Centre Quality Manager and the Academic Review Manager result in clearly defined action plans to address any issues raised. These arrangements ensure that the College meets the expectations and requirements of the awarding organisation for the maintenance of standards. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.8 The College uses the academic and regulatory frameworks of the awarding organisation to recommend students for the award of academic credit and qualifications. The College's academic management and committee structure identifies roles and responsibilities for the oversight of standards and for the delivery of programmes. The College's policies framework includes academic regulations, assessment regulations and admissions procedures which are aligned to the requirements of the awarding organisation. The College's annual monitoring and programme monitoring procedures provide a system for maintaining oversight of the maintenance of standards. The awarding organisation, through its Academic Management Review and Standards Verifiers, confirms that the governance arrangements are fit for purpose.

1.9 The College management structure, committee structure, the Policies Framework and academic regulations, are overseen by Pearson. As the ultimate responsibility for governance and the award of academic credit and qualifications lies with the awarding organisation, the arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.10 The team scrutinised documentation including the Policies Framework, the procedure for quality assurance, the Committee Structure and terms of reference. The team also examined notes and minutes of meetings including those of the Board of Governance, Academic Board, and standardisation meetings. The College Quality Improvement Plan, Pearson Academic Management Review reports, and Standards Verifier reports were also reviewed. The team met the Principal, external representatives of the Board of Governance, senior staff and academic staff.

1.11 The evidence indicates the arrangements to be partially effective in practice. Pearson has an effective and fully established academic framework and regulations to govern the award of credit and qualifications. Within this framework, the College has its own internal governance structures which are overseen by Pearson. The College sets out dates for meetings of all committees in the quality assurance calendar.

1.12 The Board of Governance meets four times each year and is the senior decision-making body for the College. The Board is responsible for approving the mission and strategic vision of the College and for monitoring and reviewing the College's policies and procedures and their application. Minutes of the Board include detailed discussions relating to the strategic direction and management of the College, scrutiny of external review reports, risk assessment and consideration of minutes of other College committees, including Academic Board and the Student Committee. Action plans produced following each meeting are reviewed at the subsequent meeting.

1.13 The Academic Board, which also meets four times each year, is responsible for all matters relating to the academic management of teaching, learning and assessment in the College. However, the terms of reference for Academic Board do not make specific reference to the oversight of standards. Minutes of meetings of the Board include consideration of Standards Verifier reports, student recruitment and responses to recommendations from various monitoring processes. But it is not clear from the meeting



minutes how the Board confirms student achievement and progression prior to recommending the award of credit to the awarding organisation (see Expectations B6 and B8).

1.14 The College has made acceptable progress in response to the recommendation to improve its academic committee procedures to assure the maintenance of academic standards made at the 2014 QAA review. The effectiveness of the membership of the Board of Governance is being reviewed by the College. The outcomes of the meetings of the committees are recorded and action taken tracked. However, the review team found that the minutes of the Board of Governance and Academic Board demonstrate a lack of clarity about their roles, there is overlap in their terms of reference and the issues discussed. Monitoring reports from Standards Verifiers and external agencies are discussed at both committees as are the minutes of the Student Committee.

1.15 The College's standardisation meeting, which is responsible for monitoring all aspects of standards in relation to learning, teaching and assessment does not have clear reporting lines in the College's committee structure although the College indicated that the notes of these meetings are discussed by Academic Board. Furthermore, the Student Committee reports directly to the Board of Governors rather than to Academic Board which has oversight of the student learning experience. The review team **recommends** that the College refines the lines of reporting and terms of reference of committees to more effectively support and accurately reflect their role in the Governance of the College.

1.16 In response to the recommendation to further rationalise College policies made in the QAA review of 2014, the College has sought to separate procedure from policy within the same framework. Procedures for quality assurance are contained in the Quality Assurance Manual which describes the processes for managing and monitoring the quality of the learning experience. The Policies Framework includes the Academic Regulations which list the procedures for the management and monitoring of academic standards, and include academic appeals and complaints. The admissions' policy outlines the procedures for the recruitment and admission of students including due diligence in connection with checking their qualifications. The assessment policy sets out procedures for securing the assessment process and includes penalties for academic malpractice. The policies are mapped to the Quality Code. Reference to the policies and procedures are included in student handbooks and on the portal. Staff confirm they have access to and are familiar with the policies and procedures of the College.

1.17 Responsibility for academic frameworks and regulations which govern how academic credit and qualifications are awarded resides with the awarding organisation. The College relies on the comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations of the awarding organisation and works with Pearson to uphold these. Therefore, the team concludes that the Expectation is met. However, the lack of clarity in the reporting lines of the deliberative committees and the overlap in the terms of reference of Academic Board and the Board of Governance constitute a moderate level of risk. This suggests a weakness in the operation of part of the College's governance structure and a lack of clarity about responsibilities.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.18 Responsibility for maintaining the definitive record for the Pearson BTEC Diploma in Education and Training programme and qualification rests with Pearson. It provides a detailed programme specification and unit specifications. These set out the programme and unit learning outcomes, identify the level, credit weighting and guided learning hours for each unit and give a breakdown of the curriculum and the assessment. Students are provided with transcripts by Pearson upon completion of their programmes of learning.

1.19 The programme specification provides a definitive record of the Pearson BTEC Diploma in Education and Training programme which can be used as the reference point for the delivery of the curriculum, the assessment of the learning outcomes and for monitoring and review by the College and by Pearson. Records of study for successful completion of the units can be awarded based on the credit and level described in the programme specification. This approach would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.20 To evaluate the arrangements the review team scrutinised the programme specification and the unit specifications for the BTEC Diploma in Education and Training. The team also examined the specifications for the BTEC Levels 5 and 7 and the ATHE Level 6 and 7 programmes which were previously delivered by the College, and examined the student tracking sheet. The review team met members of the senior management team, academic staff and students.

1.21 Overall, the evidence demonstrates the arrangements to be effective in practice. The College is currently delivering only the Pearson BTEC Diploma in Education and Training. The College selects specific units with reference to Pearson's rules of combination to form a customised programme for delivery to their students. This customised selection of units from the generic programme specification provided by Pearson is used by the College as the central reference point for programme delivery. This provides the basis for designing learning material to enable students to meet the learning outcomes, and for setting assessments which test the achievement of unit and programme learning outcomes to enable the award of credit.

1.22 Through the standards verification and Annual Management Review processes, the awarding organisation ensures that the customised programme enables students to meet the intended learning outcomes of the Diploma. Initial Standards Verifier scrutiny of the structure of the customised programme identified that the order of unit delivery should be revised to enable students to complete the theoretical aspects of the programme which provide the prerequisites for the practical elements of the programme.

1.23 Tracking sheets record student achievement and completion of individual units. These sheets are used in the standards verification process and will be used to apply for the award of credit by the awarding organisation. At the time of the review, students had completed only four units and consequently there were no records of certification by Pearson.

1.24 The College fulfils its responsibilities for maintaining definitive records within the context of the arrangements of the awarding organisation. The College relies on the well-established procedures of the awarding organisation for providing records of study for students and alumni. A standard programme specification is provided by Pearson and the College's customised programme is approved and monitored by the awarding organisation. The College adheres to the programme specification and works closely with Pearson. Therefore the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.25 Pearson is responsible for establishing the academic standards for the BTEC Diploma in Education and Training in line with the requirements of the FHEQ and other appropriate reference points.

1.26 The College has defined internal procedures for course development and approval to ensure that the requirements of any awarding body for defining and setting standards are appropriately addressed. These are described under Expectation B1. The College's processes in association with those of the awarding organisation enable Expectation A3.1 to be met.

1.27 To explore the arrangements for this Expectation the review team considered material and guidance produced by Pearson and discussed its use in programme design and approval, and in establishing standards for assessment. The review team met senior staff, teaching staff and the programme leader.

1.28 Overall, the evidence demonstrates the arrangements to be effective in practice. The Pearson BTEC Diploma in Education and Training is mapped to the QCF and recognised as equivalent to Certificate of Education qualifications in the FHEQ. The College selects units to deliver from a prescribed list in accordance with Pearson requirements to form a customised programme and submits documentation to Pearson for final approval. Staff members receive training to ensure they maintain a current understanding of their responsibilities in relation to programme delivery and assessment.

1.29 The annual visit by the Pearson Academic Management Reviewer as part of the Academic Management Review process confirms that the College maintains programme specifications for their award in line with the expectations of the Quality Code. The Pearson appointed Standards Verifier checks that the programme operates in line with the prescribed Pearson specification.

1.30 The review team found that the College, in association with its awarding organisation, has effective processes in place for the approval of programmes and the securing of standards. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.31 The awarding organisation, Pearson, determines the credit value and status of modules, learning outcomes and associated assessment criteria. The College is required to adhere to Pearson's frameworks and regulations in delivering and awarding the qualification. For the BTEC Diploma in Education and Training, Pearson provides additional guidance on the teaching and assessment of the qualification.

1.32 The College designs assessments to meet the requirements of Pearson and these are sent to the Standards Verifier appointed by Pearson for comment and approval. The College's marking and internal verification process checks that learning outcomes are met at the threshold level and this is confirmed by the Standards Verifier at annual meetings according to processes determined by Pearson. The College's processes, in association with those of the awarding organisation, would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.33 In testing this Expectation, the review team considered documentation including assessment briefs, unit and programme handbooks and assessment policies, procedures and their application. The team saw documentation developed by the College combined with reports from the Standards Verifier appointed by the awarding organisation. The team also met senior staff, academic staff and the programme leader.

1.34 The evidence demonstrates the arrangements to be effective in practice. The College uses programme material, developed by the awarding organisation, which defines learning outcomes for the programme and for modules. Assessment documentation and methods of assessment are set out in programme handbooks. Staff who met the team had a good understanding of the requirements of the awarding organisation and of the standards expected of the award. Standardisation meetings are held at the beginning and end of each term to ensure effective standardisation of assessments and the verification of assessors' decisions across all qualifications.

1.35 In a recent report, the Standards Verifier confirmed that assessments had been appropriately designed and communicated to students. However, concerns were raised about the internal verification process which led to a block on certification. The issue had arisen from a misunderstanding about the need to confirm both the academic outcomes of the units completed and the associated professional competencies before confirmation that the learning outcomes of the units had been met. The review team heard of the actions being taken by the College to address this issue in conjunction with the Centre Quality Manager appointed by Pearson. Issues identified by the Standards Verifier such as the consistency of assignment briefs, improving the internal verification process and variability of assessment feedback inform the Centre Development Plan which is monitored by the College and the Pearson Centre Quality Manager.

1.36 The College, in association with its awarding organisation, has processes in place for the management of academic standards and the associated award of credit. Where there were failings in the College's internal processes for the new Pearson BTEC Diploma in Education and Training, these were being identified by Pearson and acted upon by the College with its support. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

## **Findings**

1.37 Pearson has the primary responsibility for monitoring and reviewing the programmes offered by the College. The Pearson-appointed Standards Verifier provides an annual report on standards and the achievement of learning outcomes at the programme level. An Academic Management Reviewer provides an overarching annual Academic Management Review report of the College's provision with Pearson. The College is further supported by a Pearson Centre Quality Manager who meets with the College to monitor and support the implementation of the associated action plan. The College is responsible for ensuring appropriate processes are in place for routine monitoring of the Pearson award (see Expectation B7). These arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.38 In testing this Expectation, the review team considered documentation relating to the monitoring of provision for the past three years including Pearson Standards Verifier and Academic Management Review reports, and the College's review documents, action plans and minutes of meetings. The team also held meetings with senior, academic and professional support staff.

1.39 Overall, the evidence demonstrates the arrangements to be effective in practice. The annual Pearson Academic Management Reviews cover a range of aspects of the provision including those relating to assessment, verification and certification. The most recent Academic Management Review, which took place after the block on certification had been put in place as a result of the Subject Verifier's concerns (see Expectation A3.2), confirms that the College has in place appropriate processes for delivering valid and reliable assessments in line with Pearson regulations and requirements. Previous Pearson Academic Management Review reports were positive about the cross-referencing sections of appropriate policies to the then QAA Code of Practice.

1.40 The Pearson devised Centre Development Plan shows detailed monitoring of the Diploma in Education and Training and of the actions being taken to address concerns and to further enhance the provision. Further monitoring and support is provided by Pearson's Centre Quality Manager.

1.41 The review team found that the awarding organisation has effective processes in place for the monitoring and review of programmes. These processes explicitly address whether the UK threshold academic standards are achieved and whether academic standards are being maintained. The College manages its responsibilities for monitoring and review effectively by working closely with the awarding organisation. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.42 Pearson has ultimate responsibility for using external and independent expertise in the design and approval of programmes. Responsibility for appointing independent Standards Verifiers to oversee the maintenance of academic standards also resides with the awarding organisation. Standards Verifier reports are considered by the programme team and by senior management as part of the College's annual monitoring arrangements.

1.43 The College appoints independent governors with expertise in the delivery and quality assurance of higher education across a range of settings to assist with policy development and monitoring. These arrangements would enable the College to meet the Expectation.

1.44 In testing this Expectation, the review team examined documentation including minutes of meetings, the programme specification and the regulatory framework of the awarding organisation. Standards Verifier, and Academic Management Review reports were scrutinised with consideration of the College's engagement with the Pearson Centre Quality Manager. The review team met senior staff, academic staff and Board of Governance members.

1.45 Overall, the evidence demonstrates the arrangements to be effective in practice. Pearson specifications for the BTEC Diploma Education and Training are derived using external expertise and this is supported by additional guidance on course design and standards provided by a subject expert. The Standards Verifier and Annual Management Reviewer provide independent verification of the College's processes and maintenance of standards. Issues highlighted in their reports are discussed elsewhere in this report, notably in Expectations A3.3 and B6.

1.46 Reports by the Independent Schools Inspectorate cover the extent to which the College complies with published educational oversight standards and on the quality of educational outcomes and provision. These confirm that standards are met and make recommendations to the College about further enhancement including in relation to lesson planning, staff development and educational visits.

1.47 British Accreditation Council reports are positive and identify areas for improvement including relating to the College's prospectus, staff development for the BTEC Diploma, and the way in which the College monitors the implementation of actions identified through its various reporting mechanisms.

1.48 Actions arising from external reports are incorporated into the College's Quality Improvement Plan and monitored by the Board of Governance. The external expertise on the Board of Governance helps the College to address issues that have arisen with the implementation of the new Pearson BTEC Diploma in Education and Training programme and with the development of the College's process and procedures.



1.49 Overall, the evidence shows the College works effectively with the awarding organisation to manage its responsibilities for maintaining academic standards and makes use of external expertise. The College uses Pearson's processes including standards verification and annual monitoring, together with reviews by other accrediting organisations and the external expertise on the Board of Governance. These arrangements ensure external and independent expertise is used in the setting and maintenance of academic standards. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

1.50 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.51 Of the seven Expectations in this area all are met and six have a low level of risk. The exception is Expectation A2.1 where the review team recommends that the College refines the lines of reporting and terms of reference of committees to more effectively support and accurately reflect their role in the Governance of the College. The level of risk for Expectation A2.1 is moderate because the lack of clarity in the reporting lines and the overlap in the terms of reference of Academic Board and the Board of Governance represents a weakness in the operation of part of the College's governance structure and a lack of clarity about responsibilities. The review team made no affirmations in this section and no features of good practice are identified.

1.52 The team concludes that, overall, the maintenance of the academic standards of the awards offered on behalf of the awarding organisation at the College meets UK expectations.

## 2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

### Findings

2.1 Ultimate responsibility for the design, development, approval and modification of the programme rests with the awarding organisation, Pearson. The College has defined procedures for the approval of new programmes designed to ensure that full consideration is given to all factors which determine whether a new course should be offered. A completed New Programme Approval form is reviewed by the Principal, and the Board of Governance considers the fit with the strategic plan, resource requirements and the financial viability. If agreement is given, external approval is sought from the awarding body. The process considers a range of issues including learning outcomes, transferable skills, external reference points, curriculum design and content, programme structure, assessment, resources and staff development. The College's stated procedures for the approval of new programmes allow this Expectation to be met.

2.2 The review team explored the effectiveness of College procedures and their application by considering minutes and notes of meetings, committee papers and course documentation. The team also met senior and academic staff including the Programme Leader.

2.3 The evidence demonstrates the arrangements to be generally effective in practice. For the new Pearson BTEC Diploma in Education and Training, which was the only programme to be considered through the College's procedures since the last review, the College's stated procedures were broadly followed. The New Programme Approval form and checklist covers the range of tasks to be completed pre programme approval, during and after programme operation. Tasks to be completed before, during and after individual sessions are also included. The Board of Governance considered the course structure in the light of financial imperatives. The programme leader held discussions with employers to ascertain the most appropriate optional units to include.

2.4 The College states that curriculum content is reviewed by Academic Board to decide how best to deliver the course. However, while Academic Board noted developments with the approval of the programme, the review team found no record in the minutes of a detailed consideration of course delivery. Consideration of new programme delivery by Academic Board is not part of the College's approval process, nor is it specified in the terms of reference of Academic Board. The recommendation made in Expectation A2.1 is also of relevance here. The Standards Verifier's first report identified that the College's order of unit delivery did not reflect the explicit guidance on the correct delivery sequence from the awarding organisation. The review team heard a clear rationale for the mode of operation of the course based on the mature nature of the learners. The team also heard that the College is taking action to address the structural issues identified in the Standards Verifier's report.

2.5 Overall, the College has in place appropriate procedures for the design, development and approval of programmes. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and that the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

**Quality Code, Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education**

**Findings**

2.6 The College is responsible for the recruitment and admission of students. An admissions policy and a policy for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) which is aligned to the requirements of the awarding organisation are in place. Admissions procedures are available for students online. Students are required to complete an application form, which makes provision for the declaration of specific learning needs.

2.7 The College has an interview process and a test to assess English language proficiency. Information about the programmes offered by the College is available through the prospectus, brochures and on the website. The Admissions Committee has the final decision on admission. The College has a procedure for appeal against an admissions decision, details of which are on the College's website. The stages of the admissions process are set out for students on the College website and on the application form.

2.8 The prospectus and the website give details of the structure and content of the courses which the College is approved to offer. The admissions and enrolment processes are mapped to this chapter of the Quality Code. The College is a member of the National Academic Recognition Information Centre enabling it to verify entry qualifications from overseas providers. The policies and procedures for recruitment, selection and admissions would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.9 The team studied the admissions and enrolment policies and scrutinised the material available to students online including the application form. The team examined the prospectus and the RPL policy, English Language Test and records of interviews with students. Student files and the minutes of the admissions committee were also scrutinised. The team also met academic and professional support staff involved in the admissions process and with students.

2.10 The evidence demonstrates the policies and procedures for recruitment, selection and admissions to be effective in practice. The College's primary focus is on the provision of vocational courses to meet the needs of the local community. A shortfall in the number of teachers was identified by the College, and their recruitment strategy for the Pearson BTEC Diploma in Education and Training is aimed at satisfying this market and widening participation.

2.11 The prospectus is available online and in hard copy. This details the Pearson and ATHE programmes which the College is approved to offer and includes course objectives, the structure and curriculum content together with entry requirements. Prospectus content is aligned to the requirements of the awarding organisation which endorsed the College's admissions procedure at the time of approval and continues to monitor admission and recruitment through the Annual Management Review and standards verification processes. The website and prospectus also provide information on fees and guidance on how to apply.

2.12 The Enrolment Policy sets out the detail of the enrolment process for both new recruits and those who are re-enrolling onto the next stage of the programme.

The Admissions Policy comprises a list of procedures associated with recruitment and admissions. The procedure for recruitment and admissions procedures in these documents are not always distinct from those for re-enrolment. However, meetings with admission staff indicated that they understood what was required for recruitment and admissions and students confirmed that they had been given guidance and support throughout the recruitment, application and enrolment stages.

2.13 Students are required to complete an application form which captures their personal details, academic qualifications, employment history and asks for two referees. Admissions officers use a points-based system to assess the student's intention to study and to make an assessment of the likelihood of a student qualifying for student loan funding.

2.14 All students take a diagnostic test for English language to ensure their language ability is sufficient for them to be admitted to the programme and to identify any further support they may need. Students are interviewed by a member of the admissions team and in some cases by an academic member of staff. The interview pro forma is designed to test the level of understanding of English language and whether the student has the necessary aptitude for learning. It includes questions relating to the verification of the candidate's qualifications, employment history and personal details.

2.15 Minutes of the Admissions Committee indicate that the College intends to review its admissions procedures and this will include reviewing the scoring system which is used to assess a student's intention to study and their eligibility for funding from the Student Loans Company.

2.16 The procedure for RPL is aligned to the requirements of the awarding organisation, but at the time of the review the College had not awarded credit for the recognition of prior learning. However, the procedure is used as a reference point for the admission of students who do not have formal qualifications but have practical experience of teaching and training.

2.17 The final decision regarding admission to the College's programmes is taken by the Admissions Committee which is a subcommittee of Academic Board.

2.18 Students confirmed that they had received all the relevant information for their programme and that they had been supported through the admissions process. Those students met by the team had all attended for interview and were aware of how to appeal against an admissions decision. Students are able to evaluate the admissions and enrolment process at induction and the outcomes of the evaluation demonstrate their satisfaction with the process.

2.19 Students are required to obtain a placement at the beginning of their studies in order to fulfil the practical elements of the programme. Although this is confirmed during induction, some placements, particularly those for part-time students had not materialised. This contributed to a low retention rate for part-time students. The College is addressing this issue through a revised learning agreement which all students will be required to sign as part of the admissions and enrolment process. This confirms the students' intention to study and that they can fulfil the necessary teaching practice elements of the course through a placement.

2.20 Admissions staff are supported with their continuing professional development (CPD) through a training needs analysis and by attending staff development events which specifically relate to the admissions process. These include QAA training on this Chapter of the Quality Code, and training events organised by UK Visas and Immigration and the Higher Education Funding Council for England.

2.21 The review team concludes that the College's recruitment, selection and admissions policies and procedures adhere to the principles of fair admission. Documentation shows the arrangements are transparent, reliable, valid, inclusive and underpinned by appropriate organisational structures and processes and support the selection of students who are able to complete their programme. This is confirmed through the monitoring processes of the awarding organisation. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.22 For the Pearson BTEC Diploma in Education and Training, the College has responsibility for teaching, including appointing staff and ensuring they have appropriate skills and experience. The College has a Learning and Teaching Policy, which is mapped to the Quality Code. Lesson plans and schemes of work provide the basis for the delivery of the curriculum. The Staff Recruitment Policy sets out the criteria for recruiting staff. The College has an appraisal system and keeps CPD records. There are procedures for peer review and teaching observation. Student and programme handbooks together with an induction programme provide students with information about their programmes of study. End-of-term and end-of-unit reports are used to monitor and evaluate the teaching and learning process.

2.23 The Learning and Teaching Policy provides the basis for effective learning and includes procedures for course delivery, assessment including RPL, teaching observations and peer review. This policy is aligned to Chapter B3 of the Quality Code, supports the development of independent learners and makes provision for enhancing learners' capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking. Students are involved in the enhancement of teaching through the student committee. These arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.24 The team examined the Learning and Teaching Policy and associated documentation including the programme and unit handbooks. The outcomes of peer and teaching observations and the records of CPD for academic staff were also scrutinised. The review team met senior, academic and support staff and students.

2.25 The evidence demonstrates the arrangements to be effective in practice. The Teaching and Learning Policy sets out the objectives for the provision of learning opportunities. Schemes of work and lesson plans provide details of how the curriculum will be delivered. Students are provided with information about their programmes through the programme handbook and unit handbooks.

2.26 The policies relating to learning, teaching and assessment are set out in the Student Handbook and include Academic Regulations, assessment and complaints procedures. The Student Code of Conduct includes expectations in respect of attendance, behaviour, equal opportunities and adherence to College regulations. Students are required to sign the declaration as part of the induction process.

2.27 The Staff Recruitment Policy sets out the procedures for advertising posts, compiling job and person specifications, selecting candidates for interview, conducting interviews and checking qualifications. New members of staff attend an induction session.

2.28 Staff undergo performance appraisal which contributes to a training needs analysis and informs their CPD, which they are required to record. The College keeps a record of staff training needs and their CPD. An extensive schedule of training workshops is run by the College and these are well attended by staff. CVs available during the visit indicated that



staff are appropriately qualified for their academic roles. The Pearson Annual Management Review reports confirm that staff are appropriately qualified and that there are effective systems in place to support students.

2.29 A variety of teaching methods is used which includes formal lectures, group discussions and presentations from employers. Students are supported to become independent learners through the tutorial system which is run on both a group and an individual basis. Students are also provided with weekly academic skills classes which form part of the scheduled timetable. Individual learning plans are used to identify student learning needs. Students confirm they update these on a weekly basis and academic staff review them on a termly basis (see also Expectation B4).

2.30 The College evaluates the provision of learning opportunities through teaching observation, peer observation and student surveys. The outcomes of these evaluations are included in the Annual Programme Reports (APRs) which are completed by programme leaders. APRs also address feedback from Standards Verifiers and the Academic Management Reviewer, and contribute to the College-wide Annual Monitoring Report (AMR). Discussion of the outcomes of student feedback surveys and consideration of the APRs occurs at standardisation meetings which are attended by students. Teaching staff complete end-of-unit reports and end-of-term reports that also feed into the monitoring processes for reviewing and enhancing the provision of learning opportunities.

2.31 The College works with its staff, students and awarding organisation to review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices. A variety of learning opportunities is provided which supports students to develop as independent learners and develop their analytical, critical and creative thinking. Staff are well qualified and fully supported in their CPD by the College. Pearson oversees the provision of learning and teaching through the Academic Management Review process. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

**Expectation (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**

2.32 The range of support the College has in place for its students includes induction, tutorials, academic skills development, guidance on assessment and English language support. Pastoral support is provided through the student welfare officer and students are signposted to specialist support including health and welfare. Individual learning plans are designed to record individual targets and recommended actions. Learning resources include a student portal and library. The processes that enable student development and achievement are monitored through the annual programme reviews, the College-wide annual monitoring processes and the awarding organisation through its Academic Management Review. The policies and procedures which support student development and achievement are detailed and reflect the indicators of sound practice. These procedures would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.33 The review team tested the effectiveness of the College's procedures by examining documentation including the policies and procedures, induction programme Teaching and Learning Policy, tutorial arrangements related to student development and achievement, programme handbooks, student questionnaire results, and the student portal. The team also met senior staff, academic staff, professional support staff, and students.

2.34 Overall, the evidence demonstrates the College's procedures for monitoring and evaluating the arrangements for enabling student achievement to be effective in practice. Students are enabled to develop their academic, personal and professional practice through an extensive range of support. Many of the students are returning to education and consequently have a range of different learning and support needs. The College recognises the needs of this diverse student population and provides support on a tailored basis.

2.35 The induction period introduces students to their programme and to the resources available to support their development. At the beginning of the second term there is a further induction session targeted at improving academic skills and informing students of additional sessions available to support their academic development and progression into work and further study.

2.36 Timetabled tutorials include opportunities for students to improve their study skills, work effectively in groups, practice presentations, develop assessment techniques and improve their English language competence. Individual tutorials are provided for students who need specific support for their learning and development. Students complete individual learning plans which help them to identify their development needs and record the necessary action to address those needs. Students met by the team valued their individual learning plans, indicating that they review them on a weekly basis. The individual learning plans are used by tutors to ensure effective personal development and identify support needs which is then provided by the College; the programme leader reviews these plans each term.

2.37 Students who are not making sufficient academic progress have continuing support sessions where action plans are developed to help them to meet revised dates for the submission of work. The staff who provide the support for student development and achievement are well qualified and supported by the College's CPD process. Student attendance is closely monitored, and the policy is published on the website. Students

confirmed that the policy is rigorously implemented and any student who misses a class is contacted by a member of the support staff.

2.38 Students use the portal which provides additional learning resources and access to the online library. The physical library has recently been upgraded to stock specific texts required for the Pearson BTEC Diploma in Education and Training.

2.39 The College has a Memorandum of Understanding with a University which enables students who have successfully completed the business programmes, recently offered by the College, to progress to courses in the University Business School. Discussions are in progress with the University to reach an agreement for students who complete the Pearson BTEC Diploma in Education and Training to progress to the University's education and training programmes.

2.40 Students evaluate the support they receive through student surveys and the outcomes are positive. The College's annual monitoring process evaluates and makes recommendations for enhancing the procedures available for student support. The College indicated that it plans to further enhance its student support through the introduction of professional development plans. The team considers that the extensive support, linked to individual learning plans, which enables student development and achievement is **good practice**.

2.41 The College has effective and extensive procedures in place to support students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. These procedures are effectively evaluated by the College through its monitoring processes and overseen by the awarding organisation through the Academic Management Review process. The team identified one feature of good practice regarding the extensive support, linked to individual learning plans, which enables student development and achievement. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

**Expectation (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**

2.42 The College considers that obtaining regular student feedback is a key element of student engagement, and its procedure on student engagement sets out the various mechanisms which are used to gather students' views. These include the use of surveys in relation to College processes and programme units, the appointment of student representatives, and a Student Committee convened by the Student Welfare Officer. Each of these components feeds into the annual monitoring process. Students are represented on the Board of Governance and Academic Board. The documented procedures allow the Expectation to be met.

2.43 The review team considered the effectiveness of the arrangements to engage students by examining the College's procedures and their application through the outcomes of various surveys. The team also scrutinised committee minutes including those of the Student Committee. The team met senior staff, academic staff, professional support staff and students.

2.44 The evidence demonstrates the arrangements to be effective in practice. The College uses surveys to gather students' views on a range of issues including induction, the website, teaching and resources. The Student Welfare Officer evaluates the feedback, in liaison with the Director of Admissions and Administration, and identifies areas for action. Feedback on the outcomes is communicated to the wider student body through the portal and through the student representatives.

2.45 Each cohort of students elects representatives who form part of the Student Committee which reports to the Board of Governance. The Student Committee is convened by the College's Student Welfare Officer who provides information about the student representative role to those elected. The outcomes of the Student Committee also inform the College's AMR. Meeting records show the range of issues discussed include resources, reports of Subject Verifiers, the use of the portal and support for disabled students. As well as the formal feedback mechanisms, students are encouraged to raise issues with tutors.

2.46 Students who met the review team talked positively about the way in which the College responded to their views through the various mechanisms in place. They cited examples of improvements that had arisen directly from their feedback including the provision of new computers, additional library resources, reduction in printing costs, and improved Wi-Fi.

2.47 The College takes deliberate steps to engage all students in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. There are a variety of feedback mechanisms in place to gather students' views and use is made of feedback by the College to improve the quality of the learning experience. Thus the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.48 The College is responsible for setting assessments in compliance with Pearson requirements, first marking, internal verification and provision of feedback to students. The College's Teaching and Learning Policy also covers assessment and is cross-referenced to the Quality Code. Assessment processes and procedures are designed to meet the requirements of the awarding organisation. Standards are determined against nationally agreed reference points including the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements. The College has a process for RPL.

2.49 The College promotes student learning through providing feedback that is criteria driven. Grades and feedback are monitored by the College's Internal Verifier and reviewed by the Standards Verifier appointed by the awarding organisation. The design of the College's processes and procedures for assessment, and its approach to compliance with the requirements of the awarding organisation, enable the Expectation to be met.

2.50 The review team considered the College's procedures relating to assessment, information provided to students, assignment briefs, assessment feedback, and standards verifier reports. The team also held meetings with students, senior staff and teaching staff.

2.51 The evidence reviewed demonstrates the arrangements to be partially effective in practice. All assessments are assignment-based and are internally set and graded. These are designed by tutors and considered by the Internal Verifier prior to sending to the Standards Verifier and Pearson for confirmation. Assignments are released to students as drafts prior to external approval so they have plenty of time to prepare for assessment.

2.52 The College's assessment submission procedures still refer to a key role for the Head of Business, a designation absent from the current structure. However, staff and students were clear about the procedures for assessment submission, marking and feedback. Students talked positively about the informative nature of assessment briefs, the quick formative feedback they received and the way in which this helped them to improve their assignments. The Standards Verifier had identified ways in which feedback might be further improved and this featured as an area for action in the College's Quality Improvement Plan.

2.53 For a programme now no longer running, the Standards Verifier had identified issues with plagiarism, requiring the work to be reassessed. As a result, the College had strengthened its approach. Students confirmed that they were informed about correct academic practice at induction and in their units. All written work is required to be put through text-matching software prior to submission and students include the reports with their assessments. However, students are free to choose which system to use and hence use different systems. The review team heard of a variety of software products being used and while these all identify matched text in different ways they are of variable effectiveness. This inconsistent approach means that students' work cannot be readily compared with other current or previously submitted work. Furthermore, students are unclear about the amount of permissible matched text that is acceptable and cite different percentage scores. Some

students see the percentage score as a target to keep below rather than understanding the importance of correct academic practice. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that, by September 2017, the College reviews its approach to academic integrity to ensure that academic practice is consistent and coherent (see Expectation B8).

2.54 Grading of assessed work and moderation is completed within four weeks of the submission date with a set sample of work internally verified. Once complete the grades and work are made available to the Standards Verifier for confirmation. The most recent Standards Verifier report raised concerns about the internal verification process confirming unit grades when learning outcomes had not yet been met in full because of the need to confirm completion of the required practice element (see Expectation B7). The College does not have assessment boards and there is no clear process for confirmation that the profiles of students and their grades are accurate and complete. The review team heard that Academic Board has this responsibility. However, no record could be found in the minutes of Academic Board meetings of it undertaking this responsibility for the current or previous programmes. Nor was this remit clear from Academic Board terms of reference. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that, by September 2017, the College strengthens the procedure for consideration of students' grades and profiles prior to recommending these for approval by the awarding organisation.

2.55 The College has appropriate procedures for RPL and would also draw on those of Pearson where necessary. No students who met the team had experience of applying for RPL and both students and staff tended to refer to RPL as part of admission to the start of a course rather than for advanced standing.

2.56 Overall, the College has in place equitable and valid processes for assessment, including the recognition of prior learning, which enables every student to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the credit or qualification being sought. However, the team make two recommendations concerning the rigour and reliability of aspects of the assessment process, these relate to the inconsistent use of text matching software and the procedure for consideration of students' grades and profiles against programme requirements. Thus, the review team concludes that the Expectation is not met. The associated level of risk is moderate because the arrangements indicate weaknesses in the operation of part of the College's governance structure or a lack of clarity about responsibilities.

**Expectation: Not met**  
**Level of risk: Moderate**

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.57 Standards Verifiers are appointed and trained by the awarding organisation to fulfil their role and responsibilities. They are involved in the approval of assessments and visit the College to review work and discuss provision with staff and students. The Director of Administration receives reports and forwards these to the Principal and relevant academic staff for consideration. Reports are considered at various committees and recommendations feed into the College's Quality Improvement Plan. Reports are shared with students through the College portal, The College's approach to the use of Subject Verifiers and their reports enables the Expectation to be met.

2.58 In testing this Expectation, the review team considered documentation including the Standards Verifier's reports for the Pearson BTEC Diploma in Education and Training, minutes of meetings and committees where external reports were discussed, the College's AMR and associated Quality Improvement Plan. The team also met senior staff, academic staff and students.

2.59 The evidence demonstrates the procedures to be effective in practice. Reports from Standards Verifiers are received centrally in the College and then dispatched to key individuals including programme leaders and senior management. The reports are considered widely in College committees including at standardisation meetings and at Academic Board. Actions arising from reports feature in the College's AMR and the associated Quality Improvement Plan. The College publishes the Standards Verifier's reports on the student portal and this was confirmed by students.

2.60 The Standards Verifier first visited the College shortly after the commencement of the Pearson BTEC Diploma in Education and Training. The ensuing report records discussions about the need for placements and notes the order of unit delivery as contrary to Pearson's guidance. The subsequent report identifies issues with internal assessment and verification processes, resulting in a decision to suspend certification. The review team explored these matters and heard that the order of unit delivery was intended to respond directly to the perceived needs of learners. Once the issue had been highlighted by the Standards Verifier the team had taken steps to address the matter. Subsequently an action plan had been developed and discussed within the College, and the Pearson Centre Development Plan had been amended. The College confirmed that all students have placements. The need to ensure that students have placements which can provide the basis for the demonstration of the professional competencies had led to a strengthening of the admission procedures and the monitoring of placements (see Expectation B10). Training is being provided for assessors and verifiers, through the awarding organisation, to support their detailed understanding of the relationship between placement assessment and meeting unit outcomes. The review team was provided with the Subject Verifier reports for previous programmes delivered by the College in conjunction with Pearson and ATHE. These included examples of the awarding organisation taking action when issues had been identified. In each case the College reacted and addressed the matters identified.

2.61 Where issues are identified by Subject Verifiers, the College responds in an appropriate and timely manner. The College makes scrupulous use of Subject Verifiers and their reports. Thus, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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



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

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

**Findings**

2.62 The College considers that programme monitoring and review procedures are integral to effective management of the provision. The policies and procedures for annual monitoring are set out in a Procedures Manual. These are designed to work in tandem with the requirements of the awarding bodies and have been matched against the requirements of the Quality Code.

2.63 The College's Academic Regulations identify two aspects of monitoring; programme review which is a regular process by which all programmes are reviewed and evaluated, and annual monitoring which is a reflective, holistic, cross-institution review process which considers historic and current data and also looks forward to the coming year. The aim of annual monitoring is to encourage reflection on the operation of units of learning with a view to maintaining standards and enhancing the quality of teaching and learning. It also seeks to identify good practice and encourage local reflection on the experience of strategic matters. Any identified issues are recorded in the Quality Improvement Plan. APRs are produced on each programme and from these an AMR is produced and considered by the Board of Governance. Continuous monitoring occurs at standardisation meetings which happen at least once per term. The College's approach to the annual monitoring of its provision enables the Expectation to be met.

2.64 In testing this Expectation, the review team considered the annual programme reviews, AMRs and associated action plans, notes of standardisation meetings, and minutes of Board of Governance and Academic Board meetings. The team met senior staff, academic staff, professional support staff, students and a representative of the Board of Governance.

2.65 Overall, the evidence shows the arrangements to be effective in practice. Each programme produces an APR at the end of the year which informs the College's AMR. The APR process uses a standard pro forma which requires programme leaders to comment on a range of issues including student numbers, teaching and learning, student support, assessment, attainment and resources. It also identifies features of good practice and areas for improvement. An action plan specifies areas for development with associated responsibilities and each is given an associated risk factor. The College's Procedures Manual makes no explicit reference to APRs, different terminology is used. Despite this the annual monitoring process and the relationship between APRs and the College AMR was clearly understood by staff.

2.66 The review team noted that the APR for the first year of operation of the Pearson BTEC Diploma in Education and Training programme does not respond explicitly to all aspects of Standards Verifier's reports or identify good practice for dissemination. The APR identified as good practice matters which are minimum expectations, including having qualified staff and sufficient resources in place. The APR makes no direct reference to the Standards Verifier's report but does identify some of the issues raised for action.

2.67 As well as the APRs, the College's AMR draws on a range of sources of evidence including student progress and completion data, minutes of meetings, Standards Verifier reports, and the outcomes of student feedback. Together with the associated Quality

Improvement Plan, the College AMR is considered by Academic Board and Board of Governance. At the time of this review the AMR for 2015-16 awaited formal approval by the Board of Governance. This timescale is similar to that of the previous AMR, with consideration at the Board in November and formal approval at the Board in spring. Thus, the College uses the draft AMR and its associated action plan as a sound basis for College-wide action.

2.68 Standardisation meetings are held termly to monitor programme operation. They consider matters including assessment briefs, schemes of work, module evaluations, Standards Verifiers' reports and student attainment. Senior management, programme leaders and tutors confirmed the importance of these meetings in the routine monitoring of standards and the quality of the learning experience. Standardisation meetings do not report into the College's formal committee structure although the minutes are occasionally noted by the Board of Governance. Nor do standardisation meetings routinely report to Academic Board which has a formal responsibility for many of the issues covered. The review team heard that standardisation meetings and Academic Board might occur consecutively. The review team **recommends** that the College ensure that the committee reporting structure reflects the importance of standardisation meetings in evaluating the learning experience and monitoring student attainment (see also Expectation B6).

2.69 The review team concludes that overall, the College operates effective, regular and systematic processes for monitoring and for review of programmes. The team made one recommendation to ensure that the committee reporting structure reflects the importance of standardisation meetings. Despite this recommendation, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.70 The College has separate complaints and appeals procedures. These are made available to students through the Student Handbook and the portal. Both procedures involve a three-stage process; informal, formal and final. Formal complaints are coordinated by the Student Welfare Officer and final complaints are considered by an adjudication committee with an independent representative. For appeals, students initially raise the matter with their tutor and, if they are not satisfied then they can refer the matter to the Internal Verifier who arranges for the work to be reassessed. The final stage in the appeal process is through the Director of Studies who convenes a panel involving the tutor, Internal Verifier and an independent Hearing Officer who may be a member of non-academic staff or a student representative. The College's approach to complaints and academic appeals would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.71 In testing the effectiveness of the College's arrangements, the review team examined documents including the Student Handbook, the portal, the complaints and grievances procedure and the appeals procedure. The review team met students, senior staff, academic staff, and the Student Welfare Officer.

2.72 Overall, the evidence demonstrates the arrangements to be partially effective in practice. Students know how to access the complaints and appeals procedures should they require them. Students consider the College to be responsive to any concerns they raised and hence issues are resolved through the informal processes including reference to the Student Committee. Thus the College has had no formal complaints or appeals to consider through its procedures.

2.73 The Procedure for Complaints and Grievance identifies that students can complain against unfair coursework marking and grading. The Procedure also notes that reference to the Procedure for Academic appeals is appropriate for complaints against unfair coursework marking and grading. The appeals procedure involves Stage 1 consideration by the Tutor and Stage 2 consideration by the Internal Verifier. If the decision remains in dispute, Stage 3 involves appealing to the Principal who sets up a meeting between the tutor, Internal Verifier and an independent Hearing Officer who may be a member of non-academic staff or a student representative. The independence of Stage 3 from previous consideration of the appeal is unclear as the tutor and Internal Verifier are involved at the previous stages. Furthermore, the inclusion of a non-academic staff member or student representative on the panel hearing of a Stage 3 appeal is inappropriate to the confirmation of an academic judgement. The review team heard that the independent Hearing Officer is intended to ensure that the student is represented at the meeting. However, the procedure does not make this clear, the ability of the student to be present at the hearing is not explicit, nor is the student's entitlement to representation. The review team therefore **recommends**, that by September 2017, the College revise the complaints procedure to make it distinct from that for appeals and amend the appeals procedure to clearly state the responsibility of the College for decision making and the entitlement of the student to be present and supported.

2.74 Due to the weaknesses outlined above, the review team concludes that the Expectation is not met. Because, while the College has procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints about the quality of learning opportunities that are timely

and accessible, these are not currently clear and fair. The associated level of risk is moderate because of the College's lack of clarity about responsibilities.

**Expectation: Not met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

**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**

2.75 The College delivers the BTEC Diploma in Education and Training on behalf of the awarding organisation, Pearson. Pearson has oversight of quality and standards. The College has responsibility for the management of its arrangements with employers and placement providers for learning opportunities delivered where this constitutes an integral part of a student's programme of study. Students are expected to obtain their own placements. The College has a guide to mentoring and observing student teachers. It uses the Education and Training Foundation updated guidance on the teaching qualifications for the further education and skills sector as a benchmark for teaching practice and the awarding organisation's pro forma for recording observations of teaching. Placements are confirmed by letters from employers and are recorded on a spreadsheet. This approach would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.76 The team explored the College's arrangements for placement learning by examining a range of the documentation including the programme handbook, guidance documents, and observations records. The team also met students, employers, senior staff, academic staff and professional support staff.

2.77 The evidence demonstrates the arrangements for managing placement learning with others works effectively. Documentation showed that the arrangements in place to support students and employers for teaching practice are detailed and secure, providing a system for managing the placement. The information about the teaching practice which is provided to employers and students is detailed and enables the placement to be managed effectively. Employers and students confirm that they are provided with the Guide to Mentoring and Observing DET (Diploma in Education) Student Teachers.

2.78 Students confirm they are made aware of the requirement to find a placement during the enrolment and induction stages. The review team found that several of the placements offered to part-time students were subsequently not confirmed resulting in a retention rate of 45 per cent for the initial cohort. In response, the College has introduced a Student Learning Agreement, which students are required to sign at the time of admission confirming their ability to complete the practical element of the programme. The College now promotes placement opportunities to students and has employed a local company to assist students in finding a placement. The company has given a work placement seminar to students and will provide coaching on CV writing and interview techniques. The Student Welfare Officer also offers help and guidance on finding a placement, checks that student placements are genuine and liaises with the employers.

2.79 The College relies on experienced teachers at the placement provider to undertake the observation and check that the qualifications of the observers comply with the requirements of the awarding organisation. Staff at the College monitor the quality of the observation by the employer by observing a sample of the teaching sessions for each student.

2.80 The College has appropriate systems in place to manage placement learning, monitor the effectiveness of the observation process and confirm students' awareness of

their role in finding a placement. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

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

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

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

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

2.83 Eight of the 10 applicable Expectations are met. The risk to quality of learning opportunities for each of the met expectations is low. Expectations B6 and B9 are not met and are both associated with a moderate level of risk. The level of risk for B6 is moderate because the College's procedure for consideration of students' grades and profiles against programme requirements, and the College's inconsistent use of text matching software indicate a weakness in the operation of part of the College's governance structure or a lack of clarity about responsibilities. The level of risk for Expectation B9 is moderate because procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints indicate a lack of clarity about responsibilities.

2.84 The review team makes four recommendations in this section which relate to the following: review the approach to academic integrity to ensure that academic practice is consistent and coherent (Expectation B6); strengthen the procedure for consideration of students' grades and profiles prior to recommending these for approval by the awarding organisation (Expectation B6); ensure that the committee reporting structure reflects the importance of standardisation meetings in evaluating the learning experience and monitoring student attainment (Expectation B8); revise the complaints procedure to make it distinct from that for appeals and amend the appeals procedure to clearly state the responsibility of the College for decision making and the entitlement of the student to be present and supported (Expectation B9).

2.85 The team highlighted a feature of good practice, which is the extensive support, linked to individual learning plans, which enables student development and achievement (Expectation B4). The team made no affirmations in this area.

2.86 Despite the recommendations and the moderate risk in two Expectations, nearly all the applicable Expectations have been met and previous responses to review activities indicate that areas of weakness will be addressed in an appropriate and timely manner. The review team therefore concludes that, overall, the quality of student learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.



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

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

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

##### **Findings**

3.1 The College has an Information and Marketing Policy and procedures for public information which include arrangements for writing, checking and final approval. This includes social media websites. Information for prospective students is available through the College website and in the prospectus. Information for current students is provided in the student handbook, the programme specification and unit specifications, which are available on the student portal. The awarding organisation provides transcripts for students on completion of their programme of study.

3.2 The public information procedures provide a staged process for writing, checking and final approval of information and identify who is responsible for each stage. The procedures include guidance on liaison with to the awarding organisation. The College uses its website, portal, prospectus, programme specification, unit specifications and a course rationale to provide information for its intended audiences about the programmes it offers. This would enable the Expectation to be met.

3.3 The team evaluated the effectiveness of the public information procedures by examining the various sources of published information including handbooks, the prospectus, student portal, and scrutinised the website. The team met senior and academic staff, professional support staff and students.

3.4 The evidence demonstrates the arrangements to be effective in practice. Overall responsibility for the accuracy and effectiveness of published information resides with the Principal, this authority is delegated by the Board of Governance. The information published through the website and in the prospectus provides the necessary detail for prospective students to select their programme of study and complete the application process. Details of the Pearson BTEC Diploma in Education and Training, fees and the learning environment are included in the prospectus.

3.5 The team found that the website and prospectus contain details of programmes which are no longer run by the College, although the College is validated to run them. The College acknowledged they regard this as a weakness of the College's systems and their reliance on external input to update the website. A new website is in development and the expected launch imminent. The team **affirms** the steps being taken to develop the College's website to ensure that the information provided is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

3.6 Students are provided with a student handbook during induction. This includes a student charter, policies for equal opportunities, health and safety and ethics, together with Academic Regulations relating to assessment, including submission of assessed work and penalties for plagiarism. The handbook also sets out the role of the disciplinary committee and describes the complaints and appeals procedures, which was a recommendation from the QAA report of 2014. Students are required to sign a Code of Conduct which clearly sets out the College's expectations of students.

3.7 The Policies Framework document contains the policies and procedures the College uses for the maintenance of academic standards and for maintaining and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities. Programme and unit learning outcomes, the associated volume of credit and the assessment for each unit are set out in the programme specification provided by the awarding organisation and made available to students on the student portal. The Course Rationale identifies the optional units which students will complete for the Pearson BTEC Diploma in Education and Training.

3.8 Students confirm they are provided with information about opportunities to develop transferable skills, and undertake work placements. Students were satisfied with the information they received prior to starting their programme and this information had supported their application. The materials provided once on course were detailed, relevant and accessible. Transcripts issued by Pearson provide a record of students' achievements on their academic programme.

3.9 The team concludes that, overall, the College has appropriate procedures for producing information about its higher education provision which is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The team made one affirmation about the steps being taken to develop the College's website to ensure that the information provided is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

3.11 The Expectation is met with a low level of risk. The review team makes one affirmation in this section which relates to the steps being taken to develop the College's website to ensure that the information provided is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The team made no recommendations in this section. No features of good practice are identified.

3.12 The team concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

## 4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

### Findings

4.1 The College states that it has a clear approach to the enhancement of the learning experience through planned activities such as staff development and the way staff and student feedback is used to identify areas for development. The College's AMR process identifies areas for improvement and these are highlighted in the College's Quality Improvement Plan.

4.2 The review team evaluated the effectiveness of the arrangements by exploring the documentary evidence including those related to the AMR process, and the Quality Improvement Plan. The review team also met students, senior and academic staff, professional support staff and students.

4.3 The College's approach to enhancement is influenced by its small size and the delivery of only one programme. The College's recent Tier 4 licence loss has also caused a refocusing of strategic priorities. The College's focus is on continuous improvement drawing on issues identified in delivery or through annual monitoring. However, through discussions with staff the review team was made aware of strategic-led developments including the introduction of the portal, the refinement of the staff appraisal system and the processes put in place to enable the sharing of good practice through peer observation. Planned developments to the College website include provision for online submission. In addition, an integrated and strategic approach to employability was evident through the way in which tutors had canvassed employer views at the outset of the Pearson BTEC Diploma in Education and Training, and supported student learning through employer talks, visits, placements and guidance. The introduction of the learner agreement to clarify roles and responsibilities related to placement at the outset of a student's study. This approach is not always clearly articulated in documentation. However, there is evidence of strategic actions to enhance the College's operation and the students' learning experience. This is supported by the use of the expertise of the Board of Governance.

4.4 Overall, the review team concludes that the College takes deliberate steps to enhance students' learning opportunities through its focus on continuous quality improvement. Thus, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

4.5 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

4.6 The Expectation in this area is met and the level of risk is low. The team makes no recommendations in this area and there are no affirmations. No good practice was identified.

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

## 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 21-24 of the [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\) handbook](#)

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

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

### Academic standards

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

### Award

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

### Awarding organisation

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

### Blended learning

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

### Credit(s)

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

### Degree-awarding body

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

### Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

### Dual award or double award

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

### e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning

### **Enhancement**

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

### **Expectations**

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

### **Flexible and distributed learning**

A programme or module that does not require the student to attend classes or events at particular times and locations.

See also **distance learning**.

### **Framework**

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

### **Framework for higher education qualifications**

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

### **Good practice**

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

### **Learning opportunities**

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

### **Learning outcomes**

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

### **Multiple awards**

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

### **Operational definition**

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

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

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

### **Programme specifications**

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

### **Quality Code**

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

### **Reference points**

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

### **Self-evaluation document**

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

### **Subject Benchmark Statement**

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

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

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

### **Threshold academic standard**

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

### **Virtual learning environment (VLE)**

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

### **Widening participation**

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

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