# Higher Education Review (Plus) of London Waterloo Academy Ltd

June 2015

# Contents

# About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Plus) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at London Waterloo Academy Ltd. The review took place from 24 to 26 June 2015 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Ms Ann Hill
- Dr Peter Rae.

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

In Higher Education Review (Plus), the QAA review team:

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

A check is also made on the provider's financial sustainability, management and governance (FSMG) with the aim of giving students reasonable confidence that they should not be at risk of being unable to complete their course as a result of financial failure.

In reviewing London Waterloo Academy Ltd the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland. The selected theme for this review is Student Employability.

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 5. The QAA website gives more information about QAA and its mission.[2] A dedicated section explains the method for Higher Education Review (Plus).[3] For an explanation of terms see the glossary at the end of this report.

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[1] The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code
[2] QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us.
[3] Higher Education Review (Plus): www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Educational-Oversight-.aspx

# Key findings

## QAA's judgements about London Waterloo Academy Ltd

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at London Waterloo Academy Ltd.

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **does not meet** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **does not meet** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **does not meet** UK expectations.

## Good practice

The QAA review team identified no features of **good practice** at London Waterloo Academy Ltd.

## Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to London Waterloo Academy Ltd.

By November 2015:

- ensure that information given to students about the credit requirements for their award is accurate (Expectations A2.1, C)
- make available clear and definitive information about programme content (Expectations A2.2, C)
- devise and operate a transparent process for the selection of units to be delivered to students (Expectations B1, C)
- ensure that students recruited to the programme clearly understand the progression opportunities (Expectations B2, C)
- provide a suitable range of learning resources, including staffing, to enable students to study critically and in depth (Expectation B3)
- ensure that level 4 students embarking on study at level 5 are appropriately prepared (Expectation B4)
- update and maintain the equality and diversity policies and monitor their impact (Expectation B4)
- ensure that assessment criteria are clearly understood by all staff teaching on the programme (Expectation B6)
- develop and implement effective, regular and systematic processes for monitoring and review of its programmes (Expectation B8)
- formalise arrangements for supporting students in the workplace (Expectations B10, C)
- establish a secure record of all approved committee minutes and definitive versions of policies and procedures (Expectation C)
- establish an approach to the production and dissemination of policies, procedures and learning materials which safeguards the accuracy, trustworthiness and fitness for purpose of the information being presented. (Expectation C)

- further develop the deliberative structures to enable discussion and oversight of its provision in order to identify areas for the enhancement of student learning (Enhancement).

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

- The efforts the Academy is making to embed student engagement in institutional committees (Expectation B5).

## Theme: Student Employability

London Waterloo Academy Ltd (the Academy) focuses on providing vocationally focused programmes through education and training which is industry focused. Its higher education provision consists of Higher Nationals which are, by their nature, vocational and include work-related modules. The development of general and specific employability skills are embedded in the curriculum.

The Academy includes in its strategic aims the need for industry collaboration and partnership but the engagement of employers in design, delivery and assessment of the higher education programme is currently limited. Improving careers guidance for students to enhance their employability is an aim of the Academy and some employability initiatives have recently been introduced.

## About London Waterloo Academy Ltd

London Waterloo Academy Ltd (the Academy) is a privately funded further and higher education provider located in London on Waterloo Road. Opened in 2009, it offers a small range of professional and educational courses, including Dental Nursing, Health and Safety Compliance, English Language and Foreign Languages. The higher education provision is confined to the Pearson accredited HNC and HND Health and Social Care programme. This is delivered as a rolling programme with entry points throughout the year and currently has nine students studying at different stages.

The Academy does not have Tier 4 status, nor is it designated for student loan funding. It has not previously been reviewed by QAA.

The Academy's mission is to help learners achieve their career goals, cultivate lifelong learning, and promote respect for diversity in a global community. Specifically, it aims to:

- enable students to develop knowledge and skills necessary to achieve their professional goals
- ensure that students have access to knowledgeable and informed advisers who demonstrate care and respect
- provide accurate information about educational opportunities, requirements, policies and procedures
- collaborate with learners on the development and implementation of academic plans and educational experiences in line with the learners' interests and abilities.

The key challenge facing the Academy is to attract high quality students and increase numbers in Pearson HND Levels 4 and 5, since prospective students are not currently eligible for student loans and it cannot admit international students. It aims to secure and maintain both designation and Tier 4 approval. Although it is pursuing links with universities,

it currently has no formal articulation arrangements for the progression of students to study at level 6. Its long-term aim is itself to run level 6 top-up programmes with UK universities using the HND route. The Academy recognises that its ambitions will impact on resource demand, including the need for more teaching and administrative staff and learning resources to maintain the quality of delivery and support to students. It aims to achieve student satisfaction rates of at least 85 per cent.

Since the Academy does not have its own degree awarding powers, it offers its higher education programme, in partnership with Pearson, drawing on Pearson programme and Centre Guidance documentation. The BTEC Higher National Certificate Diploma is set at levels 4 and 5 in the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) and *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ). The Academy is reviewed regularly by Pearson, the last accreditation review taking place in February 2014.

# Explanation of the findings about London Waterloo Academy Ltd

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

# Explanation of the findings about London Waterloo Academy Ltd

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.1 London Waterloo Academy Ltd (the Academy) does not have degree awarding powers and is therefore responsible for contributing to the maintenance of academic standards set by its awarding organisation, Pearson. The Academy's sole higher education provision, the Higher National Diploma in Health and Social Care is mapped against external benchmarks, including *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ), through Pearson. The constituent modules are at levels 4 and 5.

1.2 The Higher National provision is designed by Pearson to meet national standards. The Academy's programme specifications, therefore, including their alignment in level to the FHEQ, and in content and outcomes to the relevant Subject Benchmarks Statements, are based on Pearson documentation. The Academy identifies the specific options available to students, drawn from the full Pearson range, but tailored to the Academy's staff expertise. The Academy states that this contextualisation of specifications is undertaken by the programme team and approved by the Academic Board, though the minutes of meetings provided did not support this assertion. Based on the arrangements with the awarding organisation, the arrangements allow the Expectation to be met in principle.

1.3      The review team explored how the Academy discharges its responsibility towards the awarding organisation in practice. It checked the effectiveness of the Academy's inclusion of references to national expectations through consideration of awarding organisation reports, programme specifications and definitive documents. External verifier reports were scrutinised to check that appropriate academic standards are maintained. Minutes of Academic Board were examined to confirm internal processes for approval of specifications, but were not available prior to October 2014 and those that were provided were sparse. Meetings with staff examined staff understanding of the use of the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements in programme delivery, and indicated only a limited awareness of these.

1.4      The Academy largely relies on the procedures of its awarding organisation to provide assurance that academic standards are maintained. Programme specifications state the FHEQ level of the programme and the relevant qualification and are aligned with Subject Benchmark Statements. For these Pearson awards, national standards are embedded in the programme documentation provided by the awarding organisation, and the Academy uses standardised materials such as pro formas for assignment briefs to ensure that assignments have a consistent approach across the curriculum.

1.5      The review team found it difficult to examine the pattern of internal quality assurance processes for previous years to ensure that procedures are followed, since internal documentation of committee proceedings is scant. However, external verifier reports affirm that academic standards are being maintained at appropriate qualification levels. Academy action plans arising from external verifier reports responded effectively to issues raised.

1.6      The review team concludes that the Academy meets the Expectation in *Chapter A1* in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.7      Though Pearson determines credit framework and assessment criteria, the Academy carries the responsibility for establishing its own academic regulations, academic frameworks, and quality assurance structures, and also has responsibility for undertaking assessment activities that contribute to the award of academic credit and qualifications.

1.8      The Academy has developed academic governance arrangements and policies to enable it to meet the requirements of Pearson and the expectations of the Quality Code. It has introduced policies and procedures to cover the setting, marking and internal moderation of assessments. The Academy's arrangements are subject to regular scrutiny by Pearson through the work of external examiners. In principle these arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.9      An assessment board has recently been established. Prior to that, the role was undertaken by the Academic Board, though records are not available to show this process prior to the current academic year, so evidence of procedures for determining and recording progression and completion for this period was not available to the team.

1.10      The review team considered the partnership agreement and the Academy committee terms of reference and minutes to check the operation of academic governance arrangements. Programme specifications and assessment regulations were reviewed to consider the appropriate use of assessment frameworks. External examiners' reports and the Academy's implementation of actions arising out of these reports were scrutinised. The team met staff to confirm their understanding of the academic framework and assessment regulations, and determined that teaching staff understand and implement assessment and verification procedures.

1.11      The Academy is attempting to develop appropriate academic governance arrangements through its committee structures. An absence of historical records for the Academic Board (and all other committees) meant that the team was not fully able to confirm whether the Academy had implemented its own regulations, though the report of the external verifier did not identify any issues. Academic issues are addressed and decisions made outside the formal deliberative structures of the organisation and staff agreed that such topics might be better considered within the committee framework. Senior staff confirmed that processes are becoming more structured, with monitoring activities and action plans beginning to flow through committee structures, rather than through managerial structures. However, the latest revision of committee structures was only approved in June 2015 and with such developments in their infancy, evidence of effectiveness or impact is not yet available. Similarly, a comprehensive set of academic policies is now being assembled but these are not yet in place and it is too soon to fully assess their impact.

1.12      The Academy's programme specifications, which form part of the course handbook, include reference to national credit frameworks, qualification characteristics and the volume of assessment. They do not identify the credit weighting of units, and the information in the handbook about frameworks of credit relating to HNC courses is inaccurate, giving the wrong number of units needed for HNC completion. This appears to be an inconsistency

between the information in the Academy handbook and the Pearson website, which could lead to a student taking too many units to complete the HNC. The team therefore **recommends** that the Academy ensures that information given to students about the credit requirements for their award is accurate.

1.13     External examiners' reports confirm that the Academy meets the requirements of Pearson for the conduct of assessment, and has taken action in response to the recommendations of external examiners. The review team determined that the academic framework that the Academy is establishing for Pearson programmes is beginning to formalise internal policies and approaches.

1.14     The review team concludes that the Academy's governance and management procedures, although currently developmental in transparency and comprehensiveness, are sufficient to secure academic standards. The Academy's role in implementing the academic frameworks and regulations of its awarding organisation enables the Expectation in *Chapter A2.1* to be met in design and in operation, but inaccuracies in the programme specifications concerning the credit rating of awards mean that there is a moderate level of risk.

**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**

1.15     Pearson retains overall responsibility for maintaining a definitive record of Higher National awards. The Academy maintains and makes available information which describes the aims and intended learning outcomes for each programme that it delivers, in programme specifications and course handbooks, and offers a link to the Pearson website, which notes relevant FHEQ qualification and Subject Benchmark Statements. In principle these arrangements allow the Expectation to be met.

1.16     However, this information at academy level is incomplete and at times inaccurate, particularly as it relates to the credit rating of awards and units and progression information between HNC and HND and potential level 6 degree top-ups. It is unclear which units are included in the HNC and HND as delivered by the Academy, as internal documentation is inconsistent and differs from information on the website.

1.17     The review team considered the self-evaluation document submitted by the Academy for this review and associated evidence, including programme specifications, course handbooks, minutes of meetings, and quality policy. The team also met the Principal, senior staff, teaching, and support staff.

1.18     Pearson prepares an Academic Management Review Report, which is then sent to the Academy. The terms of reference for the Academic Board note that it is responsible for considering quality assurance matters relating to its awarding organisation, though minutes of meetings did not indicate specific consideration of the academic management review. The management reviews have been considered internally, as actions have been implemented, but it is not possible to identify the process by which this has occurred.

1.19     The Academy has identified the delineations of responsibility in awarding body or organisation relationships. However, evidence presented by the Academy in the form of definitive programme documents indicates that the Academy is not yet fully meeting its own duties in the preparation of clear and accurate programme specifications, and so the team **recommends** that the Academy make available clear and definitive information about programme content.

1.20     Overall, the review team concludes that the Academy meets the Expectation in *Chapter A2.2* in both design and operation through the preparation and maintenance of programme specifications, but that inconsistent implementation of the Academy's own quality procedures, and certain inaccuracies in programme specifications, mean that the associated level of risk is moderate.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.21    The structure for the HNC/D is secured through the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF). Since the Academy does not have degree awarding powers, it works with Pearson regarding its delivery of HND provision, using Pearson documentation regarding quality assurance processes relating to academic standards. The processes and procedures of the Academy allow Expectation A3.1 to be met in principle due to reliance on the awarding body.

1.22    Students confirmed that they receive a copy of the course handbook. Programme specifications are supplied in the new programme handbook. The course handbook contains a link to the definitive Pearson qualification database. This contains details of grade descriptors and programme specifications which specify the complete range of level 4 and 5 HNC/D Health and Social Care units available for study but it is not clear from this document or indeed the Academy website, which units are on offer at the Academy (see also Expectation B1). Grade descriptors are not specifically contextualised to the Academy, and the course handbook includes a reference to the university admissions team, which is not applicable to the Academy.

1.23    In order to test the Expectation, the team examined the range of documentation which was available, but noted the relative brevity of available documentation, and also the reference to a different example of course handbook (as above).The team found no evidence of specific Academy engagement with the Quality Code related to this Expectation. Through scrutiny of a new document produced at the visit, the team could evidence that the Academy has started to map its quality assurance processes to the Quality Code but this is in the very early stages and it is not yet possible to measure any impact.

1.24    The Academy states that its long-term ambition is to develop level 6 top-up programmes with UK universities, using the HND pathway. The Academy provided evidence to confirm that it has secured an agreement with a London university to refer students on an agency basis for a BSc top-up programme, but the team noted that this agreement was limited to international (non-European) students.

1.25    Due to the reliance on Pearson processes to secure academic standards, an outcomes-based approach to academic standards, and the staff's explicit understanding of their responsibilities regarding standards, the review team came to the view that the above processes were such that adherence to UK threshold standards could be assured.
The review team finds that the Academy's higher education provision is developed and approved in accordance with the academic frameworks and regulations of its awarding body, and concludes that Expectation A3.1 is met and that 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

1.26    The awarding body, Pearson, ensures that, through its own programme approval processes, the Academy's HND programme meets threshold standards and sits at the appropriate point of the QCF. Credit is awarded only when the achievement of learning outcomes has been demonstrated by assessment. The external examiner ensures that marks are properly and accurately recorded. This approach allows the Expectation to be met in principle.

1.27    To test this Expectation, the review team examined a range of documentation provided by the Academy, including external examiner reports and academic management reviews, and the team discussed arrangements with staff and students. Staff demonstrated that they were clear about assessment methods and the awarding body's criteria and terminology relating to assessment. However, there was lack of clarity pertaining to teaching at level 4 and level 5. This is discussed in more detail at Expectation B6. Students were aware of the requirements to achieve credit and they expressed confidence regarding assessment criteria and unit levels.

1.28    Matters relating to assessment are dealt with by the Academy's Academic Board. However, the team could find little evidence of discussion relating to the assessment polices and practice, though the consideration of accreditation of prior experiential learning was an action point at one meeting.

1.29    The review team could not find any discussion regarding the supportive processes and structures in place for students with protected characteristics. It was unable to track the development and consideration of the recently produced Extenuating Circumstances Policy and Procedure document through the committee framework. A new policy relating to assessment and internal verification has recently been produced. The team examined this document and was concerned that, although it partially related to Pearson processes, it also referred to committees and roles which are not in existence at the Academy. Senior staff claimed that the processes did relate to the Academy but the team could not verify these discrepancies.

1.30    Appropriate levels of study are ensured through the explicit alignment with the awarding body, its design and approval processes, and Pearson's requirements for the academic review of the provision. However, there has been no dedicated assessment board which could report explicitly on students' results before qualifications are claimed from the awarding body, although one had recently been set up in principle at the time of the review visit. The Academy recognises that none of the assessment policies in existence at the Academy are specifically mapped to the Quality Code, but senior managers stated that a mapping exercise has begun, a development welcomed by the review team.

1.31    The review team came to the view that, overall, the arrangements for the award of credit and awards are effective and underpinned by an appropriate range of assessment methods which give students opportunity to demonstrate that learning outcomes have been achieved. Students were able to confirm that they had a clear understanding of relating theory and practice within their programme of study and they were satisfied with the range of assessment methods adopted by the teaching staff.

1.32    Despite some shortcomings in documenting its procedures, the Academy has systems to ensure that its processes are aligned with the academic regulations of Pearson in respect of this Expectation and the review team found that these are working effectively. The team concludes that Expectation A3.2 is met and that 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**

1.33     Responsibility for annual monitoring and periodic review is shared by the Academy and the awarding organisation, with Pearson providing the Academic Management Review Report to the Academy. The Academic Board of the Academy has in its remit the strategic oversight of all outcomes and is responsible for matters relating to learning and teaching, course assessment and examinations. These procedures allow the Expectation to be met in principle.

1.34     The review team scrutinised the Academy's monitoring and review procedures and confirmed that they reflect its contractual responsibilities with Pearson. However, the team was unable to establish definitively where the Academy-level responsibility lies for assuring the appropriateness of academic standards, due to the lack of specific operational and functional reporting mechanisms within the Academy's quality assurance cycle and the conflicting information found in new policy documents, such as the Periodic Programme Review policy. This document refers to roles (Faculty Head, Secretary) and structures, for example, relating to degree classification, which do not exist at the Academy.

1.35     Pearson undertakes external verification visits which comprises sampling of students' work. In the most recent report there were four main recommendations which the Academy confirmed that it had subsequently addressed. The process was managed by the Chief Internal Verifier. However, the team noted that, although the Academy confirmed that all assignment briefs were up to date, as requested by Pearson, the brief for the Research Project Unit Level 5 was out of date and not fit for purpose. The Academy recognises this and confirmed that the issue will be addressed.

1.36     The Academy has developed an action plan subsequent to the Academic Management Review Report produced by Pearson. The plan is a useful starting point in monitoring and reviewing the provision and includes action to be taken following, for example, the external academic reviewer's concerns regarding the central storage of assessment records. The team could evidence that some recommendations from Pearson have been completed and signed off, such as ensuring that all students are registered within 30 days with Pearson. All recommendations are due to be completed by 29 July 2015.

1.37     The review team concludes that Expectation A.3.3 is met and, since the process now in place for annual monitoring and review is operationally effective and will be reviewed by both the Academy and Pearson, 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**

1.38     The Academy's approach to meeting this Expectation is to ensure that it complies with Pearson's processes and procedures for the appointment of external verifiers/examiners. This process allows the Expectation to be met in principle.

1.39     Pearson's external examiners and academic management reviewers are expected to comment on whether students are achieving intended module and learning outcomes. The review team found that the most recent reports confirmed that this was the case and that the academic standards achieved by the students are appropriate for the award and level of study.

1.40     The team scrutinised evidence and met staff regarding the processes, and was satisfied that the Academy is aware of its obligations regarding external and independent expertise, though there was no explicit consideration of the use of the Quality Code as a reference point and no involvement from professional, statutory or regulatory bodies or employers.

1.41     The Academy collaborates effectively with its awarding body to ensure independent and external participation in the management of threshold academic standards.

1.42     The review team therefore concludes that Expectation A3.4 is met. Since the systems in place enable issues to be identified and resolved, the associated level of risk is judged to be low.

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

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

1.43    In reaching its positive judgement on threshold standards the review team aligned its findings with Annex 2 of the published Handbook and with Part A of the Quality Code. It considered how, as a provider without degree awarding powers, the Academy discharged its responsibility for the maintenance of academic standards towards its awarding organisation.

1.44    The review team found that the Academy understood its obligations to Pearson. Its procedures are largely aligned with the frameworks and regulations of its partner, with respect to design and approval of programmes, definitive course records, assessment, external examining and annual monitoring. However, the team also found that the Academy's processes lack transparency and full documentation in some areas and determined that the underdeveloped and derivative procedures, together with confusing documentation, represented moderate risk, resulting in two recommendations.

1.45    The Academy's procedures are only recently and partially mapped against the Quality Code and it relies almost entirely on Pearson documentation and procedures to safeguard academic standards. Nevertheless, the review team found evidence that it fulfils its requirements in relation to Pearson in maintaining academic standards and the degree of risk was low in the majority of areas.

1.46    The review team therefore concludes that the maintenance of academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations at the Academy **meets** UK expectations.

# 2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

**Findings**

2.1     The Academy regards design, development and approval as Pearson's responsibility. Students are provided with a course handbook which has a hyperlink to the Pearson website. This provides the course content and the full range of mandatory and specialist units which are available for study at level 4 and level 5. This process allows the Expectation to be met in principle.

2.2     In order to test the Expectation in relation to the Academy's practice, the review team met staff and students and considered a range of documentation, including the student handbook and different versions of course handbooks, along with the Academy's website. The Academy selects the units it will offer but the review team found that the process of determining the choice is neither clear nor contextualised. Its own website states that the units may be studied in any order, despite some being at level 4 and some at level 5 and this led to a recommendation being made in Expectation B4.

2.3     The review team found ambiguities and potentially misleading information regarding the range of units offered. The website lists three units which are not offered in the latest edition of the course handbook. The website states that students can study the units in any order but staff confirmed that students joining the programme might need to study some units before others. Since the Academy offers the higher education award on a roll-on roll-off basis, it is important that quality assurance processes are sufficiently robust to ensure that students are not disadvantaged by the order in which they undertake modules and the criteria determining which modules will be offered.

2.4     The Academy does not have its own planning cycle for programme design, development and approval, and teaching staff could not confirm the specialist modules which would be made available for the forthcoming year. The Academy was unable to evidence any planning relating to programme design and approval through agendas or minutes of meetings within the committee framework. Staff were also unclear regarding the awarding of credit and the specific credit weighting of different modules which had the same indicative hours. Students confirmed that the structure of the programme is explained to them at induction. However, the review team found that written information is confusing and potentially misleading and there are no criteria articulated for the choice of modules making up the programme students undertake. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that the Academy should devise and operate a transparent process for the selection of units to be delivered to students.

2.5     Teaching staff and students confirm that they provide evaluation of units, but it is not clear how the Academy uses this information in its planning and review processes to inform programme design and delivery, for example, to support the theme of student employability or to identify up-to-date and appropriate higher education learning resources. The review team was not presented with any evidence that programme planning processes include engagement with local employers, professional bodies, or any other interests to

ensure that the provision is aligned with employer needs. The team heard from four employers, none of whom had been invited by the Academy to contribute to curriculum design or the development of employability skills, although they were involved in workplace supervision. All students undertake a mandatory unit (Personal and Professional Development) which stipulates that students must undertake 200 hours in the workplace, but it is not clear how the Academy manages the relationship between employers and the process for employers signing off the activities and skills each student must demonstrate (see also the Commentary on the Theme later in this report).

2.6      Students stated in their submission to the review team that they would like more information regarding progression opportunities, and the students confirmed that this is covered at induction. However, progression routes are not specifically articulated, although the Academy states that it is exploring opportunities for partnership agreements with universities.

2.7      The review team heard that the Academy does not make use of a variety of external reference points, apart from Pearson, and staff are not specifically encouraged through staff development activities to develop a wider understanding of externality with regard to curriculum design and development. The team also noted that there is no consideration of equality and diversity matters in curriculum design.

2.8      Overall, the review team formed the view that the Academy's processes for the design, development and approval of programmes are unclear and unsystematic without any evidence of a robust planning cycle or the formal consideration of data. The team concludes that, due to the weaknesses identified in the operation of the design and approval processes, Expectation B1 is not met and the risk is moderate.

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

**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**

2.9     The Academy has responsibility for designing its recruitment and admissions policy and procedure and for the operation of recruitment and admissions. Pearson specifies entry criteria for HNC/D programmes. The Academy has recently introduced a new policy for the admission of higher education students which is committed to the principles of fair admission. The policy is now openly available on the Academy website, and sets out an appropriate set of expectations for students going through its admissions process. The policy is to be reviewed annually by the Admissions and Induction Committee. Information about enrolment, progression and achievement is returned to Pearson annually.

2.10     Promotion of and recruitment to higher education courses is focused around online information. Course information and entry criteria are set out both on the Academy website and in a prospectus which covers all courses (higher education and others). Students apply directly to the Academy via an online form. All applicants are invited to an interview with teaching or support staff who are responsible for admissions decisions. A recently formed Admissions and Induction Committee has the task of reviewing and checking applications and the submitted documentation from students, though the minutes of this body do not provide evidence that such decision-making processes have been implemented. The revised admissions policy includes information on admissions appeals, and this is available on the Academy's website. The review team considers that this approach allows the Expectation to be met in principle.

2.11     The review team considered the operation of this policy and process through reviewing documentation, including the admissions policy; accreditation of prior experiential learning policy; the Prospectus; the Academy website; and by meeting students, senior and academic staff and support staff.

2.12     Academy staff and students confirmed that all applicants are invited to interview. Interviews assist staff in making application assessments and provide guidance for students to make informed decisions. Unsuccessful applicants are given the opportunity to join an appropriate course that could lead to a higher education programme in the future. The review team saw an admissions log, which tracks an applicant's process through the admissions process. Data comparing applications with admissions was not available. Some students are admitted to the Academy with advanced standing by recognition of credit-bearing prior learning, and appropriate documentation is available about awarding body stipulations.

2.13     The review team found that information for prospective students was not always accurate and that this impairs the basis for prospective students to make informed decisions. These issues are explored more explicitly in section C. Since information about progression to level 6 awards could be misconstrued, the review team **recommends**, in relation to this Expectation, that the Academy ensure that students recruited to the programme clearly understand the progression opportunities.

2.14 Notwithstanding this recommendation, overall, the admissions policy and processes in place are appropriate and the review team concludes that the Expectation in *Chapter B2* is met in both design and operation. The potential, however, that a student might be recruited assuming their award would automatically lead on to a specific degree programme, represents a moderate level of risk.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.15      The review team found the current arrangements to maintain the quality of provision to include a lesson observation scheme, an appraisal policy scheme, a peer review process, and a staff development policy. While these arrangements might have some potential to allow the Expectation to be met, the processes are under-developed and uncoordinated. The Academy has recently introduced a Teaching and Learning Strategy (June 2015), which is derived from the Strategic Plan. This has been approved by the Academic Board but has yet to be implemented. Since this process is the only systematic articulation of an approach to the review and enhancement of learning opportunities and had not been implemented at the time of the review visit, the review team's view was that the Expectation could not be met in principle.

2.16      Overall, the Academy is only now starting to develop appropriate systems and processes to support the development of staff and students at a level appropriate for higher education. The review team examined the effectiveness of the Academy's approach in practice through meetings with senior, academic and support staff, students and employers, in addition to a demonstration of the electronic resources, which are quite limited (there is currently no virtual learning environment, though the Academy hopes to introduce one before the start of the new academic year).

2.17      The Academy notes that members of the academic staff teach in their respective specialist subjects and have the required skills and teaching experience. However, most members of the teaching team hold qualifications in dental nursing rather than in Health and Social Care, as they also teach in the Academy's Dental Nursing programme, resulting in a shortage of specialist provision for HNC and HND units in Health and Social Care. The Academy is heavily dependent on part-time teaching staff, with a single full-time member of staff, and this creates a level of vulnerability. It also erodes the higher education ethos for the handful of Higher National students, since most of their lecturers are neither dedicated higher education staff nor subject specialists. The review team was unable to meet most of the teaching team, due to conflicts with their other work commitments outside the Academy.

2.18      The staff appraisal scheme, introduced in June 2015, is still embryonic. Not all the staff members with whom the team spoke had undergone an appraisal. A new Peer Review Process has been approved, to be introduced in September 2015. Evidence was presented that one teaching observation had taken place in the previous year.

2.19      Continuing professional development has been the responsibility of the individual staff members. Staff development is currently unfunded, and that too is an individual responsibility. There was little evidence of Academy-led continuous professional development events, other than events in preparation for the QAA review. A new Staff Development Policy (June, 2015) offered a suggestion that the Academy had recognised the need to address this area. However, this policy has been copied almost in its entirety from another institution, raising doubt as to whether the strategies outlined are in any sense

owned by the Academy, particularly where they reference systems that do not and could not exist (such as 'an in-house PTTLS teaching programme').

2.20    The Academy currently has no virtual learning environment, though some resources, such as links to relevant professional organisations and reports, are available to students on the Academy's main website. The Academy has no library: it has a cupboard with a collection of texts to support student learning (between 20 and 30 books, according to the website and to staff feedback), though the Prospectus refers to a 'multi facility library including a wide range of relevant material'. The Academy subscribes to Issues Online, a proprietary learning resource: this does not allow broader access to journals or texts, only to materials produced by the company itself. Students noted that they bought books for themselves where these are required, or used external libraries, and that they would benefit from more reading space. The team was informed that the Academy is exploring agreements with other libraries, but at the time of the review there was no evidence of such arrangements being in place, even though the Student Handbook comments that 'students will have an unlimited online access to libraries' once accreditation plans are realised. The Academy did not supply evidence of the monitoring or evaluating of its learning resources. The Academy does not show that it has the learning resources required to support the requirements of students in a higher education environment and that enable students to study critically and in depth. The review team therefore **recommends** that the Academy provides a suitable range of learning resources, including staffing, to enable students to study critically and in depth.

2.21    Review of the provision of learning and teaching is currently linked only to the consideration of the Academic Management Review Report, compiled by Pearson. A new process for internal annual review is being introduced, but there is currently no independent process for systematic review of the programme, and no systematic collection and analysis of information about learning opportunities or teaching practices. There is a module evaluation form, completed by students at the end of each course unit. However, no data or documentation was available on how or whether this information is collated or assessed although a member of the teaching staff noted that tutors meet and discuss this feedback.

2.22    The Academy provides a high level of pastoral care as classroom numbers are small, and students are able to have regular one-to-one tutorials with a course tutor. The student submission indicated that the majority of students are very satisfied with Academy pastoral care, citing the high level of individual support from tutors, and their responsiveness to students' issues and requests.

2.23    The review team found that, overall, there is no articulation or systematic review process that would enhance the provision of learning opportunities for students. Nor, in practice, notwithstanding the effectiveness of the pastoral care for students, are there learning resources which would enable students to develop as independent learners and study in depth. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation in *Chapter B3* is not met in design or operation. In view of these shortcomings in procedure and practice, it finds the associated level of risk is serious.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.24    The Academy's Strategic Plan identifies a vocational priority for its higher education provision, and articulates an intention to work alongside industrial partners to realise this goal. However, the review team noted that large sections of the plan had been copied in their entirety from that of another institution, throwing serious doubt on the relevance of the strategy as a point of reference for the Academy. The team examined the Academy's internal procedures for review, and noted that the absence of a formal internal review structure has meant that there is not a systematic process for monitoring and evaluating resources and student support. The team scrutinised minutes of meetings and policy documents, and requested further documentation but did not find evidence of any such deliberations. In these circumstances the review team did not find evidence that processes allowed the Expectation to be met in principle.

2.25    The review team tested the Expectation further by examining the disparate range of resources made available to students to support their learning. The Student Handbook and course handbook are essential documents: the team was provided with different versions of the course handbook, and found that information in it about programme delivery cycles, unit choice, and exit and progression options, was incomplete or inaccurate.

2.26    The Academy admits students to the programme at multiple points in the year, using a 'roll-on' process that allows new students to join the unit next delivered, whether that unit is at level 4 or level 5: the website notes that units 'could be taken in any order'. The course handbook does not provide information about how new students might be prepared and supported for entering directly into level 5 units; or how students who might seek to exit with the HNC ensure they are completing the appropriate core units. Meetings with staff indicated only that students would not start with the Research Module, but were not explicit about structures specifically designed to support students in out-of-level units. Students commented that level 5 units were harder, and that a student entering at level 5 is given help to catch up. Although there was some limited awareness among staff and students of the potential difficulties of studying modules outside any framework of level sequencing, the team **recommends** that the Academy ensures that level 4 students embarking on study at level 5 are appropriately prepared.

2.27    A new Staff and Student Welfare Committee is charged with ensuring the Academy has 'an integrated and comprehensive network of services and support that effectively meets student needs', but its recent formation means that there has been no opportunity for the Academy to measure or demonstrate impact or effectiveness.

2.28    Students on Higher National programmes have personal tutors, and note that they make regular use of this provision. Students reported that the assessment of course work is timely and helpful, and that there was opportunity for formative feedback. They were particularly appreciative of the willingness of tutors to offer guidance on drafts of course work. Students highly valued the accessibility of, and support from, their tutors.

2.29    The Academy website indicates that learning support is available to assist students who might otherwise be unable to access a programme of study. However, discussions with staff about how the Academy supported students with disabilities did not suggest that the Academy had fully implemented its policy on students with special learning needs, as staff

responses were divergent from the policy and each other. The website also mentions resources that would not be available to Academy students, such as the Disabled Student Allowance (since the programme is not at this time designated for student support) and the Additional Support Fund - the latter only available in Northern Ireland. Again, this document seems to be heavily dependent on text copied from another institution's (the Southern Regional Academy) website, and has not been properly adapted to ensure it is fit for purpose. Student responses suggest that the Academy is broadly supportive of students, and does enquire at interview about learning needs, but did not refer to the policy or its provisions.

2.30     The Academy identified almost 40 per cent of its current students as mature or non-traditional. However, the Academy does not collect data linking student performance and progression for mature or non-traditional students, who are potentially at greater risk of dropping out, and so was unable to determine the effectiveness of its support strategies for such students.

2.31     The review team explored the Academy's equality and diversity policy by scrutinising documentation and speaking with academic and support staff and with students. The recently adopted Equal Opportunities Policy addresses employment issues, and the Student Enhancement Policy includes a statement on equality and inclusion. The former is outdated, referencing only older, and not current, legislation. The latter commits the Academy to 'Ensure the curriculum content models inclusive practice reflects the experience and needs of a diverse learning community and incorporates a flexible approach to curriculum design.' However, the Academy has no means by which it collects data about or monitors the impact of this policy in supporting students. The team **recommends** that the Academy updates and maintains the equality and diversity policies and monitors their impact.

2.32     The review team found considerable gaps in the Academy's policies and systems for monitoring and evaluating arrangements and resources to enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential, and makes two recommendations in this area. Therefore, the team concludes that the Expectation in *Chapter B4* is not met. Despite the late introduction of new policy documents, and student satisfaction with their pastoral and academic support, the review team finds that these significant weaknesses throughout this area represent a serious risk.

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

**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**

2.33     The Academy's approach to involving students in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience is to focus on the engagement of student representatives on Academy committees, on the use of questionnaires to provide feedback, and on the use of the tutorial system to establish lines of communication. These arrangements allow the Expectation to be met in principle.

2.34     The review team tested the effectiveness of student engagement by meeting senior staff, academic staff, support staff, and students (including a student representative). The team examined documentation including the student enhancement policy, the Student Handbook and course handbook, minutes of meetings where students were present, annual management review reports, data from the Academy survey, and the student submission for this review.

2.35     The Academy website conveys information about Student Council activities and identifies the student representatives. Neither the Student Handbook nor the course handbook provide information about the student representation system, or detail opportunities for students to get involved as a course representative or as a member of the Student Council. There is a Student Union notice board, which carries information about student activities and has a copy of the Student Charter. However, there is no published information about the process by which students are elected or appointed to posts.

2.36     The Academy's Academic Governance and Committee Structure identifies student representation in the terms of reference of the Academic Board, the Facilities, Health and Safety Committee; and the Staff and Student Welfare Committee. These new structures began to meet in the weeks preceding the review: some committees have not yet met.

2.37     At programme level, students have been encouraged to take part in an online student survey. At module level, the Academy has a standard module evaluation form, to be completed following each course unit.

2.38     The Lead Student Representative, who compiled the student submission, is now a member of the Academy staff, though was a student when the process of QAA review was first initiated. The Academy has since appointed a current HND student to serve on committees, though the member of staff remains as the Student Union chair.

2.39     The review team identified that the revised governance and committee policies were being implemented, and that a student representative had participated in meetings of relevant committees. Meetings with students confirmed that they were aware of their student representatives, and engaged with them. Although published information about student participation is not readily accessible to students, and the process for appointing or electing student representatives is not published or articulated, the review team **affirms** the efforts that the Academy is making to embed student engagement in institutional committees.

2.40     The review team heard that the student representative had been given training in academic governance, though no documents were available to provide further information on this training. The student representative whom the team met showed an awareness of the committee structures on which she served.

2.41     At course level, student representatives have opportunities to feed back concerns to the Academy management, and both students and staff were able to articulate examples of changes that had been made to Academy facilities as a result of this feedback.

2.42     The student survey was undertaken by the Students' Union, as part of the data-gathering exercise for the student submission. There is no evidence that it forms part of a systematic process of institutional monitoring of student opinion. The review team did find evidence of a regular process of module evaluation by students, and heard that members of the teaching team review such evaluations together, though this activity is undocumented and not collated, and does not form a part of a wider programme review.

2.43     The affirmation in this section relates to student engagement with quality assurance mechanisms, which, while clearly implemented, is in its early stages. The review team concludes that the Expectation in *Chapter B5* is met. 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

2.44      The Academy uses standard Pearson documentation for the issuing of assignment briefs and schemes of work to students. All assignment briefs are standardised and contain assessment and grading criteria. Students are clear about the stated aims of the programme and what they need to do to achieve their learning outcomes. They are also informed about the level of taught modules and stated that they found level 5 modules more challenging. The review team came to the view that the Academy's processes in this area provide the basis for meeting the Expectation.

2.45      To test the effectiveness of the process, the review team met senior management, teaching staff and students, and examined a range of documentation, including external examiner reports, academic management review reviews, the Academy's new assessment and internal verification policy, an individual learning plan and an internal verification assessment records plan.

2.46      An internal verification table provided the team with useful evidence of a system of internal moderation, though there is no indication of how this is applied. However, the small number of teaching staff available to meet the team were able to articulate and describe the implementation of the system.

2.47      When the team explored the issue of assessing at different levels, it found some uncertainty among staff regarding the differences between assessing at the appropriate level and found little evidence of staff development opportunities pertaining to this aspect of teaching. In view of some lack of understanding regarding assessment at the appropriate academic level and the potential this has for compromising quality and standards, the team **recommends** that the Academy ensures that assessment criteria are clearly understood by all staff teaching on the programme.

2.48      In meetings with staff, and through examination of relevant documentation, the review team was able to confirm that assignment briefs and internal verification procedures are satisfactory. However, it was clear to the team that the unit brief for the Research Project contained out-of-date information relating to another awarding organisation (ATHE Ltd) and it recommended resources to students, such as market research forecasting reports, which are only available to subscribing clients and students participating in university libraries.

2.49      The assessment policy refers to the Academy's internal verification process but does not clarify, for example, where or how assessment and verification records are retained. Staff were unable to provide the team with assurances regarding the location of evidence regarding the granting of awards prior to the current academic year.

2.50      Staff spoke confidently, however, about the range of assessment methods, such as creating scenarios, presentations, case studies, and development of care plans. Students confirmed that they were satisfied with the range of assessment methods, including those that were related to their workplace, such as risk assessment.

2.51    Overall, the review team found that there is a range of assessment methods, that assessment briefs are standardised and consistent, published assessment criteria are clear and students know what is expected of them. Overall, the team concludes that Expectation B6 is met but that, given some degree of uncertainty around staff understanding of assessment criteria by level, the associated level of risk is moderate.

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

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

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

### Findings

2.52    The Academy is aware of its responsibilities and has a clear understanding of external examining processes.

2.53    To test the Expectation, the review team considered documents related to the work of the external examiner, including external verifier/examiner reports, the Academy's response to the reports, and Pearson's annual academic management reviews. Action planning which is relevant to external examining is now considered by the Academic Board.

2.54    The review team came to the view that the arrangements set out by the Academy for the scrupulous use of external examiners are, in principle, likely to provide an appropriate level of assurance.

2.55    The Academy is responsive to the recommendations made by external examiners. The external examiner report 2014, confirms that all action points and recommendations made by the external verifier have been satisfactorily addressed by the Academy, including assignment briefs which are now more thoroughly internally verified, and the Academy has ensured that essential unit requirements linked to practice are now a key consideration in design of assignments.

2.56    However, some issues are not dealt with in a timely manner; this is evident from the most recent external examiner report provided at the visit. For example, late registration of students is still an issue but the Academy has put into place an action plan to address any outstanding issues. The lack of a deliberative structure, as detailed elsewhere, may have impeded consideration of the issues.

2.57    The Academy's website states that external verifier reports are available to read; however, it is not possible to download the reports which must be requested from the Administrator. Students, however, confirmed that reports are available should they wish to read them and, indeed, they are required to sign that they have done so.

2.58    In consideration of the external appointment and review of examiners and the verified responsiveness of the Academy to their reports, the review team concludes that Expectation B10 B7 is met and that the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.59 The Academy has a system in place for the monitoring and review of its higher education programme. Central to the process is the awarding organisation and the extent to which the Academy relies on Pearson for the annual review and monitoring of the programme. There is no application of the Quality Code as a reference point, though the Academy has plans to align its quality assurance processes with the various Chapters, and it has very recently commenced a mapping process**.**

2.60 The review team came to the view that the arrangements for the monitoring and review of programmes were such that they would not lead to meeting the Expectation. It is not clear how processes for internal quality assurance work independently, outside of those required and undertaken by Pearson, upon which the Academy heavily relies.

2.61 The team found that there was a lack of operational processes and procedures relating to academic quality assurance and that the recently produced policies, such as the quality assurance policy, were not contextualised correctly and did not link coherently to other working polices. For example, the strategic plan did not link with the quality assurance policy as they dealt with differing timeframes of three and five years respectively.

2.62 In testing these arrangements further, the review team considered a range of documentation, including that of Pearson and the available Academy committee minutes. The team noted that minutes were very brief and perfunctory and did not reflect discussions relating to academic or business support matters. The team also spoke to staff, students and employers. Staff were unable to confirm the extent to which employers are involved in annual review and monitoring of programmes, despite the declared strategic objective which indicates that the Academy will collaborate with external partners nationally and internationally to create opportunities for students to learn in diverse professional and educational environments. Nor did the employers who spoke to the review team confirm that they participated in any design or review of the curriculum.

2.63 The recently produced equal opportunities policy does not refer to the most recent UK legislation and there is no accompanying action plan, hence it is not possible to confirm how the Academy would demonstrate that it is taking steps to monitor the effectiveness of the policy with respect to curriculum matters relating to equality and diversity.

2.64 In meetings with staff, there was no recognition that regular internal cyclical annual monitoring takes place, despite claims by the Academy that there are. Although the Academy claims to have an effective peer internal audit, staff did not recognise this event or its existence. Nor was there evidence that students were systematically involved in the process. The review team looked at a completed internal annual course review and evaluation template but found that its requirements were too limited for higher education purposes and that the comments were sparse and not evaluative. Although the document identifies that the stipulated course leader signs off the completed pro forma, the team found that the signatory was a member of staff who has no responsibility for the HND programme. The review team, therefore, concluded that this process was not fit for purpose and **recommends** that the Academy should develop and implement effective, regular and systematic processes for monitoring and review of its programme.

2.65     The review team came to the conclusion that the processes in place at the Academy for the monitoring and review of its academic provision are neither clearly defined nor effective in providing evidence which could be used strategically for enhancement.

2.66     The team therefore judged that the Expectation is not met and that the level of associated risk is serious because there are significant gaps in policy, structures and procedures relating the Academy's quality assurance arrangements.

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

**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**

2.67      The Academy has a recently approved procedure for complaints and appeals. This policy, approved in October 2014, replaces the policy in the current Student Handbook and also replaces separate appeals and complaints policies submitted as part of the review documentation in April 2015. Details of the new processes are on the Academy's website.

2.68      The Complaints procedure has three stages: the first is informal; the second is in writing to be considered by the Principal; the third is to the Staff and Student Welfare Committee. There is provision for the student to be supported by a member of the Student Union, but there is no external arbitration identified.

2.69      The Academy's Appeals Procedure involves two stages: the first is internal, to the Principal; the second refers Higher National students to the 'appropriate regulatory body'. There was, however, no specific direction in the Academy policy to the awarding organisation's complaint mechanism, and there was a suggestion that QAA was the 'appropriate body,' rather than Pearson.

2.70      Student complaints and appeals against admissions decisions are subject to the Academy's Admission Appeals Policy and Procedure. The process involves the applicant submitting a written appeal, which is considered by a three-person Appeals Panel.

2.71      Given the size of the provision, the review team considers such a streamlined appeals and complaints policy to be appropriately simple and accessible. The Academy procedure for managing complaints and appeals allows the expectation to be met in theory.

2.72      The review team tested the effectiveness of the Academy's approach through consulting the complaints and appeals policies and procedures, requesting records and reports of recent complaints, examining student handbooks, and by meeting students and senior, academic, and support staff.

2.73      The students who met the review team had a clear understanding of the complaints process, and indicated that complaints are often discussed and resolved informally with tutors. With a small cohort of students, and a new policy, there were no examples of formal complaints or appeals for the review team to consider.

2.74      The team found that the information presented about complaints and appeals in student and course handbooks was inconsistent. The course handbook has no information about complaints or appeals, while the Student Handbook contains information that is no longer current, since two other policies have been created since the handbook was. This commentary reinforces the recommendations found section C, that the Academy establishes an approach to the production and dissemination of policies, procedures and the provision of learning materials which safeguards the accuracy and trustworthiness and fitness for purpose of all information.

2.75      Despite these inconsistencies, the policies and procedures surrounding complaints and appeals are broadly fair and accessible and the procedures for addressing problems are understood by all stakeholders. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation in *Chapter B9* is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.76     The Academy has no subcontracting, partnership or consortia arrangements in place with other centres or off-site employers. The Academic Management Review Report produced by Pearson states that the Academy reportedly has a partnership for a progression agreement in place with a university (University of East London). However, this actually consists only of an agent services agreement with a university for international (non-European Union) students. The review team found that in this context there was little in the way of procedure in this area but that, given the context, it was an adequate basis to meet the Expectation in principle

2.77     The review team explored and tested the arrangements for the delivery of learning opportunities with other organisations. This included desk-based analysis of documentation, such as the Academy's strategic plan, business plan, external stakeholders' strategy and emails providing details of student placements. The team held meetings with a sample of employers (by telephone), staff and students.

2.78     The team could find no evidence or action taken to support the objectives in the Academy's strategic plan, or in the external stakeholders' policy, which relates to engagement activities with existing and potential employers. There is a stated objective to improve student employability by showcasing their work to industry professionals, but no indication of how this objective will be implemented.

2.79     The Academy has produced a business plan which claims that the programme is linked with employers, and that the Academy offers job opportunities to all existing students. This claim could not be verified in relation to students on the higher education programme since they are already in employment and had approached the Academy to study independently. Similarly, the claim that the programme is linked with companies where students could practise and explore their skills could not be adequately verified. Those employers with whom the review team spoke, confirmed that they had little or no contact with the Academy. Relations with employers and support for employment is discovered further in the Commentary on the Theme.

2.80     Student employability is a feature of the programme and one compulsory module requires that students complete 200 hours in the workplace. There was some evidence that students are supervised and supported by employers in their workplace to enable them to complete the assessment requirements of this module, and that the workplace logs are signed off. However, there was less evidence of visits by Academy staff or other formal links with the Academy. Consequently the team **recommends** that, in order to secure the quality and standards of the education offered within this module, the Academy formalises arrangements for supporting students in the workplace.

2.81     Given the limited nature of the provision offered with others the review team concludes that the Expectation is met, although the recommendation on formalising support arrangements for students reflects its view that there is a moderate associated risk.

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

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

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

2.82      London Waterloo Academy Ltd does not offer research degrees.

# The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.83     In reaching its unsatisfactory judgement on the quality of learning opportunities for students, the review team matched its findings against Annex 2 of the published Handbook and the associated sections of Part B of the Quality Code.

2.84     Six expectations are met and four were not. Significantly, the level of risk was found to be serious in three areas where the expectations are not met and in one instance, two recommendations are made against the relevant expectation. Moderate risk was also identified in three cases where, overall, the expectations were judged to be met, with recommendations made in each, in addition to the moderate risk in one of the expectations not met. Overall, there are eight recommendations relating to the quality of learning opportunities. There is one affirmation, where the Academy has itself identified a need to improve and has already implemented changes.

2.85     The review team found significant gaps and inconsistencies in the Academy's policies and procedures relating to the quality of students' learning opportunities. Many of the policies and procedures seen by the review team has been recently appropriated from other institutions, with little adaptation or evidence of implementation, let alone embedding and monitoring of impact.

2.86     The expectations not met present serious current risks to the management of quality and, even where the risk is moderate, there could be serious problems over time. Therefore, the quality of student learning opportunities at the Academy **does not meet** 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 Academy publishes information about itself and its activities, including describing its mission, values and broad strategy, primarily through its website and its prospectus. Information is available to prospective students on the Academy website, in the hard copy prospectus and through Academy open evenings, to help them select their programme, understand the academic environment in which they will be studying, and gauge the support that will be available to them.

3.2      The Academy has a largely undocumented and contradictory process for ensuring the internal approval of published promotional material. The Marketing Manager is identified as responsible for seeking approval, when material is published, from (according to different documents) the Director of Quality, and/or the Head of Department, and/or the Marketing and Publications Committee. The Academy notes that the Marketing and Publications Committee reviews website content quarterly, but the terms of reference of that Committee do not mention this function. Minutes of the October 2014 meeting note that committee members are to 'review publications to review accuracy' for the next meeting, but subsequent minutes of meetings do not indicate that the approval process has been completed. There are no printed guidelines to indicate whether or how published materials are signed off by Pearson, and no documents to indicate that this has happened. The review team reached the view that the processes in place would not enable the Expectation to be met.

3.3      The review team examined promotional materials generated by the Academy, including the prospectus and the website. The team also scrutinised programme information provided to enrolled students (including programme and student handbooks, and the range of information on the website) and the processes for managing this. Meetings were also held with staff, employers and students to explore the quality of information available to stakeholders.

3.4      The team considered information for prospective students, and found a number of points where information was incomplete or inaccurate. The library is described as a 'multi facility, including with wide range of relevant literature (sic)', which is not the case, as described in relation to Expectation B3. The Prospectus says that 'all programmes…lead to degrees awarded by British Universities, or qualifications recognised by professional institutions', when no programmes automatically lead to degrees. Information about progression on the website claims that 'learners can progress to the second and third year of BSc (Hons) degree in Health and Social Care' and, taken together, these assertions offers the prospective student progression options that the Academy cannot deliver, since none of its programmes have top-up arrangements with UK universities. The team spoke with students, who also talked about top-up options following completion of their studies, suggesting that they do not fully understand the absence of such arrangements. The list of units named in the Prospectus and on the website are different from those listed in the course handbook (the former includes Managing Human Resources, Managing Financial

Resources, and Supporting Significant Life Events; these are absent in the course handbook).

3.5     Once enrolled, students receive some programme-specific information, including a course handbook (a hard copy and an electronic copy), which include brief programme specifications. However, the course handbook does not contain an overview of programme credits, and has inaccurate information about the number of units and credits required for the HNC: the handbook notes that an HNC requires 10 units, when in fact, since the units are 15 credits each, only eight are required. The handbook does include unit specifications, but other information is sparse: it does not include information about registration with Pearson; it does not discuss whether students have any choice of units; nor how students who enter level 5 units as level 4 students might be supported. The general Student Handbook is not higher education-specific, and also contains a number of inaccuracies: it refers to postgraduate students, when the Academy has no postgraduate programmes; it offers information about Tier 4 students, when the Academy does not hold a sponsor's license; it holds out the prospect of students being able to have 'unlimited online access to libraries', when no such access is available; it contains a Complaints and Appeals procedure that is no longer current, and an outdated equal opportunities policy.

3.6     The review team found evidence that students were aware of external examiners' reports and reported that they had seen them, although the reports themselves were not, as the Academy suggests, available on the Academy's website.

3.7     In testing Expectation C, the review team explored the information provided by the Academy in hard copy and electronic formats, and examined the processes for managing this. The team concluded that the Academy does not have documented policies to ensure that information provided to intended audiences is accurate, accessible and reliable, and does not have reliable processes in place for monitoring the quality of such information. The review team identified issues with version control of documentation: three different policies for Complaints and Appeals were extant in the same academic year and there were different versions of the Strategic Plan. Nor was it clear where definitive versions of policies and procedures were retained, although the team noted that documents produced from 2015 did include version control data. Minutes of key meetings before the current academic year were not available, although the team requested them repeatedly, and minutes that were available were perfunctory, providing little evidence of committee discussions or processes. The review team therefore **recommends** that the Academy establishes a secure record of all approved committee minutes and definitive versions of policies and procedures.

3.8     The team also identified issues with the Academy's unattributed use of policy documents from other institutions: in several cases, the Academy has imperfectly adopted documents from other institutions, often retaining references from their original setting, including logos and kite marks, and has not fully adapted them. The Staff Development Policy is taken in large part from another institution (West Lothian Academy); information on the website about learning support seems drawn from another academy's website; large elements of the Strategic Plan are copied from that of a drama and theatre arts academy; the student handbook is taken in large part from a further academy. Even the statement on 'How Employers Support LWA's Learners' is heavily drawn from a Learning and Skills Development Agency publication. This, together with a paucity of evidence showing where committees have dealt with or adapted these policies, suggest that the processes for generating internal policies are not effective. Consequently, the review team **recommends** that the Academy establishes an approach to the production and dissemination of policies, procedures and the provision of learning materials which safeguards the accuracy, trustworthiness and fitness for purposes of all information.

3.9      Students with whom the review team met reported that they found the information provided by the Academy clear and useful, particularly noting a helpful induction process, and their ability to seek information from individual members of staff. They had been sent a copy of the student submission. Students commented that both external examiner reports and Student Handbooks were available online, though the review team confirmed that this was not the case.

3.10      Overall, the review team determined that the Academy produces information about its learning opportunities that is often inconsistent and unreliable and that these shortcomings undermine several aspects of the work of the Academy, including the moderate risks identified in relation to expectations A2.1, A2.2, and B10 and serious risk in B8, in addition to *Chapter C*. The Academy does not have robust internal procedures to ensure that information for its stakeholders is accurate. Therefore, the review team determined that the Expectation is not met, and the associated level of risk is serious.

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

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

3.11     In reaching its negative judgement about the information provided by Academy about its provision, the review team matched its findings against Annex 2 of the published Handbook and the associated Expectation in Part C of the Quality Code.

3.12     The review team found that the Academy provides information for prospective students that is sometimes inaccurate or open to being misconstrued. The information for current students is contradictory in places and that for those responsible for quality assurance and for other stakeholders is either absent or severely compromised by the extent to which it is copied from external sources without attribution or effective adaptation.

3.13     The review team makes two recommendations in this area. The first is about securing records of committee meetings and definitive versions of documents, and the second is an over-arching recommendation about the need to develop a strategic approach to safeguarding the accuracy of information for all stakeholders.

3.14     The failure of the Academy to provide information about learning opportunities that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy contributes substantially to the serious risks identified against the expectations in relation to Part B of the Quality Code and to the moderate risks identified in relation to Part A.

3.15     Therefore the review team concludes that the quality of information provided by the Academy **does not meet** 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 Director of Studies/Principal has overall strategic responsibility for quality improvement. This involves policies, procedures and actions designed to achieve enhancement such as surveys, performance management, teaching observations, assessment practice, course self-evaluation, quality improvement plans, staff induction, staff development and continuing professional development, investment in learning resources and physical resources, and the use of management information data. However, these processes are not strategically integrated or articulated in such a way as to provide the basis for meeting the Expectation in principle.

4.2	The review team met staff and students and scrutinised a wide range of documentation. The claim made by the Academy that it conducts an annual course review and evaluation as part of its strategic approach to enhancement could not be substantiated, as this is a responsibility undertaken on behalf of Pearson. The annual monitoring process is an operational and routine procedure with limited scope to generate enhancement initiatives. The team was unable to locate within the underpinning quality assurance framework or the remits, terms of reference and minutes of the committee structure any committee which allows for the thematic consideration of enhancement opportunities. There is no opportunity to specifically comment on improvements made because the Academy does not have its own dedicated process for annual review of the teaching and learning activities which is distinct from that of Pearson.

4.3	The review team was unable to identify any areas of good practice within the strategic and operational processes of the Academy. Staff did not have an understanding of the term 'enhancement' as it applies to teaching and learning activities of the Academy, and the examples provided, which related to the development of a committee structure, student visits and employability skills workshops, are essentially routine activities, albeit recent developments. Although the new Strategic Plan claims to support a culture of enhancement it is unclear how this will work. There are no identified opportunities for employers to contribute to any kind of enhancement initiative and the majority of employers that the team contacted had little or no contact with the Academy. Senior staff confirmed that there is no systematic use of data to inform enhancement initiatives, such as cohort analysis.

4.4	A factor hindering the consideration and development of enhancement opportunities is the hasty introduction of new policies which have not been subject to discussion or approval through the committee process, and which have not been contextualised within the Academy's purpose and function. A significant amount of the documentation presented to the review team contained information about processes, structures and roles which were either non-existent at the Academy or not relevant to it. For example, the new Quality Assurance Policy contains misleading, inaccurate and out-of-date information about preparation for QAA Institutional Audit and refers to Subject Boards, which do not exist. The document also claims that the Academy is undergoing major refurbishment and that it has been accredited with the Positive about Disabled People award, neither of which is the case. When the team explored this issue with the senior management team, the team was informed that the documents did relate to the Academy, though the Principal agreed that there were anomalies.

4.5      The team therefore **recommends** that the Academy should further develop the deliberative structures to enable discussion and oversight of its provision in order to identify areas for enhancement.

4.6      Given the absence of any over-arching procedures to identify and implement opportunities for enhancement at a strategic level, the review team concludes that the Academy does not meet the Expectation and, since there are significant gaps relating to the provider's quality assurance arrangements, the associated level of risk is serious.

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

# The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.7      In reaching its negative judgment about enhancement, the team aligned its findings with the expectation in Annex 2 of the published Handbook relating to deliberative steps taken at provider level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities.

4.8      Despite student satisfaction with most aspects of their learning, and some examples of improvements, the review team has not identified any features of good practice beyond what might be expected routinely.

4.9      The review team could not find any evidence in the Academy's documentation of a strategic approach, nor any practice of integration of enhancement initiatives at the institutional level. Neither was there evidence that information was used to identify the need for improvement and embed it systematically, except in a limited and reactive fashion. Consequently, the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the Academy **does not meet** UK expectations.

# 5    Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

**Findings**

5.1    The Academy focuses on providing learning opportunities which are vocationally oriented, defined in the Strategic Plan as a duty 'to continually develop and make our programmes relevant to the sector through education and training that is industry focused.' Student employability is articulated as an important principle at the Academy, and was commented on positively in many of the review team's meetings, including those with the Principal, staff, and students. Student employment and employer engagement are prominent themes in the Academy's Strategic Plan

5.2    The Higher Nationals at the Academy are, by their nature, vocational in nature and include work-related modules. The development of both general and specific employability skills are embedded in the curriculum.

5.3    Though the Strategic Plan identifies a need for 'industry collaborations and partnerships,' these are as yet only aspirational. Although the Academy states that it 'involves employers as much as practically possible in the design, assessment and delivery of our programmes', the review team found no evidence of employer engagement in design, delivery, or assessment of the HNC/HND awards, through minutes of meetings or through external examiner reports. Employers do not currently sit on Academy committees, or have any formal voice in Academy structures. No documents or information was presented to the team that offered evidence of any formal collaborations or partnerships with employers or with industry.

5.4    The Academy business plan also notes the institution's connections with employers. The review team spoke with employers and with students. Most of the employers said they had little or nothing to do with the Academy directly, and had not visited the Academy, or met a representative of the Academy. Students, on the other hand, felt their courses to be vocationally relevant, and commented positively on how the Academy had supported them in dealing with employment issues.

5.5    It was clear from discussions with students that they perceive that opportunities for work placements alongside their academic studies contribute significantly to their employability. Work placements are a key element of several course units (Unit 4: Personal and Professional Development; Unit 29: Work-Based experience). However, the team found that, although employers confirmed student attendance at the workplace through a completed workplace log, no evidence of more extensive engagement by employers with the Academy was presented.

5.6    The Academy commented on its aim to 'improve student employability through career guidance,' in relation to which the student submission noted that 'more attention should be paid to the career service provided'. The review team found no evidence of formal careers guidance, although some employability initiatives have been introduced: the team saw evidence of an Employability Skills Workshop in May 2015 and the promise of future workshops on topics such as networking and CV writing.

# Glossary

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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