Higher Education Review of Newbury College

January 2016

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Newbury College. The review took place from 12 to 15 January 2016 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Ms Sally Dixon
- Professor Ian Robinson
- Jacqueline Scott (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 4.

In reviewing Newbury College, the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland.

The themes for the academic year 2015-16 are Student Employability and Digital Literacy,[2] and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

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

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[1] The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code.
[2] Higher Education Review themes:
www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2859.
[3] QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us.
[4] Higher Education Review web pages:
www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Newbury College

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

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and other awarding organisations **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

Good practice

The QAA review team did not identify any features of **good practice** at Newbury College.

Recommendations

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

By May 2016:

- ensure that the status of higher education courses advertised across all media for prospective students is clearly specified (Expectations B2 and C)
- ensure consistent use of higher education course titles and reference to awarding partner validation across all media (Expectation C).

By July 2016:

- produce separate programme specifications for each distinct Higher National award and title to meet fully the requirements of the awarding organisation (Expectations A2.2 and C)
- ensure that external examiner reports are shared with students on Higher National courses (Expectation B7).

By September 2016:

- systematically disseminate good practice to improve students' learning opportunities across the higher education provision (Enhancement).

By October 2016:

- provide timely information and training to all higher education student representatives to equip them fully in their role (Expectation B5).

By December 2016:

- ensure that higher education students engage more fully as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience, and that the College monitors and evaluates the impact of student engagement (Expectation B5)
- routinely monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of enhancement across the higher education provision (Enhancement).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The actions taken to gather unit-level feedback systematically from students on Higher National courses (Expectations B3, B5 and B8).

Theme: Student Employability

The College has well established practices for working with employers. The majority of higher education students are employed, so their studies are aimed at enhancing employability. Work-based mentors on the foundation degree are well supported by the College. Students from all courses are positive about the development of their employability skills. Employers are involved in the design and review of Higher National courses, and are well-informed and enthusiastic about the benefits of the College's provision.

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

About Newbury College

Newbury College (the College) is a general further education college based on the outskirts of Newbury. The College primarily serves Newbury, Hungerford and Thatcham but its catchment area also includes West Berkshire and the nearer parts of Reading and North Hampshire. Its mission is 'to be a centre of excellence for learning, business and vocational skills'. The College's vision is to achieve 'outstanding learning which inspires learners to make a positive difference to their community'.

At the time of its Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) by QAA in 2011, the College had 93 higher education students. It now has 136 students on higher education courses, consisting of 27 full-time and 109 part-time students.

The College continues to offer a foundation degree, and a range of Higher National Certificates and Diplomas (HNCs and HNDs). The Foundation Degree in Supporting Children's Development and Learning is delivered by the College as part of its relationship with the University of Reading. As part of its agreement with the awarding organisation, Pearson Education, the College currently delivers a range of HNC/Ds in Graphic Design, Mechanical Engineering, and Electrical and Electronic Engineering.

The College has identified a number of key challenges facing its higher education provision, including incorporating new teaching staff; adapting to changes in funding and, in particular, how to resource current and future developments; continuing to address local skills needs; engaging part-time students in the deliberative structure; and creating a differentiated higher education identity for staff and students in what is a predominantly further education college.

The College has made satisfactory progress with the recommendations and further development of features of good practice made in the IQER report.

Explanation of the findings about Newbury College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

1 Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/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 Ultimate responsibility for setting academic standards and ensuring that the requirements of the relevant reference points are met lies with the College's awarding partners. The College has a partnership agreement with the University of Reading to deliver the foundation degree, which was validated under the University's regulations. Higher National courses are delivered through a licence from Pearson, with the academic standards of awards being set out in the approval documents. The College is responsible for maintaining these standards, and evaluating and reviewing the students' learning experiences. Programme specifications vary according to the requirements of the awarding partners but, in each case, the qualification is positioned at the appropriate level and there is reference to Subject Benchmark Statements. The programme specification for the foundation degree is written by the awarding body, although College staff are able to provide feedback into amendments through periodic review and management meetings. For Higher National courses, the BTEC qualification specifications are written by Pearson, and the College is then expected to tailor these in its programme specifications to capture the 'local dimension'. The processes in place ensure that the awards are correctly positioned at the relevant level of the FHEQ and are aligned with Subject Benchmark Statements, therefore allowing the Expectation to be met.

1.2 The review team considered the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by examining programme specifications, minutes of relevant meetings, and awarding partner

regulations. The team also held meetings with teaching and senior staff, including those from the awarding body.

1.3   The evidence reviewed shows the procedures to be effective in practice. The College has an effective partnership with the University of Reading which has been further strengthened by the latter assigning a Programme Director to coordinate, monitor and manage the partnership across the network of colleges. The review team saw evidence that College staff were actively involved in the 2011 periodic review and subsequent implementation of actions. Course teams are supported by the College's Teaching and Quality Manager, who ensures that staff have access to the latest version of awarding partners' regulations and also provides support in interpreting these requirements. The awarding body also provides training for College staff on its regulations, and staff also attend training sessions delivered by Pearson. External examiner reports confirm that the College maintains academic standards on behalf of its awarding partners.

1.4   The review team saw evidence that academic staff make appropriate use of programme specifications as a reference point in the learning, teaching and assessment of programmes. The programme specifications contain clear and relevant information regarding level and Subject Benchmark Statements.

1.5   While the awarding partners have ultimate responsibility through their own regulatory frameworks for ensuring that the relevant external reference points are adhered to, there is evidence that the College effectively manages its own responsibilities for doing this within its partnership agreements. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.6   The regulatory frameworks of the awarding partners determine academic standards and award of credit for each course. The College has a Memorandum of Understanding with the University which outlines the respective responsibilities of each organisation, and also incorporates the University's relevant policies and procedures. The College designs, delivers and assesses its Higher National courses in accordance with the frameworks and processes set out in the awarding organisation's guidance, most notably the BTEC procedures for standards verification and external examining, and the BTEC Guide to Assessment Levels 4 to 7. The College has also introduced its own Assessment Policy for Higher National programmes. Assessment boards for Higher National provision are convened by the College to confirm that students have met the requirements of their award. Programme specifications for all higher education provision define the names of awards and the level and credit rating of their constituent modules. The College's processes would enable it to meet Expectation A2.1.

1.7   The review team considered the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by examining documentation including the Assessment Policy, Memorandum of Understanding with the University, and relevant BTEC guidance. The team also held meetings with academic and senior staff and students.

1.8   The evidence reviewed shows the procedures to be effective in practice. The University's regulations and policies are communicated to staff and students through course handbooks and student induction packs. Following a similar process, the standards for Higher National provision are communicated in the relevant programme specifications and in course handbooks. Staff whom the team met confirmed their understanding of where to find, and how to use, programme specifications for their intended purposes. Students confirmed that they are aware of the relevant policies, namely in course handbooks and on the VLE.

1.9   The awarding partners have responsibility for academic frameworks and regulations. The College adheres to these requirements and has appropriate processes in place to ensure that staff understand and enact their responsibilities in this regard. Within the context of the partnership agreements with its awarding partners, the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.10   The College publishes definitive records, in the form of programme and unit/module specifications, for all its higher education courses. Unit and module specifications are available on the VLE. Pearson produces unit information for the Higher National courses, and this is supplemented by the College through its assignment briefs. For the foundation degree, module handbooks for each year of the course are produced by the awarding body. It is also the responsibility of the awarding body to maintain the programme specification, which can be found on the University's website and which is also signposted in the Course Handbook. For Higher National programmes, it is the responsibility of the awarding organisation to provide definitive course information and the responsibility of the College to produce tailored programme specifications for each Higher National award, which are made available to students on the VLE or in hard copy. The College has produced a programme specification template for Higher National courses which includes aims, learning outcomes, assessment methods, and reference to Subject Benchmark Statements and FHEQ levels. The specifications are produced by the College's Teaching and Quality Manager. External examiners approve specifications prior to publication. The processes to assure the production of definitive course documentation, which constitute key reference points for the delivery, assessment, monitoring and review, would enable the College to meet this expectation.

1.11   The review team reviewed the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by examining programme specifications, course handbooks, and the VLE and website. In addition, the team met senior, teaching and support staff, and students.

1.12   Overall, the evidence reviewed shows the practices and procedures to be effective. The review team found that the College fulfils its responsibilities regarding the University's processes. The full programme specification for the foundation degree is signposted in the Course Handbook and is accessible on the University website. Students whom the team met confirmed their awareness of how to access the programme specification.

1.13   For the Higher National courses, students whom the team met were not aware of the purpose of a programme specification but they did confirm that detailed course information is made available on the VLE or in hard copy.

1.14   Although the College's programme specification template includes the key information required by Pearson, the review team found that some of those produced did not fully comply with the awarding organisation's expectation for each named award to have its own unique programme specification. For example, the HNC Engineering programme specification provides combined details of Mechanical and Electrical and Electronic modules. The team therefore **recommends** that, by July 2016, the College produces separate programme specifications for each distinct Higher National award and title to meet fully the requirements of the awarding organisation (see also Expectation C).

1.15   Within its awarding partners' regulatory requirements, the College largely fulfils its responsibilities for producing definitive records. Information is made available to students in different ways. The team did make a recommendation for the College to produce separate programme specifications for each distinct Higher National award and title to meet fully the

requirements of Pearson. The Expectation is met and, because the recommendation refers to a need for the College to amend details in its documentation, the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

Findings

1.16   The awarding partners are ultimately responsible for ensuring that academic standards are set and maintained at an appropriate level and are in accordance with their academic frameworks and regulations. The College has put in place formal procedures to govern both the consideration of new courses prior to approval from awarding partners, and also to shape the curriculum where its relationship with its partners permits. However, the development of new higher education courses, or revalidations of existing ones, remains subject to the regulations of the awarding partners. The foundation degree was last approved in a periodic review and revalidation exercise by the University of Reading in 2011. The College is one of three partners of the University who, together, contribute to the development of the foundation degree under the coordination of a course leader based at the University.

1.17   The College has approval from Pearson to deliver a number of Higher National courses, not all of which are currently being offered. While the core curriculum and academic standards are defined by the awarding organisation, the College is permitted to select a number of optional units to meet local needs. The College may additionally seek approval from the awarding organisation to include College-devised 'meeting local needs units' in the curriculum. For its internal approval processes, a capital and resource bid is developed and considered by the Senior Management Team (SMT), and, if necessary, by the Corporation. Formal permission to proceed from SMT is followed by a more detailed development of the proposed curriculum offer before a formal submission is made to Pearson, or other validating institution, seeking approval to deliver the appropriate course. Planning of curriculum material, assessment, student handbooks and other material takes place once approval has been received from the awarding organisation. The College's strategic plan for higher education focuses upon employer needs, vocational relevance, the local community and widening participation, and this focus is reflected in its existing provision and its plans for future growth. These processes would enable the College to meet Expectation A3.1.

1.18   The team reviewed the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by examining documentation relating to course approval and revalidation, awarding partners' academic regulations, and partnership agreements. The team also held meetings with senior and teaching staff.

1.19   The evidence reviewed shows the practices and procedures to be effective in practice. Following a strategic decision to deliver new higher education provision, the College underwent a process of resource planning to confirm that the staff and physical infrastructure was appropriate to assure academic standards. The review team saw evidence that this procedure is followed by detailed activities to prepare the documentation required by the awarding partners in order to secure approval for course delivery.

1.20   The review team saw evidence that College staff, alongside others in the network of university partners, were fully involved in the most recent periodic review and revalidation of the foundation degree in 2011. The outcomes confirmed the setting, maintenance and achievement of academic standards.

1.21   The College's process for preparing a submission to the awarding organisation is detailed and clear, and Pearson's most recent Quality Review and Development Report confirms the College's continuing alignment with the national requirements necessary to assure academic standards.

1.22   The College's internal processes for developing proposals for higher education provision, together with its staff, resource base and organisational infrastructure, have enabled the College to successfully gain approval to deliver courses awarded by both the University of Reading and Pearson. While both awarding partners retain ultimate responsibility for academic standards, the College discharges effectively its delegated responsibilities for contributing to the development and approval of the curriculum and its associated academic standards. Therefore, the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.23   The College's awarding partners are ultimately responsible for ensuring the setting and maintenance of the academic standards of all credit and qualifications awarded in their names. The College has agreements with its awarding partners which specify its delegated responsibilities within the academic frameworks and regulations with regard to assessment of learning. For the foundation degree, the operational implementation of the assessment regulations are described in the University's Examinations and Assessment Handbook. For its Higher National provision, the College has developed its own Assessment Policy, which aligns with the requirements of the different awarding partners but applies in practice to teaching staff engaged in the assessment of Higher National courses. The policy gives direction on, among other things, assessment design, grading, pre and post-assessment moderation, external moderation, and the final approval of grades in team meetings acting as Assessment Boards.

1.24   Both the University and the College require that assessment tests students' achievement of module or unit learning outcomes. Both institutions require assessment instruments to be formally checked and approved before being issued to students, and grading must similarly be internally moderated or verified before being scrutinised by external examiners and considered by assessment boards. Staff appointed as internal verifiers or moderators use College summary sheets to record their scrutiny for later verification. These sheets include generic criteria for the various grades of achievement, and require confirmation that unit learning outcomes have been achieved. Arrangements are also in place for the annual monitoring of student achievement. The College makes available specifications for each programme and these include assessment details and learning outcomes. These procedures would allow the College to meet Expectation A3.2.

1.25   The team tested the Expectation by scrutinising the evidence provided by the College, including the Assessment Policy and associated regulations and procedures, external examiner reports, programme specifications, annual self-evaluation reports, and records of assessment boards and meetings associated with assessment. The team also met with senior staff, teaching staff, and students.

1.26   The evidence reviewed shows the policies and procedures to be effective in practice. Staff teaching on the foundation degree contribute to a University-led team formed from all of its partners that are delivering the award. Team members contribute to the design and moderation of assessment in accordance with the University's regulations. On Higher National courses, assignment cover sheets provide a framework to identify learning outcomes for students and to demonstrate coverage during internal verification.

1.27   The review team saw considerable evidence from various procedures to confirm that learning outcomes are addressed, grading and assessment have been properly conducted, achievement appropriately recognised, and academic standards achieved. These procedures include internal verification, moderation processes and periodic review carried out by the University, Assessment Boards, annual monitoring, consideration of

external examiner reports, and use of the BTEC assignment checking service. Students whom the team met confirmed that they were fully aware of the particular learning outcomes being addressed in assessment, and that feedback was clear.

1.28   The College has effective systems in place to ensure that the assessment of students is robust, and that the award of qualifications and credit is based on the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.29   The College has an overarching Policy for Ensuring Quality in the Curriculum, within which the responsibilities of key staff, both at course and institutional level, are defined. Its annual monitoring process is captured within the College annual calendar. Each higher education course leader produces an annual template-based reflective self-evaluation report (SER). The respective Curriculum Managers draw upon the SERs in developing their curriculum area's annual self-assessment report (SAR). The various service areas also produce SARs, with both the curriculum and service SARs then feeding into the institutional SAR, which is considered at Academic Board. Quality improvement plans are generated at each stage and progress is monitored through termly reviews between the respective Curriculum Manager and the Teaching and Quality Manager. The SER for the foundation degree is submitted to the awarding body and thus contributes to the University's own annual monitoring process.

1.30   The Director of Students, Curriculum and Quality carries executive responsibility for academic provision, and holds monthly operational meetings with Curriculum Managers. These meetings permit early identification of emerging areas for improvement or aspects of good practice, and for which early executive action can be identified to mitigate issues or to share success. If emerging actions require more senior consideration, they would be taken by the Director of Students, Curriculum and Quality to the College Management Team (CMT) or the Senior Management Team (SMT) for consideration. The Director of Students, Curriculum and Quality also conducts termly Business Review meetings with Curriculum Managers during which progress in each curriculum area is formally reviewed. In addition, four times each year, Curriculum Managers are required to make formal reflective presentations to SMT upon key matters in their area. These include teaching, learning and quality; internal progression; the student voice; and progress with admissions.

1.31   Periodic review of the foundation degree is carried out by the awarding body but the College course team contributes, as members of the wider network which includes three partner colleges. Pearson conducts regular management-level reviews, including a quality review and development report, of its delivery centres, and conducts its own periodic review of the higher national curricula, with which the College is required to engage. The College's own processes and its adherence to those of its awarding partners would enable it to meet the Expectation.

1.32   The team tested the effectiveness of the procedures by examining relevant documentation including SERs, minutes of committee meetings, external examiner reports, academic regulations, and partnership agreements. The team also held discussions with senior and academic staff, and students.

1.33   The evidence reviewed showed the procedures to be effective in practice. The course-level SERs are detailed and reflective, addressing developments in delivery, quality and standards, student achievement and information. The College is also in the process of introducing a way to gather feedback from Higher National students on completion of units, thus providing additional data for the evaluation process to go alongside its existing surveys (see also paragraph 2.19). At the curriculum and institutional levels, the review team saw evidence that discipline-based self-assessment reports (SARs) draw upon the course SERs,

and subsequently inform the generation of the College SAR. The College SAR is formally considered at both Academic Board and Corporation.

1.34   The evaluation processes are supported by effective executive structures and procedures, which focus strongly upon the student learning experience. Regular summaries on academic quality and standards are made to the Academic Board and Corporation, and procedures are in place to bring management support to areas in particular need. Action plans emerging from the curriculum area SARs are formally reviewed with Curriculum Managers three times a year. External examiner reports confirm that academic standards are being met, and that actions arising from the reports are produced immediately and regularly monitored by the College's management team. Staff whom the review team met demonstrated a good understanding of how course-level monitoring works, together with the associated procedures.

1.35   The evidence from documentation and meetings clearly shows that the College has appropriate systems in place for programme monitoring and review with regard to maintaining academic standards, and is operating effectively in accordance with the requirements of its awarding partners. Therefore, the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3.4): 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

1.36   The awarding partners have ultimate responsibility for making use of external and independent expertise to set and maintain academic standards. The University of Reading appoints an external member to course approval and periodic review panels, and also appoints external examiners for the foundation degree. Pearson is responsible for appointing external examiners for the Higher National courses, with examiners attending the College and meeting with staff and students. The College has a policy for ensuring quality in the curriculum which outlines responsibility for the completion of an annual self-assessment to critically evaluate and review the course. This also includes reflection on external examiner reports. The College's main responsibilities in meeting this Expectation are to ensure that appropriate consideration is given to the feedback provided on the management and delivery of courses, for example from external examiners, and also from employers who contribute to course development. These approaches would allow the College to meet the Expectation.

1.37   The review team considered the effectiveness of these procedures by scrutinising awarding partners' procedures, their criteria for the appointment of external examiners and panel members, SERs and SARs. The team also held meetings with senior and academic staff, and employers.

1.38   The review team found these processes to work effectively in practice. External examiners are involved at appropriate stages of the quality assurance processes and, overall, their reports confirm that the academic standards of the awards are being maintained. The College has an effective system for responding to actions identified by external examiners. For example, the 2015 report for HNC Electrical and Electronic Engineering raised concerns regarding the internal verification processes which resulted in the certification being blocked. However, the subsequent action plan showed that the College dealt effectively with the issues raised in the report, resulting in the course being 'released' again.

1.39   The College and individual course teams have strong links with a number of local employers and regularly invite them to discuss potential course developments. This principally occurs through dialogue with employers during the development of initial proposals for optional units for Higher National provision.

1.40   The College works in accordance with the regulations and procedures of its awarding partners. The evidence from documentation and meetings shows that, overall, the College is effectively managing its responsibilities for maintaining academic standards and making use of external expertise. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

1.41   In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook. All of the Expectations for this judgement area are met, with low risk. In A2.2, the team makes a recommendation for the College to produce separate programme specifications for each distinct Higher National award and title to meet fully the requirements of the awarding organisation.

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

2   Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

2.1   The awarding partners are ultimately responsible for ensuring that academic standards are set and maintained at an appropriate level and are in accordance with their academic frameworks and regulations. The College has put in place formal procedures to govern both the consideration of new courses prior to approval from awarding partners, and also to shape the curriculum where its relationship with its partners permits (see paragraphs 1.16 and1.17 for further details). The adherence of the College to its awarding partners' formal procedures for programme design, development and approval, and its own internal processes, would allow it to meet the Expectation.

2.2   The team reviewed the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by examining documentation relating to course approval and revalidation, awarding partners' academic regulations and requirements, and partnership agreements. The team also held meetings with senior and teaching staff, students and employers.

2.3   The review team found these processes to work effectively in practice. The strategic plan has established a clear set of objectives against which the growth of its higher education portfolio is measured. The strategic plan also informs the College's annual analysis of regional skills and development needs, and its subsequent consideration of course developments.

2.4   The team saw evidence that the College's detailed course planning procedure is clear and effective, for example in shaping current and future developments in engineering, computing, textiles and design-based provision. It has also led to the decision to appoint a Higher and Professional Programmes Curriculum Manager, whose role would include cross-College responsibility for coordinating and leading the development and growth of the higher education portfolio.

2.5   In choosing how best to match the curriculum offer to local needs, the College works well with employers to develop 'local needs units', to select appropriate optional units, or to exploit the strengths and experience of staff. For example, staff whom the team met described how the core general engineering courses draw upon the menu of optional units to provide bespoke courses for particular employers who wish to develop significant numbers of their staff.

2.6   The periodic review and revalidation of the foundation degree took place in 2011. The various activities were led by the University, and the College staff were fully involved in reviewing and developing the curriculum, as well as hosting and engaging with representatives from the University's review team.

2.7   While the awarding partners retain ultimate responsibility for academic standards and quality, the College is effective at discharging its delegated responsibilities for the design and approval of courses, including through its close relationships with employers.

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

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.8   The College has devolved responsibility for selection and admission of students to all Higher National courses, with the procedures set out in a clear College Learner Recruitment, Admissions and Appeals Policy and Procedure. This document is supported by the Procedure for the Recognition of Prior Achievement. For the foundation degree, the College has shared responsibility with its University partner for the selection and admission of students. The College administers the admissions process while the awarding body exercises oversight.

2.9   Applicants are provided with initial advice and guidance by admissions staff, and interviews with academic staff take place to inform and assess all prospective students, and to determine the offer for admission. Advice and Guidance Interview Guidelines, produced by Learner Services, support the admissions process. Academic staff are trained by the admissions team to ensure consistency in procedures. Quality and standardisation is further assured by admissions interview observations conducted by the Senior Careers Officer. Relevant information is supplied to students through the College and University website, admissions support, and individual course interviews. Students are given the opportunity to review admissions processes through a survey available on the VLE. Information for prospective students is made available across a range of media including hard copy prospectuses and the website. These processes would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.10   The review team examined the effectiveness of the recruitment, selection and admissions policies and procedures by analysing documentation including the Learner Recruitment, Admissions and Appeals Policy and Procedure and the Procedure for the Recognition of Prior Achievement, Advice and Guidance Interview Guidelines, as well as by examining the VLE and website. The team also held meetings with senior, teaching and support staff, and students.

2.11   Overall, the review team found that the policies and procedures for recruitment, selection and admission work effectively in practice. Students and staff whom the team met confirmed the value of the individual interviews. Students stated that they had an accurate understanding of their course prior to commencement. Staff found the Course Information Data (CID) system a useful aid in assuring the quality of admissions and they also valued the opportunity to receive feedback through the admissions observation process. The team also heard examples of effective procedures being in place for identifying and supporting additional needs at various stages, including pre-admission, interview, enrolment, and on-course.

2.12   The team saw evidence that the College's prospectuses include some Higher National courses that are awaiting formal approval from the awarding organisation. Staff whom the team met confirmed that the College produces the full and part-time prospectuses primarily as marketing tools to support the gathering of labour market intelligence. In such cases, the Director of Students, Curriculum and Quality, in collaboration with the Marketing Team and the Teaching and Quality Manager, checks and also retains oversight of course information quality checks. The team was, however, informed that only courses for which approval has been received from the awarding organisation are advertised on the website. In addition, any applicants enquiring about courses awaiting approval receive a letter and

telephone call advising that the course is a proposed one, and subsequent interviews only take place for courses that have received formal approval from the awarding organisation. However, despite these safeguards, the review team considers that, since a prospectus is commonly understood by prospective students to be a reflection of the courses approved for delivery, it is potentially misleading to promote unapproved awards as a means of gathering market intelligence. The team therefore **recommends** that, by May 2016, the College ensures that the status of higher education courses advertised across all media for prospective students is clearly specified (see also Expectation C).

2.13   Overall, the team concludes that the Expectation is met. However, there is a recommendation for the College to ensure that the status of higher education courses advertised across all media for prospective students is clearly specified. For this reason, the level of risk is moderate because, while the College's recruitment, admissions and selection procedures are broadly adequate, the procedures have some shortcomings in terms of the rigour with which they are applied.

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

2.14   The College's Higher Education Strategic Plan 2014-2018 articulates its strategic approach to the management of higher education, including teaching and learning. The plan outlines the quality targets for teaching and learning, together with the Teaching and Learning Strategy for 2014-2018. The latter includes information about robust, consistent and flexible systems to support teaching and learning. The College has in place a number of other policies, strategies and operational practices relating to the development of teaching and learning activities, including a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Strategy, a Classroom Observation Principles and Framework, and a Policy for Ensuring Quality in the Curriculum. The latter outlines the responsibilities of the Director of Students, Curriculum and Quality, who oversees the College's higher education curriculum offer, and of Curriculum Managers, who oversee timetables and staff. The Director of Students, Quality and Curriculum undertakes Business Reviews with curriculum areas on a termly basis. The College has a higher education induction programme for new teaching staff, and also appoints mentors to support new teachers. The College maintains a record of staff CPD. The Foundation Degree Course Handbook outlines how teaching is organised within the College, while the Higher National course handbook articulates how students are provided with academic support. The College's processes would allow it to meet the Expectation.

2.15   The review team examined the effectiveness of teaching and learning procedures by reading relevant documentation relating to the policies, strategies and operational practices for teaching and learning, annual course monitoring reports, course handbooks, induction materials, and minutes of relevant committee meetings. The team also held meetings with senior, teaching and support staff, and students.

2.16   Overall, the review team found these processes to work effectively in practice. The College's induction programme for new teaching staff works effectively, and staff whom the team met value the support offered by mentors who are experienced managers and practitioners. Staff involved in the delivery of the foundation degree attend staff development sessions held with the University of Reading, as well as weekly meetings to standardise approaches and to share practice.

2.17   Students on the foundation degree feel that teaching staff are fully qualified and trained in their field. The results from student surveys indicate that all foundation degree students and the majority of Higher National students are satisfied with the quality of teaching. Higher National students whom the team met had experienced some difficulties with new members of staff, but the College had responded quickly to these concerns. The Higher National course teams meet each half term to review student experience and progress. The review team also saw evidence that the College provides five days of training internally each year and, in addition to this, staff may use up to five days for off-site training and development.

2.18   The Classroom Observation Principles and Framework outlines the approach to improving standards of teaching, learning and assessment. The team saw evidence of lesson observations being moderated, and teaching staff completing peer observations. The College subsequently produces an annual teaching and quality report detailing the outcomes of the process and this is discussed thereafter by the CMT. The team also saw evidence that

the University of Reading carries out peer observations for staff teaching on the foundation degree.

2.19   The team saw evidence that the College uses an internal survey analysed by QDP for gathering student feedback on their experiences at induction and at the end of each level of study. The foundation degree students also complete module evaluation questionnaires provided by the University of Reading. Currently, there is nothing similar at unit level for students on the Higher National courses. Therefore, the College has taken the decision to develop a similar questionnaire for these students, starting with a pilot questionnaire online for students on the Mechanical Engineering course. The review team **affirms** the actions taken to gather unit-level feedback systematically from students on Higher National courses (see also Expectations B5 and B8).

2.20   While the College does not routinely separate matters relating to further and higher education within its procedures and processes, the monthly quality report is submitted to the CMT, and a separate report is submitted to Academic Board and the Governor's Strategy and Standards Meeting. This enables adequate oversight at various management levels within the College.

2.21   The College has a number of strengths in teaching and learning, with students valuing the knowledge and teaching skills of tutors and the opportunities to develop their employability skills. The College also has effective staff development activities in place. The team makes one affirmation regarding the actions being taken to gather unit-level feedback systematically from students on Higher National courses. Overall, the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.22   The College's Higher Education Strategic Plan 2014-18 outlines quality targets for success rates, teaching qualifications and self-assessment grades. The strategic plan articulates the College's aims to provide robust, consistent and flexible systems, and adequate resources, to support teaching and learning, including for those students with additional learning needs. The plan also incorporates the Information Learning Technology (ILT) strategy. The College has a checklist with expected standards for the integration of ILT in teaching and outlines that support can be offered to curriculum staff to achieve the standards. The College's Policy for Ensuring Quality in the Curriculum outlines the responsibilities of the Director of Students, Curriculum and Quality and Curriculum Managers. The Curriculum Manager's Business Review includes a review of capital bids and resources as well as a resource audit. Business support areas complete SARs which are then reviewed in a formal meeting.

2.23   All students receive an induction to the course, an induction pack and student handbook, and a separate induction to the library. The College provides a structured approach to course delivery with students being made aware of modules/units and assignments at the start of the academic year. Information is provided on the College and University VLE. The College evaluates the induction process through student focus groups. Students have progress reviews with actions set based on academic development or wider personal skills. Students are able to make appointments with learning support, careers guidance, counsellors and safeguarding teams as appropriate. The learning support team is able to assess students for learning difficulties such as dyslexia and provide the requisite support. The processes the College has in place would allow it to meet the Expectation.

2.24   The review team tested the effectiveness of the College's arrangements and resources by scrutinising relevant documents relating to its strategic and procedural approaches to providing support and resources for students and by reviewing a selection of information available on the VLE. The team also held meetings with students, teaching and support staff.

2.25   The team found that the procedures for implementing, monitoring and evaluating arrangements and resources work effectively in practice. Higher education students benefit from further education support systems such as learning support, counselling and careers advice. Students whom the team met, both full and part-time, confirmed that the support provided by the College enables them to develop as independent students. The College has various initiatives to assist students with the transition into higher education, including a welcome evening for prospective foundation degree students. Students whom the team met welcomed the information and support provided during the induction activities. Students whom the team met also confirmed that they have progress reviews with actions based on academic development or wider personal skills. Students knew about the process for being able to make appointments with learning support, careers guidance, counsellors and safeguarding teams as and when required.

2.26   Many students are employed and the team heard several examples of how employers are involved in the design, development and revalidation of courses. Employers also work closely with the College through regular meetings and formal progress reports to improve the performance and professional potential of students. Employers are also able to inform College staff about the latest developments within industry.

2.27   The team saw evidence that Curriculum Managers' Business Reviews include a review of capital bids and resources as well as a resource audit. The capital bid document requires staff to assess the impact that the resource will have on students, while the replacement request documentation details how resources will be used within the curriculum. The SARs produced by the business support areas include details of activities and actions to support students. A cross-College SAR is also produced and this details the income for higher education provision. However, this report lacks a specific section on the experience of students on higher education courses.

2.28   Overall, the College has arrangements and resources in place to enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential and therefore the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B5: Student Engagement*

Findings

2.29   The College's Learner Involvement Strategy identifies ways in which it engages with all students. The College operates a Student Council for all students, while a bespoke Higher Education Student Forum started in May 2015. Course representatives should be elected at the start of the year. Biannual student satisfaction surveys provide opportunities for general student feedback and contribute to cross-College 'You Said We Did' initiatives. The College induction pack and Student Handbook signpost students to the role of the Student Council and the biannual surveys. Student feedback from all higher education courses is included within SARs and SERs, and course representatives are invited to attend SAR and SER panels (see also Expectation B8).

2.30   For the foundation degree, course representatives are elected according to the awarding body's procedures. All students on the course are given the opportunity to attend Staff-Student Liaison Committees (SSLCs) managed by the awarding body. Minutes of SSLC meetings are made available on the University's VLE. Course representatives can also attend Boards of Study and Monthly Management Meetings. Module feedback is gathered systematically via the VLE. Representation systems are outlined in the Foundation Degree Course Handbook. The College's student engagement strategies and procedures would enable it to meet this Expectation.

2.31   The review team examined the effectiveness of the strategies and procedures in place to engage students by examining documentation including the Learner Involvement Strategy, Student and Course Handbooks, induction pack, sources of student feedback, details of the student representation systems, and minutes and terms of reference of relevant groups and committees. The team also held meetings with teaching and support staff, senior staff, the Principal, students, and course representatives.

2.32   While the College has the structures in place for effective student engagement, the review team found some weaknesses in their operation, most notably for students on the Higher National courses. The review team acknowledges the role of the awarding body in managing the student representation system for foundation degree students, and also notes that this is effective, with students whom the team met giving examples of positive things such as the opportunities for prospective year one students to meet with current students, changes to assessment design, and an Action Research Day.

2.33   The College has no higher education Student Governor. The College recognised that the Student Council was largely being attended by further education students, and therefore introduced the Higher Education Student Forum in May 2015. Although two Student Fora have now been held, attendance by students has been low, with no Higher National students being in attendance at either meeting. In addition, students whom the team met, including course representatives, displayed little awareness of the role of the Forum. In addition, there is limited oversight by senior management of the impact or effectiveness of higher education student engagement strategies, with the focus to date being on the analysis of participation rates at Business Review meetings.

2.34   Students from all courses whom the team met provided examples of changes that had come about as a result of providing formal and informal feedback to tutors, including online submission of assignments, splitting group sizes, additional software and the Higher Education Study Zone. While students acknowledge the important role of informal feedback and the accessibility of their tutors, there remain inconsistencies in the opportunities for

students and course representatives to meet formally with course leaders and tutors. While feedback from students is considered as part of the SER and SAR processes, students have limited awareness of the role of student representation on the SER/SAR panels and are unable to describe its impact as a means of improving their learning experience. While students acknowledged that tutors want to help and improve their learning experience, some expressed a desire for student engagement opportunities to be more organised and systematic. The findings from paragraphs 2.34 and 2.35 lead the team to **recommend** that, by December 2016, the College ensures that higher education students engage more fully as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience, and that it monitors and evaluates the impact of student engagement.

2.35   Selection processes for course representation on the foundation degree work well, with representatives now voted for by their peers. However, the team noted inconsistencies in timeliness and the approach to electing Higher National course representatives. Course representatives whom the team met feel that the College should do more to inform them fully about the role, while some had yet to receive any formal training. Staff whom the review team met acknowledged the need for further training for all course representatives, and this was planned to take place over the coming weeks for those representatives elected this academic year. The team therefore **recommends** that, by October 2016, the College provides timely information and training to all higher education student representatives to equip them fully in their role.

2.36   The College currently lacks a systematic approach to gathering unit-level feedback for Higher National courses, but has recognised this weakness and has a plan to introduce it shortly. These findings support the affirmation made in paragraph 2.19.

2.37   Overall, the College does have ways to gather student views and there is evidence of changes being made as a result of this feedback. However, there remain weaknesses in the student representation system despite the introduction of initiatives such as the Higher Education Student Forum, where student attendance has thus far been low. The team makes two recommendations for the College to ensure that students engage more fully as partners in quality assurance and enhancement, and also provide timely information and training to representatives. The team also affirms the actions taken to gather unit-level feedback systematically on Higher National programmes. While the team acknowledges the challenges faced by Colleges in engaging fully those students who attend on an infrequent basis, the conclusion is that the Expectation is not met. The level of risk is moderate because of the weaknesses in the operation of the student representation system.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

2.38   The College's arrangements and processes for assessment are defined within its agreements with the awarding partners. The College has also developed its own Assessment Policy (see paragraphs 1.23-1.24 for further details). In addition, the College applies the University's procedures for the formal record of prior acceptance (RPA) for foundation degree students, although this is rarely necessary. For students on Higher National courses, the College follows its own recognition of prior achievement (RPA) procedure. For students who require support for their learning, the College consults as appropriate with either the University or Pearson to determine what measures should be put in place to support assessments.

2.39   Wherever possible, students submit assignments on the VLE. Staff are expected to assess and internally verify student work within 15 days, with provisional grades immediately reported back to the student on the VLE and recorded on the College's student record system in preparation for Assessment Boards. Staff provide feedback to students using standard structured cover sheets to assist the student in identifying what could be improved in future. A detailed, three-stage Academic Malpractice and Misconduct Policy is in place which outlines the procedures for the investigation of suspected malpractice and the penalties that may be imposed. Students have access to anti-plagiarism software as a developmental tool, which they may use before submitting assignments, and staff use the same software as an aid in detecting malpractice. The College's own processes and procedures for assessment and its approach to complying with its awarding partner regulations allow it to meet the Expectation.

2.40   The review team considered the effectiveness of the policies and procedures by examining documentation such as the Assessment Policy, awarding partner regulations, external examiner reports, annual SERs and SARs, and minutes of committees and meetings that have a role in assessment. The team also met with senior, academic and support staff, and with students.

2.41   The evidence showed the processes and procedures to be effective in practice. The College's Assessment Policy is updated regularly, and benefits from oversight by the Corporation's Teaching and Quality Committee. The Policy is detailed and comprehensive, aligns well with the requirements of both awarding partners, and staff find it to be a useful point of reference.

2.42   The team saw evidence that members of the foundation degree course team have attended relevant training, and receive support on assessment from the University. Staff teaching on Higher National courses attend development and training on verification and assessment, provided by the awarding organisation. Curriculum Managers also sample all assessment practice to ensure that awarding partner requirements are being met. On the foundation degree, workplace mentors make some contribution to the assessment of students. Employers whom the team met confirmed that this process is well managed by the College, with mentors receiving detailed briefings and being closely supported by College staff in their early contributions.

2.43   Evidence from external examiner reports confirms that assessments are well designed, provide appropriate differentiation, and permit students to demonstrate achievement properly. Detailed arrangements for initial moderation or internal verification are in place in order to confirm the validity of the assessment instrument. Likewise, after assessment, verification takes place to confirm and standardise the grades awarded. Staff whom the team met also confirmed that the College occasionally submits marked Higher National assignments to the BTEC national checking service to ensure parity of grading with national norms.

2.44   The team noted an isolated, albeit potentially serious, matter raised by one Higher National external examiner, in which a failure of internal verification processes had compromised academic standards. The review team learned that staffing shortages in one curriculum area had undermined the normal procedures, but that following receipt of the examiner's observations, swift remedial action had been put in place to ensure proper assessment of the student group concerned before the end of the academic year. The external examiner had subsequently expressed his satisfaction with the arrangements, and the College strengthened its procedures to oversee the assessment and verification processes by Curriculum Managers.

2.45   Evidence from students confirmed that assessment briefings are clear, and highlight the learning outcomes being assessed and the relevant grading criteria. Feedback to students is detailed, helpful in identifying aspects to be improved, and always available within the permitted 15 days. Furthermore, students confirmed that they were readily able to arrange one-to-one meetings for more personal specific feedback on their work. External examiners and students confirmed that the academic malpractice policy was in place, understood and properly implemented.

2.46   The processes for RPA are used sparingly but appropriately, for example where students have progressed from an HNC onto an HND, and the procedures are used to formally recognise a number of HNC units within the HND. In addition, the University has briefed all its partner colleges on the use of its own RPA procedure.

2.47   The team saw evidence that College representatives had attended the University's Boards of Examiners in accordance with the awarding body's regulations. The College's Assessment Policy requires Higher National course teams to convene internal Assessment Boards in accordance with the awarding organisation's requirements, and the review team saw evidence of these taking place and being properly constituted. The team also saw evidence that, while employers do not attend the Assessment Board, they may be invited to the associated progress review meetings for their employees.

2.48   The College operates appropriate procedures that enable equitable, valid and reliable assessment, including for the recognition of prior learning. They provide suitable opportunities for all students to demonstrate the intended learning outcomes for the award of credit or qualification. Procedures are detailed and well managed, and emerging issues are swiftly identified and resolved. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External Examining*
Findings

2.49   The College's awarding partners are responsible for the selection and appointment of external examiners. The terms of engagement and duties expected of the external examiners are set down by the awarding partners. For the foundation degree, the University of Reading receives and owns the external examiner reports which are then shared with the College. The University sets out in its Provider Handbook the requirements for external examiners to moderate student work, attend Examination Boards, and prepare a report that identifies recommendations for action and examples of good practice. Similarly, Pearson outlines the obligations for its external examiners with respect to the moderation of students' work and the preparation of reports.

2.50   The College monitors awarding body reports for standards of assessment, verification and moderation through its self-assessment process. For Higher National provision, the College uses an external examiner, moderator and centre assessment report which addresses the actions raised in external examiner reports. This includes a distribution list from the curriculum team to the Teaching and Quality Manager. The College's procedures and its adherence to those of its awarding partners would allow it to meet the Expectation.

2.51   The review team examined the effectiveness of these procedures in practice by examining a range of documentation including external examiner reports and associated responses, annual monitoring reports, minutes of relevant meetings where reports are considered, and information on the VLE. It also held meetings with students, teaching staff and senior staff.

2.52   Overall, the evidence showed the processes and procedures to be effective in practice. The team saw evidence that the College follows the procedures set out by its awarding partners in terms of considering and responding to external examiner reports. For example, for Higher National courses, the reports are considered by the course teams and, where necessary, an action plan is developed and subsequently discussed at Academic Board. The College produces an Academic Board summative report which provides an overview of outcomes for Quality in Teaching, Learning and Assessment. This report refers to external examiner reports and areas which were highlighted as 'red' (see also paragraph 2.44).

2.53   Students whom the team met were aware of the external examiner process, and the students on the foundation degree confirmed that they could access the external examiner report. However, the external examiner reports for Higher National courses are not routinely shared with students, nor are they available on the VLE. Higher National students whom the team met were aware that external examiners review their courses but they had limited awareness regarding the existence of reports and their role in improving the quality of teaching and learning. The team therefore **recommends** that, by July 2016, the College ensures that external examiner reports are shared with students on Higher National courses.

2.54   Overall, the role of external examiners is clear and well embedded in the quality assurance systems, and the College makes effective use of reports in the monitoring and review of higher education courses. The review team made one recommendation to share external examiner reports with students on Higher National courses. Despite this recommendation, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (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

2.55   The College has put monitoring processes in place in which an annual self-evaluation report (SER) is produced for each course. The performance of courses is further monitored through regular operational meetings between the Curriculum Managers and senior College management (see paragraphs 1.29 -1.31 for further details). In addition, the awarding partners have well defined systems in place, which are fully detailed in their regulations, handbooks and partnership agreements with the College. These systems ensure that the processes for the monitoring and review of programmes are implemented, and that the assurance and enhancement of the quality of learning opportunities takes place (see paragraphs 1.29-1.31 for further details). The College's own processes, and its adherence to those of its awarding partners, would enable it to meet the Expectation.

2.56   The team tested the effectiveness of the procedures by examining relevant documentation including SERs and SARs, minutes of committee meetings, external examiner reports, academic regulations, and partnership agreements. The team also held discussions with senior and academic staff, and students.

2.57   The evidence showed the processes and procedures to be effective in practice. The Policy for Ensuring Quality in the Curriculum does not define the monitoring and oversight processes for assuring the quality of student learning opportunities. Instead, these processes are itemised within the annual academic calendar. The policy is, however, clear on the need for the various stakeholders to elicit student views.

2.58   The course-level SERs are detailed and reflective, addressing among other matters course-level student achievement, recent developments in delivery, quality and standards, and information, and drawing on comprehensive data from the College management information system. Supporting information and evidence is collated within an associated course team file.

2.59   Students on the foundation degree provide formal feedback at the end of each module, which adds considerably to the quality of the SER, and has, for example, led to changes in module assessment regimes. While student views are elicited in wider student satisfaction surveys and through student contributions at meetings with the course team, the review team learned that the College has recognised the benefits of receiving feedback at unit level for Higher National courses, and was in the process of implementing plans to introduce an institution-wide method to gather student feedback on completion of each unit. These findings support the affirmation made in paragraph 2.19.

2.60   The curriculum-area SARs draw upon the higher education SERs and other material in order to synthesise an annual evaluation of each area. However, in conflating data from further and higher education courses, the curriculum-area SARs lose much of the richness contained in the higher education reports. However, the team did see evidence that the College is planning to introduce an institution-level higher education SAR, which will draw upon all the course SERs.

2.61   The college-level SAR predominantly discusses further education matters, and rarely addresses the higher education portfolio. Both curriculum area and institutional SARs are formally reviewed and agreed with teaching staff, employers and students. The College SAR is formally considered at both Academic Board and Corporation.

2.62 While institutional deliberative consideration of higher education matters is rare, this is mitigated by strong executive structures and procedures. The team saw evidence, for example, that learning walks and teaching observations by the leadership team produced a comprehensive picture of the quality of student learning experiences. The termly Business Review meetings address many matters typically contained within annual monitoring processes, outcomes inform the College's Business Managers' meetings chaired by the Principal, regular summaries on academic quality are made to the Academic Board and Corporation, and procedures are in place to bring management support to areas in particular need. Action plans emerging from the curriculum-area SARs are formally reviewed with Curriculum Managers three times a year by the Teaching and Quality Manager, and reports from external examiners are actioned immediately and monitored by managers. Regular cross-College meetings for all staff teaching on higher education courses considerably shorten lines of communication to staff.

2.63 Overall, the College's adherence to awarding partners' annual monitoring and periodic review processes, and its own quality assurance procedures, allows it to operate effective, regular and systematic processes for monitoring and review of higher education courses. The team references a previous affirmation concerning the actions taken to gather unit-level feedback from students on Higher National courses. Although institutional systems to oversee annual monitoring processes are executive rather than deliberative, they are nonetheless effective. Therefore, the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.64   The College and its awarding body have shared responsibility for handling student complaints on the foundation degree, while the latter retains overall responsibility for handling academic appeals. The procedures are outlined in the Course Handbook and via the University website. For Higher National courses, the College has shared responsibility for the implementation of complaints and appeals procedures. The College has its own Complaints Procedure and Assessment Appeals Procedure. Information regarding both processes is available in the induction pack and Student Handbook, and the Complaints Procedure is also accessible via the College website. The College also makes use of the induction process as a way of increasing student awareness of the appeals and complaints procedures. The College assesses student awareness of the complaints procedures via the biannual surveys. These processes would enable the College to meet the Expectation.

2.65   The review team tested the effectiveness of the procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints by examining documents such as the Course and Student Handbooks, induction pack, Complaints Procedure, Assessment Appeals Procedure, and feedback from student surveys, and through information on the College and University websites. The team also held meetings with teaching and support staff, and students.

2.66   The review team found that the procedures for academic appeals and student complaints work effectively in practice. Staff and students whom the team met confirmed that most issues are dealt with on an informal basis through dialogue between students and their tutors before the formal complaints procedure needs to be put in place. Indeed, only one formal complaint was made by higher education students during the academic year 2014-15. Students whom the team met were also clear about where to go for information if they wish to make a formal complaint, and clear about being informed of the complaints and appeals procedures during induction.

2.67   Appeals and complaints processes are clearly signposted in the Foundation Degree Course Handbook. While information for Higher National students is available in various places, the information concerning complaints and appeals procedures that is provided across Course Handbooks is inconsistent (see also Expectation C).

2.68   The team saw evidence that senior oversight of complaints is exercised through annual complaints reports, which include detailed analysis of all complaints and their outcomes.

2.69   The College has clear procedures in place for making complaints or appeals. Staff and students have a clear understanding of the procedures or where to find the information should they require it. Therefore, the team concludes that the Expectation 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

2.70   The College has responsibility for arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with organisations other than the awarding partners. Students on the foundation degree are required to be in employment in a childcare setting at the start of the programme. The Course Handbook outlines details of the course for students, including the role of the work-based mentor. The role of the work-based mentor, including the requirement to moderate at least one work-based assessment, is also set out in the Provider's Handbook and the Mentor and Student Handbook produced by the awarding body. For Higher National provision, due to the units delivered, there is no formal requirement for students to undertake any work-related learning. However, the majority of students are already employed and most are sent by employers. The procedures in place would enable the College to meet the Expectation.

2.71   The review team tested the College's arrangements for implementing and managing work-related learning opportunities by considering a range of documents and information, including handbooks and minutes of relevant meetings. The team also held meetings with academic and support staff, students and employers.

2.72   The review team found that the arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with organisations other than the awarding partners work effectively in practice. Staff and employers whom the team met confirmed that tutors on the foundation degree visit the workplace to carry out assessments and support student learning and the development of good practice. Furthermore, mentors are invited to the College to be inducted into their role. The College has a well established relationship with work-based mentors, enabling discussion of potential future students from their employment as well as dialogue on the benefits of this provision. The awarding body's Course Handbook for students and mentors includes clear templates for agreements between the workplace, student and College. The College also records discussions between mentors, students and link tutors on documentation provided by the University. Mentors whom the team met confirmed that they are supported in completing the workplace assessment and that there are assessment standardisation meetings with a College tutor.

2.73   Although there is no formal requirement for Higher National students to be in employment in order to complete their courses, the team did hear several examples of the close working relationship that the College has with local employers. For example, Engineering employers and staff whom the team met described how they work closely with the College to identify the units that should comprise the College's Higher National awards, and to monitor the progress of individual students.

2.74   The College has close working relationships and adequate arrangements in place with employers to ensure effective delivery of learning opportunities. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Findings

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

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.76   In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook. Nine of the 10 applicable Expectations are met. The risk to the quality of learning opportunities within these nine met Expectations is low for eight Expectations. However, Expectation B2 (Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education), while met, is associated with a moderate level of risk. Expectation B5 (Student Engagement) is not met, with a moderate level of risk.

2.77   The review team makes four new recommendations in quality of student learning opportunities which relate to the following: ensure that the status of higher education courses advertised across all media for prospective students is clearly specified (Expectation B2); ensure that higher education students engage more fully as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience, and that the College monitors and evaluates the impact of student engagement (Expectation B5); provide timely information and training to all higher education student representatives to equip them fully in their role (Expectation B5); and ensure that external examiner reports are shared with students on Higher National courses (Expectation B7).

2.78   The team makes one new affirmation regarding the actions taken to gather unit-level feedback systematically from students on Higher National courses (Expectations B3, B5 and B8).

2.79   The moderate risks in Part B indicate some weaknesses in the operation of part of the College's governance structure, and some shortcomings in terms of the rigour with which quality assurance procedures have been applied.

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

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Findings

3.1 The institutional agreement between the College and the University of Reading outlines responsibilities regarding the production of information provided for current and prospective students. The University of Reading is responsible for producing the programme specification and also the Provider's, Module and Mentor Handbooks. The College contributes to updating course information with final versions approved by the awarding body. The promotion of the course is the responsibility of the College. For Higher National courses, the College is required to produce tailored programme specifications to include a subset of information for students from the awarding organisation's definitive course documentation. These are made available to students on the VLE or in hard copy. The College is also responsible for the promotion of Higher National courses and for providing course information as required by the awarding organisation.

3.2 Overall, the College outlines its approach to marketing and assuring the quality of information in its Marketing Strategy and Marketing Policy and Procedure. Course leaders produce information that forms the basis of that made available via the website and other media. Course information produced for the website is subject to a three-stage sign-off process, with initial checks by the Curriculum Managers and the Marketing Team, and final spot checks being made by the Director of Students, Curriculum and Quality. A course approval process also supports the production of course information that is made publicly available via the website. Information in hard copy prospectuses is checked by the Director of Students, Curriculum and Quality in collaboration with the Marketing Team and the Teaching and Quality Manager. All higher education students receive a comprehensive Student Handbook. Prospective students and other stakeholders can research higher education course information via the College website, the awarding partner websites, and via full and part-time prospectuses. The College's arrangements for the production of information would enable it to meet this Expectation.

3.3 The review team tested the effectiveness of the College's arrangements for publication and assurance of information by exploring the availability and accuracy of information on the website, on the VLE, and in programme specifications, prospectuses and in Course Handbooks, and by examining the Marketing Strategies, Policies and Procedures. The team also held meetings with senior, academic and support staff, and students.

3.4 Overall, the review team found the procedures for checking and producing information about higher education provision to be effective in practice. The College complies with the awarding body's procedures with respect to the provision of comprehensive Course, Module and Mentor Handbooks for the foundation degree. In addition, the programme specification is clearly signposted in the Course Handbook and is accessible online. Both students and employers were complimentary about the information received during the course.

3.5 Students whom the team met confirmed that detailed course information, including unit, lecture and assessment details, is made available to them on the VLE or in hard copy, although they were unfamiliar with the concept of a programme specification. While the College's programme specification template includes the key information required, it was

found that some of those produced for Higher National courses do not comply fully with the awarding organisation's expectation for each named award to have its own unique programme specification. These findings support the recommendation in paragraph 1.14.

3.6   While Higher National students whom the team met confirmed that they receive information about learning outcomes, units and reading lists, there remain inconsistencies in content between handbooks for different Higher National courses, for example with regard to assignment rules and procedures, reading list information, and complaints and appeals (see also paragraph 2.67). While the review team is assured that the necessary information is available for students on each Higher National course, it also welcomes the College's plans to standardise course handbooks in the future in line with the Foundation Degree Course Handbook. Information on VLE sites is largely consistent and is subject to an ILT audit conducted by the Learning Resources Centre (LRC) Manager within the first half term of the academic year.

3.7   The team saw evidence that the College's prospectuses include some Higher National courses that are awaiting formal approval from the awarding organisation. Staff whom the team met confirmed that the College produces the full and part-time prospectuses primarily as marketing tools to support the gathering of labour market intelligence. The team was, however, assured that the College has adequate procedures in place once the prospective student makes contact to ensure that subsequent information, advice and guidance is clear and accurate. These findings support the recommendation made in paragraph 2.12.

3.8   Throughout the review process, the review team developed a view that the College's focus on marketing and the use of the full and part-time prospectuses as tools for gathering market intelligence had also contributed to a relaxed attitude towards the use of consistent course titles and references to awarding partner validation across promotional media. For example, the use of the foundation degree course title and references to the awarding body are inconsistent across the different media. In the art and design areas, similar inconsistencies in title and reference to the awarding organisation were found. While the team recognises that the website provides students with accessible course information displayed in a uniform layout, it also noted changes being made to improve consistency of content in web-based material following meetings held during the review visit. The team therefore **recommends** that, by May 2016, the College ensures consistent use of higher education course titles and reference to awarding partner validation across all media.

3.9   Overall, the team concludes that the College has adequate procedures for checking that information about its higher education provision is fit for purpose and trustworthy. Despite making one new recommendation and referencing two others, two of which stem largely from the College's focus on marketing and the use of prospectuses as tools for gathering market intelligence, the team concludes that, overall, the Expectation is met. However, the level of risk is moderate because of some shortcomings in terms of the rigour with which quality assurance procedures have been applied, and also a lack of clarity about responsibilities.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

3.10   In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The Expectation for this judgement area is met but the associated level of risk is moderate. The review team makes one new recommendation to ensure the consistent use of higher education course titles and reference to awarding partner validation across all media. The team also references two recommendations from Parts A and B: to ensure that the status of higher education courses advertised across all media for prospective students is clearly specified; and to produce separate programme specifications for each distinct Higher National award and title to meet fully the requirements of the awarding organisation.

3.11   Overall, the review team concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1 The College's Strategic Plan for Higher Education 2014-18 positions the higher education portfolio within the overarching College plan to achieve outstanding performance against a range of predetermined metrics. These include alignment with national higher education quality expectations and a focus upon achieving planned targets for recruitment, student achievement, 'value added', grades for teaching observation, student feedback, student success in the employment market, feedback from employers and the greater use of information technologies within the learning environment. The College oversees these metrics through its processes for the annual monitoring of quality and standards and through its normal executive leadership teams. These processes are explained more fully in paragraphs 1.29 -1.31. In addition, since its last QAA review, the College has established a series of regular meetings for all staff teaching on higher education courses. This was a deliberate step to share the College's higher education agenda as well as engendering a culture of enhancement across the teaching staff.

4.2 The College's draft Enhancement Policy is due to be implemented early in 2016, and will be reviewed and updated annually. It aligns itself primarily with the theme chosen annually for QAA Higher Education Reviews, in this case employability, and therefore it is intended to change its focus accordingly each year. The College's strategies and procedures would allow this Expectation to be met.

4.3 The review team evaluated the effectiveness of the strategies and procedures by examining the Higher Education Strategic Plan, the draft Enhancement Policy, meeting minutes, annual reports and other documents relating to the quality assurance and enhancement processes. The team also met the Principal, senior and academic staff, and students.

4.4 Overall, the College's strategies and procedures for enhancement work effectively. The College has strong relationships with local employers, and this was evident in links with professional bodies, effective recruitment of part-time students already in employment, short secondments of staff with employers, and the role of employers in shaping and reviewing the curriculum. The Strategic Plan envisages a managed expansion of the higher education portfolio, building upon these identified strengths.

4.5 While SARs have been used for some time, the introduction of the annual SERs for each higher education course was a new innovation for the academic year 2014-15, and was in itself a deliberate step having recognised the benefits of course-specific monitoring on the foundation degree. The SER template is detailed, and the team saw evidence of several articulate and reflective reports. In addition, both the student community and the College had found the process of writing a student submission for Higher Education Review useful. The team was informed that the College would like students to produce a similar written higher education student SER in future years, which would then contribute to the development of the new higher education SAR.

4.6 However, as noted in paragraph 2.61, in conflating data from further and higher education, the curriculum-area SARs lose much of their richness in the higher education reports. For example, the team read and heard of several examples of practice at course level that warranted wider dissemination but did not feature in the higher level reports, and were thus potentially unable to contribute to cross-College enhancement. The College is currently in the process of appointing a Higher and Professional Programmes Curriculum

Manager who, while not exercising line responsibility for the delivery of higher education in the College, will have strategic oversight for the development and coordination of the higher education portfolio. In future years, it is also intended that the higher education course SERs will contribute to a higher education SAR. This should enable the College to more systematically capture opportunities for cross-College enhancement.

4.7   While the College SAR is discussed at Academic Board each year, the Board has discussed good practice within reports from Curriculum Managers only once within the last three years. Discussion of higher education matters at Academic Board are rare, although the team learned that matters emerging from meetings of Course Leaders, Curriculum Managers or from annual monitoring would be identified and acted upon following the termly Business Review meetings with Curriculum Managers. It was clear to the team that the engagement of Course Leaders and Curriculum Managers in regular management meetings had led to enhancement, for example in the identification of the need for, and the provision of, additional specialist computing.

4.8   All higher education staff meet as a group every six weeks, and although more recently the gatherings have been used to prepare for HER, they have also provided some opportunity for College-wide sharing of good practice, examples including the development of the SER template, Course Leaders reviewing each other's draft SERs, and changes to assessment practice. Although in its infancy, the team considers that these regular meetings of teaching staff have the potential to become a powerful contributor to the enhancement of higher education provision. As the various developments outlined in paragraphs 4.6 - 4.8 are either at an early stage or are not yet fully effective, the team **recommends** that, by September 2016, the College systematically disseminates good practice to improve students' learning opportunities across the higher education provision.

4.9   The recently developed Enhancement Policy focuses principally upon the employability agenda. Being embryonic, the Policy has not yet had time to influence the academic calendar or staff behaviour. The team considers that, while the intention to alter its principal focus each year will usefully broaden the College's deliberate reflection, doing so might also overlook trends in other aspects of the student experience. As the Policy is new and there is currently little evidence of systematic monitoring and evaluation of enhancement taking place, the team **recommends** that, by December 2016, the College routinely monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of enhancement across the higher education provision.

4.10   Overall, the College has adequate processes in place for the management and quality assurance of its higher education courses, and these provide appropriate frameworks for enhancement of the student learning experience. Good practice is identified at course level, and is occasionally disseminated more widely in the College. The regular meetings of teaching staff could increasingly provide systematic opportunities for such dissemination to support executive actions by the College and Senior Management Teams. At a College level, quality assurance and enhancement matters relating to higher education are infrequently discussed at Academic Board, while the emerging plans to develop a higher education SAR, drawing among other contributions upon a student SER, may make a more deliberate contribution at institutional level. Despite this and the two recommendations, the team is satisfied that the College is taking deliberate steps at a provider level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities. Therefore, the Expectation is met. However, the level of risk is moderate because, while quality assurance and enhancement procedures are broadly adequate, there remain some shortcomings in terms of the rigour with which they are applied.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.11   In reaching its judgement about the enhancement of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The Expectation in this area is met but the level of risk is moderate. The team makes two new recommendations in this section: to systematically disseminate good practice to improve students' learning opportunities across the higher education provision; and to routinely monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of enhancement across the higher education provision.

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

5   Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1   The majority of programmes at the College are designed to support specific careers. The College has well established practices for working with employers. On the foundation degree, mentors support students in their work and there are regular visits from tutors to check on progress. Mentors are also invited to induction meetings with tutors. Foundation degree students whom the team met were clear about the progression route to the University of Reading and also spoke positively of how the course has given them the opportunity to observe other work settings.

5.2   The majority of students are employed so their studies are aimed at enhancing employability. The College has therefore involved employers in the development of Higher National courses. Higher National course teams also hold regular progress meetings with employers, many of whom are sending students on courses. Employers are also involved in the review of courses, and those whom the team met are well informed and enthusiastic about the benefits of the College's provision.

5.3   Employers whom the team met also confirmed that the Higher National provision has helped to fill skills shortages, and that students are able to use real projects which are part of the day-to-day business. Students whom the team met confirmed that the courses support the enhancement of their employability skills. The College is currently working with the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) to provide funds for a Research and Development 'Solutions Lab'.

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 30 to 33 of the Higher Education Review handbook.

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

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.