



Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of OLC (Europe) Ltd t/a Organisational Learning Centre

November 2016

Contents

About this review	1
Key findings.....	2
QAA's judgements about OLC (Europe) Ltd t/a Organisational Learning Centre	2
Recommendations	2
Affirmations.....	2
About OLC (Europe) Ltd	3
Explanation of the findings about OLC (Europe) Ltd.....	4
1 Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations.....	5
2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities.....	16
3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities	38
4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities	41
Glossary.....	44

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA). The review took place from 31 October to 3 November 2016 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Ms Deborah Trayhurn
- Professor Ian Robinson.

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

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

- makes judgements on
 - the setting and maintenance of threshold academic standards
 - the quality of student learning opportunities
 - the information provided about higher education provision
 - the enhancement of student learning opportunities
- 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 5.

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

¹ The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code

² QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us.

³ Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers): www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Educational-Oversight.aspx

Key findings

QAA's judgements about OLC (Europe) Ltd t/a Organisational Learning Centre

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at OLC (Europe) Ltd t/a Organisational Learning Centre.

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of 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.

Recommendations

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

By March 2017:

- work with its delivery partner to expedite the enrolment of students currently undertaking preparatory study at its London campus (Expectation B2)
- put in place learning resources and support arrangements for its London-based students to ensure an appropriate student experience (Expectation B4)
- make tailored programme specifications publicly available as required by its awarding organisation (Expectation C).

By Sept 2017:

- further develop student representation processes to increase student contribution to the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience (Expectation B5)
- ensure that review practices effectively use management information to improve learning opportunities across programmes (Expectation B8)
- adopt a coordinated approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities, including greater involvement of the student voice, to systematically improve the student experience (Enhancement).

Affirmations

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

- The actions being taken to align complaints and appeals processes with Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) best practice recommendations (Expectation B9)
- The introduction and ongoing review of a more rigorous admissions screening process to assure the ability of applicants to achieve an award (Expectation B2)
- The steps being taken to publish, once its future strategic direction has been determined, information which describes its mission, vision and overall strategy (Expectation C).

About OLC (Europe) Ltd

OLC (Europe) Ltd t/a Organisational Learning Centre (the College) is an independent provider of higher education based in Bolton, was established in 1998, and initially focused on education provision to international students in the oil industry.

It is accredited to deliver a range of business, management and engineering awards on behalf of Pearson Education, and finance management programmes on behalf of the Chartered Institute of Credit Management (CICM).

The College undertook a major expansion in 2013, recruiting over 800 UK students, mainly from widening access backgrounds. However, completion rates in this cohort proved to be low and in response, admission requirements were revised and other changes introduced.

QAA carried out a Review for Educational Oversight in 2014. This had positive outcomes, with a feature of good practice, and fourteen recommendations, including reference to policy development, committee record keeping and increased use of the student voice. The review team found that progress had been made, though some areas still warranted further development.

Explanation of the findings about OLC (Europe) Ltd

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

1.1 Ultimate responsibility for setting academic standards and ensuring that requirements of the relevant reference points are met lies with the College's awarding organisations, Pearson and the Chartered Institute of Credit Management (CICM). The College is approved by Pearson to deliver and assess Higher National and other courses, in accordance with the academic standards of awards defined by Pearson. Its relationship with CICM is somewhat narrower, restricted purely to the delivery of CICM's curriculum, CICM undertaking all aspects of assessment. In addition, the College has recently entered a delivery partnership with Stockport College, in which the College delivers and assesses Pearson programmes on behalf of Stockport College.

1.2 The College is responsible for maintaining the standards of the awarding organisations, and evaluating and maintaining the students' learning experiences. Detailed specifications for programmes are developed by the awarding organisations, and in each case the qualification is positioned at the appropriate level on the various national frameworks and aligns with the various subject benchmarks. For Higher National courses, the BTEC qualification specifications are written by Pearson, and the College is then expected to capture the 'local dimension' by making available its own tailored programme specifications.

1.3 The processes put in place by the awarding organisations ensure that the awards are correctly positioned at the relevant level of the FHEQ and QCF and are aligned with Subject Benchmark Statements, and would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.4 The review team considered the effectiveness of the College's implementation of awarding organisation practices and procedures by examining programme specifications, minutes of relevant meetings, awarding organisation regulations, and reports from external examiners. The team also held meetings with teaching and senior staff, including representatives from the College's delivery partner, Stockport College.

1.5 The Pearson Higher National curriculum includes a wide range of optional units, the provider either making an appropriate choice of modules to meet local needs, or seeking permission to design a limited number of local units. While the nature of the College's own provision with Pearson has remained broadly static for a number of years, the teaching team was engaged in selecting the most appropriate optional units for delivery this academic year (see also paragraph 1.25). The College has chosen to select from the wide range of choice offered within Pearson's specification rather than to develop local variants. For its Higher National provision, the College generates its own locally tailored programme specifications derived from Pearson's overarching specification, but contextualised by its own procedures and processes. The tailored programme specifications contain clear and relevant information regarding level and Subject Benchmark Statements and the review team considers that these met the requirements of the awarding organisation, although they appear not to be readily available to students (see paragraphs 1.20 and 3.6).

1.6 The evidence reviewed shows the procedures to be effective. Regular meetings of academic staff provide updates on changes to awarding organisation requirements and regulations, and staff have attended training and development sessions offered by the awarding organisations. Programmes are all subject to regular scrutiny by external examiners, appointed by the awarding organisations. Scrutiny of their reports confirm that the College maintains the appropriate academic standards.

1.7 While the awarding organisations 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 manages its own procedures for doing this effectively within its devolved responsibilities. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.8 The College's awarding organisations define academic standards and determine the award of credit for each programme. 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, including the BTEC procedures for standards verification and external examining.

1.9 The College has codified its various policies and procedures for both staff and students, including a teaching, learning and assessment policy; a grading policy; a policy and detailed procedures for internal verification; a staff teaching and learning handbook; and a student College Handbook. Tailored programme specifications for the College's higher education provision define the names of awards and the level and credit rating of their constituent modules.

1.10 The College has an established committee/meeting structure within which academic matters are considered and addressed. Assessment boards for Higher National provision are convened by the College to confirm that students have met the requirements of their award. The College's processes would enable it to meet the Expectation.

1.11 The review team considered the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by examining reports from external examiners, College policies, the College's agreement with its delivery partner, records of meetings of committees and assessment boards, and relevant BTEC guidance. The team also held meetings with academic and senior staff and students. The evidence reviewed shows the procedures to be effective.

1.12 The student handbook and the various policies and handbooks for staff provide an appropriate level of detail and address Pearson's expectations of providers. External examiners comment positively upon the thorough, well documented processes and the handbooks, and the team learned that the College audits its policies on a periodic basis to ensure continuing alignment with the Code of Practice for Higher Education and updates staff accordingly where change is considered necessary. The College's agreement to operate in partnership with Stockport College requires continuing alignment with the Code of Practice.

1.13 Policy is underpinned by regular staff meetings in which time is committed to standardising assessment and spreading good practice. Staff met by the team demonstrated their understanding of where to find, and how to use, the relevant documentation. Students confirmed that the College Handbook and the virtual learning environment (VLE) provide detail of relevant procedures and policies.

1.14 All academic staff, regardless of site, are invited to Academic Committee's Teaching and Learning Review (TeaL) meetings. In addition, a weekly operations meeting of senior staff provides the necessary executive functions. Monthly meetings of the Academic Committee address most academic matters, referring matters of principle or detailed deliberation to the termly TeaL meetings. Annual Programme Review (APR) meetings reflect upon programme performance holistically, whereas unit and programme assessment boards

(UAB and PAB) consider student performance in specific units and programmes respectively. Programme Committees provide opportunities for programme teams to meet, to engage with students and to manage the delivery of a particular programme.

1.15 The awarding organisations 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. 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 (A2.2): 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

1.16 The College provides definitive records, in the form of programme and unit/module specifications, for all of its higher education courses. Unit and module specifications are available on the VLE and in the form of unit handbooks or guides. Students on Higher National programmes are additionally given access to the detailed Pearson programme and unit information. For Higher National programmes, it is the responsibility of the College to produce tailored programme specifications for each award; it has generated programme specifications which include, among other topics, programme aims, learning outcomes, assessment methods, and reference to Subject Benchmark Statements and the appropriate FHEQ levels.

1.17 The College centrally maintains student records, both at module and programme level, reports from which are used to support decisions at assessment boards, generate student progress transcripts and support personal tutor activities. As the recent cohorts of students recruited under the auspices of the College's delivery partnership with Stockport College progress, the locally generated data will similarly inform Stockport College's assessment boards.

1.18 The College's production of definitive course documentation, which constitutes key reference points for the delivery, assessment, monitoring and review, together with its implementation of a central College-wide student record system, would enable the College to meet this Expectation.

1.19 The review team evaluated the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by examining programme specifications, course handbooks, the student record system, records of assessment boards, external examiners' reports, and the VLE and website. In addition, the team met senior, teaching and support staff, and students. Overall, the evidence reviewed shows the practices and procedures to be effective.

1.20 Locally produced programme specifications align with Pearson's requirements, containing comprehensive detail. However, they have yet to be made available to prospective or current students (see paragraphs 1.5 and 3.6). While not aware of the purpose or availability of programme specifications, students did confirm that detailed programme information had informed induction activities, that the awarding organisation's qualification specification was readily available, and that detailed unit information was made available either on the VLE or in hard copy.

1.21 External examiners comment that assessment records are secure and effective, and that there are appropriate and robust procedures for registration and certification. The minutes of UABs contain detailed and accurate records of student performance. Protocols to transfer data securely from the College to Stockport College have not yet been required but are in the process of being developed.

1.22 Personal electronic progress transcripts of are issued to students so that they are able to monitor their own progress, and student grade and submission profiles are available

to staff and personal tutors to assist in developing and monitoring personal development plans.

1.23 Within the regulatory requirements of its awarding organisations, the College fulfils its responsibilities for producing definitive records. Information is made available to students in a variety of ways, and while students do not have visibility of locally generated programme specifications, they can access the necessary information from other sources. 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 (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

1.24 The College works with two awarding organisations, offering Pearson Higher National programmes in Business and Engineering for levels 4 to 7 and CICM Finance Management programmes at levels 3 to 5. The awarding organisations are regarded as solely responsible for the approval of programmes and their constituent units, and for providing programme and unit specifications.

1.25 The College does not offer any locally devised units on the Pearson programmes, but selects the specialist units and approves the delivery of the units from the awarding organisation's specifications at the inception of the programme. This is the responsibility of programme managers and Unit Lead Tutors.

1.26 These approaches recognise the College's responsibilities for approving programmes and would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.27 The review team considered the effectiveness of these arrangements by reviewing documentation, including awarding organisation specifications and records of meetings, and through meetings with students and staff.

1.28 The College does not have specific processes for designing and developing programmes and considers that current arrangements with its awarding organisations place responsibility for development of awards on these awarding organisations. The team found evidence of the College's engagement with awarding organisation specification revisions, including committee discussions and progression pathway alignment.

1.29 A study centre arrangement has been operating with Stockport College with the HND Business provision, with delivery of this undertaken since January 2016. This arrangement uses programme structures arranged and delivered by the College.

1.30 The awarding organisations have responsibility for positioning the qualifications at suitable levels, creating and aligning the programme outcomes with relevant qualification descriptions, qualification characteristics and Subject Benchmark Statements. Therefore, the College's responsibilities in respect of Expectation 3.1 are limited.

1.31 The College uses the awarding organisations' approaches to managing programme development. These protocols cover reference points for the FHEQ, programme outcomes and credit values in order to ensure that the programme meets the required standards. The College therefore meets its limited role for designing and developing provision by working with the awarding organisations, so the Expectation is met and the 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

1.32 The College operates assessment processes following regulations and guidance provided by its awarding organisations. CICM arranges assessment externally, so the College is responsible for formative assessment only on these programmes. Overall responsibility for the award of credit for Pearson provision is monitored by Pearson through the external examiner process.

1.33 The arrangements in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.34 The review team reviewed the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by meetings with the Director of Academic Affairs, Programme Leaders (including those working with Stockport programmes), students, and academic support staff in addition to reviewing College documents and assessment meeting records.

1.35 On Pearson programmes the College's responsibilities include the setting, marking and internal verification of assessments that test achievement of learning outcomes. Pearson supplies these learning outcomes and ensures that these are aligned with UK threshold standards. Assessment briefs for units are based upon Pearson templates and the College operates an internal verification process, following Pearson guidelines, for approving assessment briefs and ensuring that learning outcomes are met when an assignment is awarded a pass grade or better. Feedback is provided to students on a template provided by Pearson.

1.36 UABs approve unit results and these are held termly. The remit of PABs' activity is prescribed. PABs and UABs are operated according to the College's procedures, which monitor and report student achievement. These are held following completion of delivery of all of the units and meet Pearson guidance. Credits are claimed on completion of each unit for students completing the unit successfully.

1.37 The review team found that the College's processes and policies in place to review unit achievements and consider the programme overall are broadly effective. They comment on work and achievement across the different sites operated by the College. The Pearson external examiner reports conclude generally that College processes align with their expectations. Pearson, as the awarding organisation, samples all units before the programme results are released for awards. The College has no independent operation in this respect.

1.38 The review team concludes that the College works in partnership with its awarding organisations and operates successful practices which ensure that credit and qualifications are awarded only where learning outcomes, and the academic standards of its awarding organisations, have been met. Therefore 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

1.39 Pearson, as the awarding organisation, has ultimate responsibility for ensuring that academic standards are achieved when making qualification awards. The monitoring and review of awards and academic standards is undertaken by Pearson through its external examiner process and by using an annual reporting activity on College Programme Management.

1.40 The College operates UAB and PAB to monitor and internally approve student unit and programme achievement. The Academic Committee has overall responsibility for monitoring programmes and academic standards. This Committee discusses matters such as the outcomes from UAB meetings, awarding organisation and quality assurance matters. The College operates an internal verification process and an Annual Programme Review at the end of each academic year.

1.41 These approaches and arrangements enable the College to meet the Expectation.

1.42 To review the effectiveness of these practices, the review team examined documents from the various review activities, particularly the internal annual programme and unit reviews, checklists of responsibilities and the Pearson Annual Management Review, and discussed their operation with staff from all levels of the College operation and senior staff from Stockport College.

1.43 Student work is sampled in an internal verification process. Reports from the units, assessment and internal verification processes are reviewed.

1.44 The College does not have an internal process for periodic review, but refers to its responsibility to engage with Pearson's review activities. The review team found no evidence of major issues identified through the external examiners' annual reports.

1.45 The College operates monitoring and review processes to meet its awarding organisations' requirements. These demonstrate achievement of UK threshold standards and confirm that the academic standards of the awarding organisations are maintained. Therefore the Expectation is met and the 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

1.46 Pearson are responsible for arranging external scrutiny of academic standards and frameworks, as the awarding organisation. This is undertaken through programme development, validation and review processes. Pearson operates external examiner oversight, which provides independent oversight at key stages of setting academic standards through learning outcomes, and maintaining academic standards through sampling students' assessed work. The College acts upon the external examiner reports as appropriate in order to ensure that College arrangements meet the expectations of the awarding organisation.

1.47 The College appoints staff who have experience of teaching and assessing at other higher education institutions. Some of these staff currently hold external examiner appointments at other higher education providers. Staff are encouraged to maintain links with their professional bodies.

1.48 These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.49 Review of the records of these practices and discussion with staff enabled the review team to consider how far these processes work in practice. The review team met the Managing Director, senior management team (SMT) members, programme teams and senior staff from Stockport College to discuss operations.

1.50 The main ways in which independent and external expertise is used to advise on the meeting of UK threshold academic standards in delivery and achievement are through exchange with the awarding organisation and the operation of the external examiner (Standards Verifier) systems provided by Pearson. There is little externality beyond Pearson's role currently evident at the College. There is no external membership on the Board of Directors and no formal mechanism for involving external staff in activity which will impact on programmes. The team heard that staff are developing approaches to extend their external experiences and engagement through teaching placements; other work experience programmes; and professional body membership (see also paragraphs 2.29 and 2.30). This engagement with external organisations provides an opportunity for staff development and exposure to alternative viewpoints. The recent partnership developments with Stockport College provide a further opportunity to develop external engagement.

1.51 The review team concludes that independent and external expertise to set and maintain standards is met via the awarding organisations' own arrangements. Therefore the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

1.53 All the Expectations are met and the level of risk in each is low. No features of good practice were found, nor were any recommendations or affirmations made.

1.54 The College delivers programmes on behalf of Pearson Education and CICM. It discharges its responsibilities appropriately, drawing on external advice and support, and also from staff and students. The College takes steps to ensure that its activities are aligned with all relevant external reference points.

1.55 The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its awarding organisations **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 organisations, Pearson and CICM, have overall responsibility for programme design, development and approval. These awarding organisations are responsible for ensuring that, as an approved centre, the College operates its programmes according to their requirements. Pearson checks this through its Annual Management Review (AMR) and external examiner processes. The College relies on awarding organisations' power to position programmes within the FHEQ, set levels and credit values of individual units, align course content with subject benchmarks, and carry out any other form of alignment with UK threshold standards. The College does not have in place formal policies and procedures for the approval of new programmes or the amendment of existing programmes.

2.2 These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.3 To consider the effectiveness of these arrangements, the review team met senior staff from both the College and Stockport College, students, and academic and professional teams and reviewed documentation including collaboration agreements, checklists of responsibilities, AMRs, meeting minutes and programme specifications.

2.4 The decision to offer new programmes at the College or to develop partnership activity with another higher education provider is made by the Board of Directors, in line with current business objectives. The Academic Committee considers proposals and tasks the TeaL meetings with detailed development.

2.5 The College, as an approved Centre, has some devolved responsibilities from awarding organisations with respect to programme design and development, including, for Pearson programmes, the choice of non-prescribed units. This results in the College producing its own version of a Pearson HND programme specification. Programme Managers have responsibility for the oversight of programmes within their remit, with the Director of Academic Affairs having oversight for programme and unit development.

2.6 The College has recently begun partnership arrangements with Stockport College following due diligence consideration by the College and regular discussions to ensure effective setup and early operation of the HND Business specification at the College sites. The partner responsibilities placed on the College are to meet regulatory requirements and deliver education, training and consulting, including customer satisfaction processes. The review team heard that Stockport College is undertaking a review of its own and partner policies and practices to ensure that full alignment and benefits have been gained by Stockport College from the College's experience and approaches to learning and teaching. The programme offered to Stockport College students has recently been revised to reflect the new Pearson Business specification. This development reflected a major change that was reviewed by the Academic Committee and specific actions passed to the operational TeaL, which held a special meeting to consider the changes. The review team noted that in

undertaking this development the Academic Committee minutes were relatively sparse, and did not record detailed discussions around employer engagement and progression opportunities in any depth. The College monitors progress of developments of this type using operational meetings and audits.

2.7 The review team found that there was no definitive document articulating the rationale for the structure of the new Pearson HND Business programme for teaching from September 2016. This would demonstrate how the structure for the new programme met Pearson expectations, including around level progression, employability and progression. Students are provided with a list of units comprising the new specification and the detailed programme specification document provided by Pearson to centres. This information has not been provided in a contextualised document to meet the Pearson specification guide (see also paragraph 3.6).

2.8 In discussion, staff showed awareness of approaches to setting academic standards and the role of the sector frameworks such as the FHEQ. Unit Lead Tutors are identified in advance of delivery. Lead Tutors are responsible for developing unit learning materials, establishing schemes of work, materials for delivery by sessions, assessment plans and associated matters. These developments are overseen by the Programme Manager. Practices have developed to ensure greater consistency and improved interaction between staff across sites and between designers and staff intending to deliver and assess the designed materials. This includes use of a minimum specification to provide materials for the student VLE. Further developments of programme practices signalled by changes at the awarding organisation, such as the need for a student development policy indicated by Pearson, are not clearly evident.

2.9 The College undertakes provision design and development in a limited manner. Development undertaken regarding the new Business specification has been basic to date. As the College relies on its awarding organisations, the College maintains that the scope for use of design, development and approval processes for developing provision is limited. Awarding organisations provide feedback to the College through the AMR process and they consider that the College complies with this expectation. The College fulfils its responsibilities for design, development and approval of learning materials in full.

2.10 Overall the team confirms that the Expectation is met and that the 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

2.11 The College has devolved responsibility for the recruitment, selection and admission of students to its Higher National courses, with the procedures articulated in a series of associated policies: Learner recruitment, Registration and Certification; Accreditation of Prior Learning; Admissions; and Public Information. The procedures have been developed to align with the principles of the Schwartz Report, and subsequent to entering into their recent delivery partnership, processes have been further refined to align with those of Stockport College.

2.12 Information for prospective students is predominantly made available through the websites of both the College and the delivery partner, but also includes hard copy promotional material and prospectuses (see also paragraphs 3.2 and 3.6).

2.13 The procedures followed are clearly documented, guiding staff through the various stages of enquiry, shortlisting, interview, testing, offering a place on a programme, and generation of student records.

2.14 Applications are initially assessed against the academic entry criteria, and appropriate candidates are interviewed. Consistency of decision making is assured through staff training, the use of a small team of interviewers, a formal structure to the interview, the maintenance of interview records and confirmation of certification of previous academic achievement. Offer letters are signed only by core members of the admissions team, either on behalf of the College or, with respect to students registering with Stockport, on behalf of its delivery partner. Unsuccessful applicants are able to appeal the decision using the College's standard appeals process (see Expectations B9 and C).

2.15 These processes would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.16 The review team examined the effectiveness of the recruitment, selection and admissions policies and procedures by analysing documentation including the Learner Recruitment, Registration and Certification Policy; the Accreditation of Prior Learning Policy; the Admissions Policy; and the Public Information Policy; and by examining the VLE and website. The review team also held meetings with senior, teaching and support staff, and students.

2.17 The admissions processes are coordinated by a core team of staff, described in some documents as the Admissions Committee, ensuring that procedures are adhered to, run smoothly, and meet the requirements of both the awarding organisation and the College's delivery partner. The review team learned that the College has previously used external agents to assist in the recruitment of students. The procedures used to identify, select, appoint and monitor agents appear to be fit for purpose.

2.18 Students and staff met by the team affirmed that the College's current processes and procedures for admissions work smoothly. They confirmed the value of the individual

interview and students indicated that they gained an accurate understanding of their course prior to commencement. Candidates who are not able to show achievement of the appropriate numeracy and literacy thresholds are required to undertake diagnostic tests and are signposted accordingly to further study, assessment and certification. The review team also learned that procedures are in place for supporting students with additional needs. Students undertaking programmes under the auspices of Stockport College generally register during a visit to the College, during which they are also introduced to the additional learner resources and support services available at Stockport College.

2.19 The College identified serious shortcomings in student performance and achievement a number of years ago, and its investigations indicated a number of issues regarding the recruitment of appropriate students. A significant number of students were recruited who were inadequately qualified, resulting in poor engagement with the curriculum and low completion rates. Subsequent changes to the recruitment and admissions procedures both address the identified weaknesses and align procedures with those of its delivery partner. The College now rarely invokes its Accreditation of Prior Learning (APEL) policy, requires secure evidence of academic qualifications used for admission, interviews all candidates, and operates a detailed tracking system for applications. Following a hiatus in recruiting and the development of its new delivery partnership with Stockport College, recruiting to HND programmes recommenced in January 2016. Current students are carefully monitored, and a significantly enhanced approach to student support has also been introduced (see paragraph 2.48 for detail). Acknowledging that it is too early in the academic cycle to review the impact of these changes, the team **affirms** the introduction and ongoing review of the more rigorous admissions screening process to assure the ability of applicants to achieve an award.

2.20 The team met a group of students from the College's London site who understood themselves to be studying on a Higher National programme, and had recently completed their first HN assessment. It transpired that the College's partner had adopted the position that the London site was not formally approved for delivery, and regarded the students to have been recruited to a preparatory programme with the opportunity to register on the HND once, and if, the site had been approved. Further investigation clarified that the College and its delivery partner had been exploring extension of their agreement to include delivery on the London site for many months, during which procedures had been agreed to recruit and enrol students onto Stockport College programmes. It was evident from correspondence and meeting records that staff from both organisations believed that recruitment had been authorised. In discussions, staff from both organisations appreciated that the misunderstanding potentially disadvantaged the London students, who legitimately expected to be able to complete their award. There was a clear intent from all concerned to expedite a solution, and to put arrangements in place so that students were able to continue studying on the programme they believed themselves to have started. The team therefore **recommends** that the College works with its delivery partner to expedite the enrolment of students undertaking preparatory study at its London campus.

2.21 Overall, the review team found that the policies and procedures for recruitment, selection and admission work effectively and concludes that the Expectation is met. However, the level of risk is considered moderate due to both the need to review its new recruitment and admissions procedures and also the recommendation for the College to work with its delivery partner to expedite the enrolment of students undertaking preparatory study at its London campus.

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

2.22 The College has in place a number of policies, strategies and operational practices relating to the development of teaching and learning activities, including the E-learning Policy and Strategy; the Grading Policy; the Homework Policy; Internal Verification Policies and Procedures; the Staff Development Policy; the Staff Observation Policy; the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy and Strategy; and the Teaching and Learning Handbook. Between them they define the College's arrangements for the development of learning opportunities and the associated support for staff. The College Handbooks for students and the College/Student Agreement share the College's approaches to teaching and learning with its students.

2.23 The Director of Academic Affairs is responsible for the quality of teaching and overseeing learning, teaching, and the student experience within the College. He carries overarching responsibility for the annual review of academic programmes. Programme Managers have overall operational responsibility for the effective delivery and assessment of awards and Unit Leaders are responsible for ensuring the production of teaching material, coordinating the teaching for their units, and managing unit assessment.

2.24 The College has an induction programme for new teaching staff, and also appoints mentors to support new teachers. A mandatory programme of staff development is in place, a record of staff continuing professional development (CPD) is maintained, and staff performance is routinely and formally reviewed.

2.25 The College's processes would allow it to meet the Expectation.

2.26 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, external examiner reports, annual programme monitoring reports, course handbooks, and minutes of relevant committee meetings. The team also held meetings with senior, teaching and support staff.

2.27 The College's induction programme for new teaching staff works effectively, and staff the review team met valued the support offered by mentors who are experienced managers and practitioners. The Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy gives a comprehensive overview of the College's approach to teaching, learning and staff development. It is reinforced by statements in the Teaching and Learning Handbook and the College's tailored programme specifications. The Staff Handbook includes details of induction and appraisal. Overall, the various policies and strategies are comprehensive, fit for purpose and meet the requirements of the awarding organisations.

2.28 While there is no formal policy or framework to regulate the recruitment and selection of staff, the College aspires to recruit staff with an appropriate academic experience and qualification. Meetings with staff and scrutiny of both reports from external examiners and staff curricula vitae demonstrated that staff are appropriately qualified and experienced to teach in higher education.

2.29 Recently appointed teaching staff are required to undertake an Initial Professional Development Programme and encouraged to undertake a postgraduate teaching qualification. All academic staff are encouraged to seek professional recognition or qualified teacher status through bodies such as the Higher Education Academy or the Society for Education and Training. The review team learned that the College provides placement opportunities for students undertaking formal training to qualify as teachers in further education, and was able to confirm that a number of placement trainees had progressed to employment at the College on completion of their training.

2.30 The Staff Development Policy indicates that 'Staff development at the College supports staff in developing the skills, behaviour and knowledge they need...and that... all staff should also be engaged in continuous learning to enhance their performance in their roles'. The review team confirmed that staff are expected to identify personal development needs, both pedagogic and discipline-based. These are prioritised and supported accordingly. Staff, both full and part-time, reported that all reasonable requests were supported, and that staff were currently being fully funded on master's and doctoral-level study. In addition to this 'demand-led' approach, the review team learned of College-led training initiatives in assessment, pedagogy, and awarding organisation procedures, among others, delivered both in-house and by attendance at external courses. A number of staff have been supported to undertake a level 7 programme in Strategic Management and Leadership.

2.31 Staff informed reviewers that they regularly meet in 'informal skill sharing sessions' following their regular Academic Committee Meetings to explore new initiatives including, among others, the introduction of in-class group work, the use of plagiarism-detection software and the pilot scheme for grading student work online; understand changes to national and awarding organisation frameworks; share practice; undertake assessment standardisation; and develop new procedures and approaches to their teaching. The College is alive to the challenges of maintaining a consistent College-wide approach to teaching, learning and assessment; staff from all sites are invited to Academic Committee and Teaching and Learning (TeaL) meetings and staff from the Bolton site visit London to conduct staff training on a regular basis. All assessment grading is conducted by a core team at the Bolton site.

2.32 The College operates a process of teaching observation. Peer observations are used to support staff and spread good practice, whereas observations by senior staff form part of the appraisal process. Formal appraisal of staff takes place twice a year, following which the College conducts a training needs analysis to inform the subsequent staff development programme.

2.33 The College has effective staff induction, development, teaching observation and appraisal processes in place. This enables staff to maintain currency in both pedagogic and discipline-specific areas. 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

2.34 The College has a number of policies in place that define the College's arrangements for the support and development of students. These include the Student Learner Development Policy; the Student Support Policy; the E-Learning Policy and Strategy; the Homework Policy; the Reasonable Adjustment and Special Consideration; the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy; the Teaching and Learning Strategy; the Equal Opportunities Policy; and the Disability Strategy. The various policies and strategies articulate the College's aims to provide consistent and flexible systems and adequate resources to support teaching and learning, including for those students from diverse backgrounds and with additional learning needs. The College Handbooks for students and the formal College/Student Agreement provide the formal mechanism to signpost these arrangements to students.

2.35 All students are allocated a personal tutor and receive an induction to the College and their programme, a student handbook, and separate guidance for each unit studied. The Director of Academic Affairs exercises oversight of the student experience, and is assisted by Programme Managers.

2.36 The College is small, and does not have a large infrastructure of support services. Students receive structured support in dedicated classroom sessions to develop their academic skills and employability, as well as both academic and pastoral support through their personal tutors. Several administrative staff also carry responsibility as student welfare officers. There is a small library at each teaching site, with wireless connectivity for student access to email and the internet, and students have access to printing and a limited number of desktop computers in each delivery centre. The College operates its own VLE to support students. Students registered through the partnership with Stockport College have access to all student services and resources on its Campus, including its VLE, student support, finance, library, and counselling. Staff teaching on the Stockport College courses have similar access to the learning resources.

2.37 The processes the College has in place would allow it to meet the Expectation.

2.38 The review team tested the effectiveness of the College's arrangements and resources by scrutinising relevant documents relating to its 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.

2.39 The review team found that the procedures for implementing, monitoring and evaluating arrangements and resources work effectively.

2.40 The various policies and strategies were reflected in the key messages contained within the Student College Handbooks, which were readily available on the VLE, and appear to be the students' principal source of regulatory information, although students informed reviewers that their personal tutors and teaching staff were always available to give or signpost the relevant information. Unit-level student information is clear and comprehensive.

2.41 The Learner Development and Student Support Policies lay out in detail the College's approach to developing students as learners and providing additional

non-academic support. Students and external examiners comment that tutors provide strong motivation and support. The Reasonable Adjustment Policy gives guidance to entitlement and procedures for students with disabilities, in order to provide the equality of opportunity enshrined within the Equal Opportunities Policy and the Disability Strategy. The review team learned that while the College does not provide dedicated professional support staff to assess the needs of students presenting with specific learning difficulties, students have access to facilities at Stockport College. In addition, staff indicated both that one member of the academic team has expertise to gather sufficient diagnostic intelligence to refer the student for professional evaluation, and also that the College has always been able to accommodate any adjustments thus recommended. The College reviews and updates its policies and strategies on a regular basis.

2.42 The student induction programme is comprehensive, addressing, among other topics, health and safety, prevention and safeguarding matters, the programme structure and the basic principles of academic writing. Students are introduced to the careers and employability development programmes, assessment workshops, critical writing skills days and ICT development sessions. Students confirmed that the induction programme, together with the various student handbooks and unit materials, provided sufficient programme information.

2.43 The review team learned that the College considers access to the internet essential for learning, not only for access to the VLE, but for communication with students and to enable staff to use social media in their teaching. Appropriate policies have been put in place to regulate unacceptable use. With effect from September 2016, all new Higher National students have been given tablet devices in order to make better, interactive and immediate use of technology in the classroom. Staff have been exploring the use of the Pearson HN Global resources for students. Operational IT support is provided by non-specialist College staff, with contractor backup as required.

2.44 The E-learning Policy and strategy explains that the VLE is intended to support the classroom teaching programme. Both students and staff report that the VLE has become an essential element of the learning experience. While achieving the delivery partner's minimum expectations for VLE content, staff acknowledge that it is currently used largely as a repository for learning materials, but that the more sophisticated features available on the delivery partner's VLE will encourage more imaginative use of the system.

2.45 The College makes use of proprietary software for the detection of plagiarism, both to assist in the development of students' writing skills, and to minimise opportunities for academic malpractice. The College believes that there has been a notable positive impact following its introduction.

2.46 Students were aware that they had access to both the College's and Stockport College's learning and support resources. However, the students studying at the College's London site were, at the time of the review, yet to be enrolled with Stockport College (see paragraph 2.20). The College had taken steps to provide the students with soft copies of all material lodged on the VLE, but the students lacked opportunities to access wider resources, and were thus not receiving the broader support opportunities afforded to their Manchester-based peers. The team therefore **recommends** that the College puts in place learning resources and support arrangements for its London-based students to ensure an appropriate student experience.

2.47 That apart, external examiners and students confirm that classroom, library and IT facilities are appropriate.

2.48 Several years ago the College identified emerging issues with student retention, progression and completion (see paragraph 2.19). This resulted in a wide review of student support mechanisms, and the introduction of the personal tutor system with timetabled tutor interventions. Students have access to staff each week to access personal support and development activities and to develop their own individual learning plans. In addition to the scheduled personal tutorials where active tracking and monitoring takes place, the College has introduced assessment workshops, critical writing skills days, ICT support sessions, and programmes to develop academic writing skills, as well as scrolling electronic noticeboards which can be continually updated.

2.49 The College makes use of feedback questionnaires to elicit student input to each unit and reviewers learned of examples of changes to assessment to enhance student learning. The introduction of re-invigorated student meetings seems to be eliciting helpful feedback. External examiners state that feedback to learners is clear.

2.50 Interventions have been put in place to address English language issues, student retention and progression. In addition, a programme of debates has been organised to develop a broader cultural understanding among the student community. The review team learned of an increasingly robust approach to supporting activities and engagement with continuing students, and there have been indications of early success.

2.51 In 2015, the College introduced a student employability initiative. The College has now put formal careers development and employability programmes in place for the students, and since January 2016, new students have had access to Stockport College's careers services. A number of students opt to break their studies to gain work experience, and the College supports them in seeking appropriate placements.

2.52 The College has arrangements and resources in place to enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. Arrangements at the London site are yet to fully stabilise and so the team **recommends** that the College puts in place learning resources and support arrangements for its London-based students to ensure an appropriate student experience. Overall the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Moderate

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

2.53 The College's approach to student engagement is delivered through direct staff interaction with groups and cohorts of students and by the contribution of elected student representatives for each programme and cohort. The College encourages the groups to identify at least two student representatives per class.

2.54 These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.55 Meeting records, induction reports, evaluations were examined and meetings held with students, and staff from the College and Stockport College to test this operation in practice.

2.56 Student representatives are provided with a Roles and Responsibility Sheet on which they are briefed verbally. Student representation activity is introduced in induction meetings. The College considers that this enables newly elected student representatives to understand their role and for the whole class to understand how meetings are held. Student representatives self-manage their interaction with their groups. Representatives coordinate class meetings themselves to discuss any issues that are necessary to raise.

2.57 The College has a formal system to gather feedback from students on completed unit review activity and reports the findings at TeaL meetings. Student representatives engage in the Programme Committee as part of the College's deliberative committees. Review of engagement practices takes place through the Annual Programme Review.

2.58 Student meetings are scheduled regularly, approximately every three months, either as site meetings for the whole student group, or as programme meetings. These meetings enable interaction with students to give the College direct feedback of their experiences. The College has acknowledged that students do not readily understand the role of the Programme Committee and their contribution to these meetings, which are not part of the deliberative committee practices. This was an issue identified in the 2015 QAA Annual Monitoring report and the review team found that there is a cautious approach to engaging students in full deliberative activity. Examples of PCM minutes show these to be informal meetings with a focus on timetable changes and tutor allocations with little wider coverage. Meetings are attended by the Programme Manager and Directors, with few active teaching staff otherwise present. The team learned that meetings lack formality and that records are sparse; it would be difficult for non-attendees to gain a sense of discussions. Presently students do not have opportunity to meet across sites and engage together in representation development. Formal training for student representatives is not available, though the review team heard that this may form part of the developing future offer through partnership with Stockport College.

2.59 While student representative systems have been developing at the College, representatives are not members of the Academic Committee or Teaching and Learning Review meetings, which are deliberative committees with responsibility for oversight of quality and academic standards. The review team **recommends** that the College further develops student representation processes to increase student contribution to the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience.

2.60 Student engagement is established and operates through student representative mechanisms. However, the College is recommended to undertake further development to ensure that students are effective partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. The team concludes that the Expectation is met, and the level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: 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

2.61 The College's assessment arrangements are closely overviewed and managed by its awarding organisations.

2.62 For its CICM awards, the College is responsible for setting formative work, student feedback and delivering their learning and teaching materials, while assessment is controlled by CICM.

2.63 In relation to its Pearson provision, the College is responsible for the setting, marking, internal verification and provision of student feedback on its HND and level 7 programmes, in line with Pearson regulations and guidance. For Pearson programmes, the Unit Lead Tutors create assessment regimes to meet all assessment criteria, which are described in the Pearson programme specification against the Unit Learning Outcomes. The external examiner confirms, through the reports following a visit and the sampling of graded assessed work, that requirements are adhered to by the College.

2.64 These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.65 To review the effectiveness of the arrangements in place, the review team considered documentation including handbooks and policy documents, examples of UAB and PAB records and minutes, assessment examples with associated internal verification records, and feedback provision to show how these processes worked in practice, and met with students and staff from the College and senior staff from Stockport College.

2.66 Assessments produced by Unit Lead Tutors are subject to the College's internal verification process before being issued to students. Graded student assessed work is also sampled and moderated in Pearson programmes according to the College's Internal Verification Policy. A teaching and learning handbook and associated documents describe the assessment policies, regulations and processes that underpin the setting and maintenance of academic standards.

2.67 UABs and PABs consider student achievement and formally award grades for students on Pearson programmes. All decisions are subject to external examiner ratification by the awarding organisation.

2.68 The College's assessment regulations and assessment strategy approaches are not gathered formally in one place. The review team was informed that these arrangements were being updated. Assessment information for students is placed in the programme and unit handbooks. These are uploaded to the VLE.

2.69 The College has previously enabled students to have unlimited submission opportunities, but has revised this approach in response to the changes implemented by Pearson in their recent programme specification revision. Late submissions are capped to a pass and if students do not pass their single attempt at resubmission then they have to resit

the unit. The College is currently in the process of preparing a late submission policy that takes Pearson's new regulations into account.

2.70 A new system has been introduced in September 2016 to apply Pearson assessment requirements and track and record student assessment. An Examinations Officer role supports the internal verification practices and administration processes have been strengthened to ensure that internal requirements for assessment are met. The review team confirmed that students are aware of these new assessment submission requirements.

2.71 UAB and PAB operation is effective and includes summaries of actions to resolve student queries and personal mitigating circumstances, although not academic misconduct. The results sheets do not show the number of attempts made by candidates for each unit. They also do not have any summary statistical analysis. Actions arising from recommendations do not have dates associated, nor is it clear how these are collected in an action planning process through unit and programme review activity (see also B8).

2.72 Assessment design is managed effectively. An assignment brief template operates and an internal verification process is in place, which generally meets the awarding organisations' requirements. Development of this system has taken place, to tighten up activities and focus these further on the Bolton site in order to increase the consistency in practices across the College sites. Unit leaders are based in Bolton, and develop the assessments for all delivery sites. All new tutors are trained through a standardisation process. Following guidance from the Lead Tutor the 'new' assessor is supported to develop the skills to ensure that they are assessing at the appropriate level and providing feedback in accordance with the internal verification requirements set by the awarding organisation.

2.73 The Internal Verification Policy has been similarly applied to the Stockport College provision. The team heard that internal verification and assessment practices are being augmented as part of the operational development with Stockport College. It is identifying its own Lead Verifier to confirm processes for upcoming assessment. Stockport College will also take responsibility for formal unit and programme assessment meetings. The College confirmed that it intends to maintain its internal UAB and PAB systems, running meetings as preparatory activities before Stockport College's assessment boards.

2.74 Student feedback on assessment is provided using a template. Students confirmed that the feedback provided is generally helpful and usually provided in a timely manner, within two weeks of the submission deadline to meet the College policy. The administrative support provided enables logging of the student work and tracking of this through the assessment system. Following internal verification the grade is logged on the College tracking system and feedback emailed to the students. The College monitors assessment and feedback practices and discusses these with students at Programme Management meetings. External examiners' comments on assessment practices report that feedback is supportive and constructive and links directly to the student performance.

2.75 The College operates an extenuating circumstance policy and procedure, which is set out in the College Handbook. This is detailed in the College Handbook under the heading of 'Mitigating Circumstances'. The College also operates a Reasonable Adjustment and Special Consideration Policy. Students confirmed awareness of these practices to request an extension to an assignment deadline and highlighted personal tutors' support in these instances. The College offers support to students with protected characteristics.

2.76 Academic literacy and assessment practices have been identified as requiring increased development and support; this has been delivered by personal tutors. A plagiarism detection system was introduced at the College in academic year 2014-15. This is applied in a formative manner for assessment so that students may make adjustments, for example to

clarify referencing, before final submission of work to the College. This was piloted and evaluated with the positive impact confirmed by students particularly in respect of support for student skills development.

2.77 The College's Malpractice Policy for dealing with plagiarism distinguishes between minor and major cases of plagiarism. The Director of Academic Affairs has overall responsibility for applying the Malpractice Policy. Any academic misconduct investigations and meetings are managed by Bolton Lead Tutors aided by the Examinations Officer and other administration staff.

2.78 Guidance for plagiarism is given and available to students in the student handbook. Stockport College students are given its Academic Misconduct Procedure.

2.79 Arrangements for assessment, management practices for academic misconduct and the development of academic literacy are all developing appropriately. The College operates assessment practices effectively and the conduct of assessment boards meets awarding organisation requirements. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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

2.80 The College's awarding bodies, CICM and Pearson, control external examiner appointment and management. The role of the external examiners is to ensure that academic standards are met through checking on the appropriateness of assignment briefs and the grading and feedback provided by tutors of the College. The powers provided to external examiners include making recommendations to release or block unit awards and ultimately the award of qualifications themselves. External examiners usually make an annual visit to the College for each programme and issue a report subsequent to the visit.

2.81 These arrangements would enable the College to meet the Expectation.

2.82 The team investigated the arrangements by discussions with students and staff and by review of documentation, including external examiner reports, committee minutes and action plans.

2.83 The Director of Academic Affairs receives the external examiners' reports and reviews these with the Programme Leader and Examinations Officer to propose the actions required. The reports are then reviewed at Academic Committee or operational meetings for actions to be resolved. Actions from the Pearson external examiners' reports are integrated into the College's action plan. The reports are shared with students by making them available on the VLE.

2.84 The College receives and considers external examiner reports and determines responses to these. The reports are discussed at Academic Committee meetings, although the minutes do not always clearly record comprehensive coverage of issues raised. Similarly, notes from TeaL meetings do not routinely clearly capture an analysis of issues raised by external examiners.

2.85 The College's action plans confirm that external examiner issues are identified as specific entries in the action plans. However, the interaction between action planning, implementation and internal audit activity is not clearly articulated in committee minutes. Furthermore, comments from external examiners across different disciplines making similar points such as assessment feedback activity, or contextualising of grading criteria, are not clearly identified and addressed at the College level. Responses to external examiners' reports are made when in discussion at the next (annual) meeting, rather than more promptly, which delays visibility of implementation of actions (see paragraph 2.97).

2.86 External examiner reports are provided to students through the VLE, although the students whom the review team met were not aware of these and they are not discussed with student representatives as a formal topic in meetings (see also paragraph 2.59).

2.87 The College makes appropriate use and consideration of external examiner reports. The Expectation is therefore met and the 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

2.88 Pearson programmes are monitored using external examiners and academic management is reviewed through annual monitoring by the awarding organisation. Annual monitoring reports are fed into the Academic Committee, where items are considered and monitored through the Institutional Action Plan. The College's responsibilities for annual monitoring of the Pearson and CICM provision, alongside periodically reviewing the programmes as delivered, are indicated in checklists of responsibilities.

2.89 The College uses programme monitoring and review processes on an internal cycle of meetings and evaluations as part of an academic calendar. This includes UABs, PABs and the Academic Committee. At the end of the year an Annual Programme Review Meeting is held, which is chaired by the Director of Academic Affairs. The purpose of the meeting is to evaluate the College's teaching and learning over the past academic year as well as evaluating the effectiveness of academic actions taken. The outcomes of the APR are fed into the Academic Committee.

2.90 Programme managers are responsible for overall monitoring and review of their programmes, including reviewing external examiner reports and outcomes of UABs and PABs. Unit Lead Tutors are responsible for producing monitoring reports, which go through to UABs for recommendations to be made for the units.

2.91 These arrangements would enable the College to meet the Expectation.

2.92 The review team met students, the Director of Academic Affairs and staff from the College and Stockport College to establish how far these processes were effective, regular and systematic in respect of monitoring and review of programmes. Materials examined included example APR reports, external examiner reports and committee minutes.

2.93 The College has been working on a number of developments such as strengthening of the personal tutor practices, introduction of plagiarism-detection systems and developments of admissions processes, and the benefits of these are confirmed by students. These developments are reflected in the College action plan but do not articulate clearly with the formal monitoring system and processes used. Some of the key elements of an annual programme monitoring process are in place, but further data gathering and implementation is required to make these fully effective. The Programme Reviews considered do not discriminate by programme or site, so they do not show information regarding local specific actions. The format of the APR is not comprehensive and does not include specific review of elements such as staff recruitment and development, aggregated admissions and performance information, including review of programme support activities, for example employability and personal tutor interventions. Similar comments were also raised during QAA's Annual Monitoring visit in 2016 when student retention, attendance, coursework submission and achievement at the College were discussed.

2.94 The College manages processes of unit reviews, leading to unit recommendations made by unit leaders to the UAB meetings. These reports follow template forms and include qualitative data from the delivery of units and make recommendations for ongoing improvement and resolution of any issues arising. However, they do not clearly demonstrate

formal use of quantitative data, consideration from external examiners or student reviews, and unit recommendations give limited insight into enhancements. The team was informed that developments are determined from these processes in an annual cycle, either by Academic Committee or in operational meetings. The team found that the process was not clearly strategic and that the documentation does not illustrate full consideration of all data sources, with points of good practice identified and disseminated.

2.95 The review team found that there is a degree of overlap in committee responsibilities in respect of review practices. Academic Committee has the responsibility to report results of external reports and oversee academic standards and progress on the institutional action plan. TeaL meets once a term and reviews and evaluates actions or explores issues over a longer timescale. Review of minutes shows that annual review activity is not clearly and fully embedded into College practices, with neither committee addressing overall action planning formally, although both report on operational activity.

2.96 Currently, the College's periodic review process is limited to engaging with Pearson during Pearson's processes of specification development, though these are expected to evolve in response to demands from the College's delivery partner.

2.97 The College processes provide limited evidence of detailed and full scrutiny of management information. The review team **recommends** that the College reviews its review practices to ensure that they make best use of data and cohort analyses to improve learning opportunities across programmes, to ensure, in turn, that the programme review activity is formal and comprehensive.

2.98 Overall, given the approaches adopted by the College and the developments made to the learning opportunities, the Expectation is seen to be met. As there is a recommendation relating to enhancing the operation to make monitoring and review more effective, the level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

2.99 The College has an appeals and complaints policy and procedure, which is provided in the Academic Policies framework. The Appeals and Complaints Policy relating to making appeals for students and applicants is provided to students in their handbook but is not fully accessible to applicants on the College website (see paragraph 3.8).

2.100 At the outset of their programme students sign a College/Student Agreement, which includes information about the College's appeals and complaints policy and procedure. The College's appeals and complaints process includes the possibility of recourse to the relevant awarding organisation and, if this is exhausted, to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA). Checklists of responsibilities are provided, which make the College actions and responsibilities clear. Programmes run in partnership with Stockport College use the latter's appeals and complaints processes.

2.101 Appeals, according to the College policy, include requests to amend an award grade, appeal against disciplinary action and requests to reconsider admissions decisions. The Director of Academic Affairs receives formal appeals and sets up an Appeals Panel to consider the appeal. Student Welfare officers and personal tutors provide support to students wishing to make complaints.

2.102 These arrangements provide procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints and would enable the College to meet the Expectation.

2.103 A review of the related policies and documents was carried out, along with information presented regarding the College experiences of appeals and complaints and the College's handling and review of these. Meetings were held with students, the SMT and professional staff to establish the operations in practice.

2.104 The documentation does not provide a clear distinction between academic appeals, complaints and appeals against disciplinary penalties. The College may wish to review the distinction in these processes in the context of the ongoing revisions to policies referred to below and the associated affirmation (paragraph 2.107).

2.105 In September 2015 the College embarked on development to align College processes with the OIA expectations. Development of policy documents was monitored by the TeaL and were deemed to be operational in January 2016. Seven HND Business students from Manchester have tested the appeals system in full and complained to the OIA to appeal against the decisions made to expel them. These complaints were concluded by the OIA and recorded as 'not justified' in August 2016.

2.106 As a result of this OIA review, the College reviewed its practices for issuing attendance and progression warnings to students, and agreed that if a student does not respond to warnings made informally (for example by SMS text message), it is good practice for formal written warnings to be issued, which are personalised to the student, highlighting clearly why the student's attendance and/or progression is causing concern and what the likely consequences will be of failure to act and improve attendance.

2.107 In discussion the College acknowledged the need for further development of the Appeals and Complaints Policy to meet the OIA's Good Practice Framework for Handling Complaints and Academic Appeals. This was expected to introduce a timed, staged process with clearer processes outlined, with staged sign-off and feedback reporting procedures. The materials provided by the OIA as a result of consideration of these cases offer further opportunity for the College to gather feedback and to ensure that these policies are fully aligned with sector best practices. The team **affirms** the actions being taken to align complaints and appeals processes with OIA best practice recommendations.

2.108 Developments include improvements to the monitoring, recording and oversight of the College's appeals and complaints activity. The College stated that it monitors and evaluates appeals and complaints through Academic Committee, with reports of outcome going to a TeaL meeting, although the team did not locate evidence of such reporting. Currently, informal complaints are not usually recorded, but those raised through the student group meetings are recorded in those minutes. Minutes of meetings held as part of investigations associated with this policy are acknowledged to be too sparse. The team heard that as a result of this investigation, oversight of investigation of complaints and appeals will be formalised as a standing agenda item on the TeaL minutes' template.

2.109 A number of specific developments are underway and this has led the team to affirm the actions being taken to align complaints and appeals processes with OIA best practice recommendations. The developments already in place enable the team to determine that the College is developing procedures for appeals and complaints which reflect sector best practices. The Expectation is therefore met and the 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

2.110 The College has not delegated any aspect of the provision of learning opportunities to others; therefore, this Expectation is not applicable.

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

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

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

2.113 All the nine applicable Expectations were found to be met. The associated risk was low for six Expectations and moderate for three Expectations. Four recommendations and two affirmations were made.

2.114 Recruitment and admission policies are generally robust and appropriate. The review team notes the more rigorous admissions screening process recently implemented to ensure that students can achieve their awards and this is reflected in an affirmation under Expectation B2. Some students have been recruited who have been unable to be registered to undertake an award, and the College is encouraged to work with its delivery partner to resolve this situation, which is reflected in a recommendation under Expectation B2.

2.115 The resources and arrangements in place generally enable students to develop effectively, both academically and personally. However, in one campus location, some aspects of support are not readily accessible, and this is reflected in a recommendation under Expectation B4.

2.116 The steps taken to engage students allow for them to contribute to their learning experience. However, there would be benefit in further developing student representation processes and this is reflected in a recommendation under Expectation B5.

2.117 The College operates its quality management system under the supervision of its awarding organisations. However, its own internal review practices would be more effective with improved utilisation of management information, and this is reflected in a recommendation under Expectation B8.

2.118 The College's appeals and complaints procedures are being revised to align with OIA good practice guidelines, and this is reflected in an affirmation under Expectation B9.

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

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Findings

3.1 The College's Public Information Policy and Approval Procedures describes its approach to assuring the accuracy of published and publicly available information, and was designed to align with Part C of the Quality Code. Directors each take lead responsibility for assuring the accuracy of aspects of publically available information, auditing material at least annually. On a day-to-day basis, designated senior staff have delegated responsibility to act as custodians for the accuracy of particular aspects of public information. Teaching staff have authority to make changes to the academic content of the VLE. In respect of programmes delivered under the auspices of the delivery partner, while the College is able to propose promotional and other published material, responsibility for final authorisation lies with the delivery partner.

3.2 The College promotes its Higher National provision and provides course information as required by the awarding organisation. Prospective students and other stakeholders can research higher education course information via the College website, the delivery partner website, and through printed material, which is published from time to time. All enrolled students have access to a comprehensive Student College Handbook and detailed information regarding each unit studied through the VLE.

3.3 The College's arrangements for the production and management of information would enable it to meet this Expectation.

3.4 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 various policies and procedures. The team also held meetings with senior, academic and support staff, and students.

3.5 Overall, the review team found the procedures for producing information about provision to be effective.

3.6 The College complies with the awarding organisation's procedures with respect to the provision of comprehensive unit material available to students. Students met by the team confirmed that course information, including unit, lecture and assessment details, is made available to them on the VLE, although they were unfamiliar with the concept of a programme specification. External examiners comment favourably on the well documented student handbooks. In accordance with the expectations of its awarding organisation, Pearson, the College has generated comprehensive tailored programme specifications, derived from Pearson's own overarching specification, and contextualised to suit the needs of the College. However, these are not made readily available to either prospective or current students (see also paragraphs 1.5 and 1.20), who intimated that overall knowledge of their programme was limited to a list of units within their offer letter, presentations within their induction and termly briefings from the programme team. The review team therefore

recommends that the College makes tailored programme specifications publicly available, as required by its awarding organisation.

3.7 The College drew the review team's attention to the fact that it has currently chosen not to publish information that describes its mission, values and overall strategy. This follows the recent hiatus in recruiting (see paragraph 2.19), its new delivery partnership with Stockport College, uncertainty regarding whether to seek approval to recruit overseas students onto long programmes, and current work to confirm the longer-term strategic direction of the College. The team learned that the work to refine the College's strategic direction was approaching completion, and that in due course this would be made publicly available. The review team therefore **affirms** the steps being taken to publish, once its future strategic direction has been determined, information which describes its mission, vision and overall strategy.

3.8 The College's Appeals Policy is provided to students in their handbook but is not accessible to applicants on the College website. This may present a potential risk to applicants who wish to challenge application decisions, although the team heard that the complaints route, which was publicly available, was effectively used in such cases. The College may wish to review and make consistent its publicly available materials in this regard.

3.9 Entry requirements for the Higher National programmes are correctly captured in the tailored programme specifications and on the delivery partner's website, although the College's own web-based material does not fully reflect the need for an applicant to possess an entry qualification in an appropriate cognate discipline. The College acknowledges the omission, but confirmed that admissions interviews and consideration of an applicant's commercial or business experience provides sufficient checks to ensure that they would be appropriately qualified. Promotional material properly reflects the partnership between the College and its delivery partner, although this is not immediately apparent in letters offering a course place to students.

3.10 Overall, the review team concludes that the College has adequate procedures for making sure that publicly available information about its higher education provision is fit for purpose and trustworthy. Despite making one recommendation and one affirmation, neither of which impacts significantly upon the students' day-to-day learning experience, the team concludes that, overall, the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

3.12 The Expectation is met and the level of risk is moderate. One recommendation and one affirmation was made.

3.13 The information provided by the College is generally fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The College has appropriate mechanisms in place to ensure the accuracy, transparency and ownership of information. The College plans to publish its mission, vision and overall strategy once its future strategic direction has been determined, and this links to an affirmation.

3.14 Students and applicants are made aware of the structure and broad composition of their programmes of study and students are provided with detailed unit content information as the course progresses. However, tailored programme specifications are not publicly available and this is reflected in a recommendation.

3.15 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 approach to improving the quality of students' learning opportunities is through an improvement cycle approach, which is highlighted in the Teaching and Learning Policy. The policy cites the development of an institutional strategy for systematically enhancing the quality of provision, through enhancing support for staff CPD, supporting projects and staff research, and using critical appraisal of quality management processes and procedures to ensure that they are fit for purpose.

4.2 Responsibility for oversight for the Teaching and Learning Policy rests with the Director of Academic Affairs, who works to make improvements via the academic committee and TeaL meetings. Academic Committee meetings are in place to follow current issues and to ensure that actions are in place and being followed up. TeaL meetings are in place to evaluate and monitor and evaluate the outcomes of such actions and other initiatives. TeaLs can be viewed as a specialised type of Academic Committee meeting. The College areas for enhancement in improvement cycles are driven from input from staff and students with opportunities for both to determine and implement enhancement opportunities.

4.3 The arrangements in place would allow the College to meet the Expectation.

4.4 The team considered the extent to which the College as the provider takes measured steps to address initiatives and practices and make improvements, and the approaches and variety of information used. Examples of recent developments in practice were considered in discussion with staff and students, examining the review practices used and the extent of engagement and committee deliberation operated in meetings.

4.5 Although there was some differentiation between committee activity, relatively little difference was found in the approach taken between TeaL and Academic Committee meetings. While the Academic Committee was stated to track actions, these did not regularly refer to the institutional action plan, or minute decisions and actions taken against this. As noted in section B5, student representatives are not included in the deliberative committee that manages this improvement cycle, which limits their direct participation in College-wide strategic decision making.

4.6 The College developed the Teaching and Learning Policy in 2013. A range of initiatives have been identified and project developments undertaken. Recent enhancement projects have included receipt of student feedback and staff training needs analysis. While examples of projects were provided in discussion with staff, the College acknowledged that full evaluation and review of the impact of activity such as a student employability programme, which was developed and introduced in 2014-15, or development of assignment workshops, on the learning experiences, have yet to be completed. Some developments originally proposed for one programme, such as introduction of tablets for students, had been extended to most student cohorts. Students whom the review team met stated that this had not been continued with all incoming student groups and the students recruited for London in September 2016 had not received these.

4.7 The review team was informed that meetings to discuss delivery of the new HND Business specification and others to ensure consistency and standardisation across the

HND programme had been arranged, and a CPD programme for term 1 academic year 2016-17 was being operated. Best practice is identified and shared through staff involvement in skills sharing sessions arranged in the margins of formal TeaL meetings. These activities are not minuted and the outcomes and impact of these sessions are not formally evaluated.

4.8 There is an institutional improvement cycle, but there is limited engagement, which clearly relates to the provider taking deliberate steps and involving students. There is no clear approach to identifying and disseminating good practice in order to enhance practices across the College programmes or units. Accordingly, the review team **recommends** that the College adopts a clear strategic approach to enhancing learning opportunities, including greater involvement of the student voice, to improve the student experience systematically.

4.9 Overall, there is evidence that deliberate steps have been taken to improve the student experience. However, there is limited evaluation and limited engagement with students in decision making. A recommendation is made to strengthen the strategic approaches to enhancing learning opportunities. Therefore, the Expectation is met but given the recommendation made for development, the level of risk is regarded as moderate.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Moderate

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

4.11 The Expectation is met and the level of risk is moderate. One recommendation was made.

4.12 The College has taken deliberate steps to improve the quality of learning opportunities; however, there is limited evaluation and limited engagement with students in decision making, and this is reflected in a recommendation.

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

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 22-25 of the [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\) handbook](#)

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

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

Academic standards

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

Award

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

Awarding organisation

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

Blended learning

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

Credit(s)

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

Degree-awarding body

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

Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

Dual award or double award

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

e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

Enhancement

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

Expectations

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

Flexible and distributed learning

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

See also **distance learning**.

Framework

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

Framework for higher education qualifications

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

Good practice

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

Learning opportunities

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

Learning outcomes

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

Multiple awards

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

Operational definition

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

Programme (of study)

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

Programme specifications

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

Quality Code

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

Reference points

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

Self-evaluation document

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

Subject Benchmark Statement

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

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)

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

Threshold academic standard

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

Virtual learning environment (VLE)

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

Widening participation

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

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