



Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of Oxford Business College UK Ltd

April 2016

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About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Oxford Business College UK Ltd. The review took place from 26 to 27 April 2016 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Millard Parkinson
- Dr Mary Meldrum.

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

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

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

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

In reviewing Oxford Business College UK Ltd the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland. The [themes](#) for the academic year 2015-16 are Student Employability, and Digital Literacy,² and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

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 6.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.³ A dedicated section explains the method for [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).⁴ For an explanation of terms 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 Higher Education Review themes: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2859.

³ QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us.

⁴ Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers): www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Educational-Oversight.aspx.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Oxford Business College UK Ltd

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Oxford Business College UK Ltd.

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

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at Oxford Business College UK Ltd:

- the clear and supportive admissions processes which prepare students for an effective learning experience (Expectation B2)
- the effective sharing of best practice including positive use of observation which facilitates the team ethos among staff (Expectation B3)
- the positive, enthusiastic and consistent approach to the implementation and use of digital technology, which enhances student learning opportunities (Expectation B3)
- the effective partnership between the College and its students which enables them to fully develop their academic, personal and professional potential (Expectation B5).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Oxford Business College UK Ltd.

By September 2016:

- ensure that programme specifications fully meet Pearson requirements (Expectations A2.2, B6)
- hold examination boards in line with Pearson requirements (Expectations A2.2, B6)
- fully articulate the College's strategic approach to the enhancement of learning opportunities (Enhancement).

By December 2016:

- formalise staff development to increase the level of scholarly activity and the proportion of staff with appropriate higher education teaching qualifications (Expectation B3).

Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms** the following actions that Oxford Business College UK Ltd is already taking to make academic standards secure and improve the educational provision offered to its students:

- the work undertaken to improve student achievement, progression and completion rates (Expectation A3.3)

- the work undertaken by the Strategic and Operational Management Teams to increase oversight of the programme (Expectation B8).

Theme: Digital Literacy

The College has a strong commitment to digital literacy and ensures that all teaching staff, support staff and students are fully competent in this area.

The College makes full and enthusiastic use of the virtual learning environment (VLE) and has also upgraded and standardised smartboards in all teaching rooms.

The College effectively uses social media to engage with both current students and alumni.

Financial sustainability, management and governance

Oxford Business College UK Ltd has satisfactorily completed the financial sustainability, management and governance check.

Further explanation of the key findings can be found in the handbook available on the QAA webpage explaining [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).

About Oxford Business College UK Ltd

Oxford Business College UK Ltd is a small business college located in the centre of Oxford offering a range of business-related courses from Levels 3 to 5. The College's vision is 'to be a leader in the field of personalised business education at higher levels, serving a global market, home, EU and international'. Its mission is 'to provide the most positive learning experience for each individual student and to provide a distinctive learning environment that proactively engages students'.

The College has 67 full-time students studying for Pearson Higher National Certificates and Diplomas (HNCs/HNDs) in Business following a number of different pathways (Law, Marketing, Human Resources, Accounting and Management). The College also runs Level 3 foundation courses. The College has 16 part-time academic staff and works with Pearson as its awarding organisation.

Since its Review for Educational Oversight in July 2012, the College has made changes to its governance structure. The main changes are to the committee structure where two Senior Management Teams (SMT Strategic and Operational) have been established. Student representation on committees has been increased and there is now a student representative on SMT Strategic.

The College no longer offers the Level 7 Extended Diploma in Strategic Management and Leadership (EDSML) and was also awarded '.ac.uk' status in October 2015.

The College has identified a number of key challenges:

- legislative changes
- competition from other providers
- Tier 4 license requirements
- HEFCE and Student Loans Company funding
- maintaining Specific Course Designation.

The College has made good progress in addressing the recommendations from its last review and received a monitoring visit by QAA in May 2015. The College has become more

proactive, implementing action planning to review and reflect on activity. It engages thoroughly with the Quality Code and has markedly increased student engagement and representation.

Explanation of the findings about Oxford Business College UK 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* are met by:

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

1.1 The College runs Level 4 and 5 Higher Nationals with Pearson as the awarding organisation. Pearson is responsible for ensuring that the qualifications are aligned with the relevant national framework levels, qualification descriptors and characteristics, and Subject Benchmark Statements, and for overseeing the qualifications to ensure that awards mark the achievement of positively designed learning outcomes. The College is responsible for delivering awards and maintaining the standards set by Pearson.

1.2 Pearson is responsible for processes for approval to run new programmes. The process for College approval and review of programmes is currently overseen by the Strategic Management Team - Operational. The processes in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.3 The team met the Principal and academic staff and scrutinised programme documentation.

1.4 A current agreement with Pearson is in place. The College has run the same HNC/HND programmes and units for a number of years and has not added any new programmes in the period covered by this review, although it has taken a strategic decision to discontinue a Level 7 programme. Academic staff whom the team met had not been

involved in the choice of modules run on the programme. They had been involved in contributing to the College response to the review by Pearson of the programme structure and content for the HNC/HND programmes run at the College. There is evidence that the Senior Management Team - Operational has oversight of the College response to the Pearson-led programme changes.

1.5 The higher education provision at the College is small and there have been no new programmes added during the period of the review. There is evidence of a process and oversight for managing changes to programme structures within the new committee. Therefore the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.6 Pearson is the awarding organisation and is responsible for setting transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern the award of academic qualifications. The College is responsible for maintaining the standards set by Pearson.

1.7 Pearson provides a comprehensive set of frameworks and regulations to govern the award of its qualifications. The College has put in place a revised governance structure to oversee the award of academic credit and qualifications; this consist of strategic and operational management meetings. The College follows Pearson processes and these processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.8 The team tested the Expectation through meetings with the Principal and academic and support staff and scrutinised programme documentation.

1.9 The College currently offers Pearson Level 4 and 5 awards. There are a few students with outstanding assessment on a Level 7 programme that has been discontinued by the College.

1.10 The team saw evidence that the College follows Pearson processes for internal verification and external examiners' reports confirm the standard of award. The College has addressed issues raised about academic frameworks and regulations and has taken steps to address issues raised through its revision of governance arrangements, although there are still some weaknesses to address, as referenced under Expectation A2.2.

1.11 The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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

1.12 The College is required to follow the processes of its awarding organisation, Pearson, for the oversight of assessment and annual monitoring and review.

1.13 Pearson produces programme specifications and unit descriptors which provide a detailed breakdown of the content, aims, learning outcomes and assessment methods of each unit. Using that framework, the College is responsible for maintaining its own definitive programme specification for each programme that it is approved to run by Pearson.

1.14 The College has a responsibility to ensure that all marking and internal verification is carried out to Pearson regulations and that records of this are provided. It is a requirement of Pearson that providers hold assessment boards to approve progression and final awards following external examination. The processes in place at the College are not sufficient to allow the Expectation to be met.

1.15 The team met the Principal and academic staff and scrutinised programme documentation and minutes.

1.16 The team found evidence that the College follows Pearson processes for annual programme monitoring and review and tutors confirmed that they are involved in that process.

1.17 The College produces an HNC/D handbook with some information on programmes but the team considered that this does not contain the detailed programme specification for the programmes required by Pearson. Students and academic staff whom the team met confirmed that they understood the requirements of the programmes. In the light of the lack of detailed programme specifications, the team **recommends** that the College ensures that programme specifications fully meet Pearson requirements (Expectation B6 also refers).

1.18 The College provided evidence showing that all marking and internal verification is carried out according to Pearson regulations and that records of this are maintained. The College confirmed it does not currently hold internal examination boards as required by Pearson. The review team **recommends** that the College holds examination boards in line with Pearson requirements (Expectation B6 also refers).

1.19 The College has a process to provide records of study to students and alumni.

1.20 The team considers that the College needs to ensure that it fully meets the requirements of its awarding organisation in terms of the information provided in its own College programme specification and in the running of College exam boards. The Expectation therefore is not met and the level of risk is moderate due to a weakness in part of the College's academic governance structure.

Expectation: Not met

Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

Findings

1.21 The College offers Higher National Certificate and Diploma (HNC/HND) programmes awarded by Pearson. It took a strategic decision in 2014 not to continue offering EDSML Level 7 programmes but there are a small number of students still registered on this programme who have the opportunity to submit work for assessment.

1.22 The College is not involved in the design or development of HND programmes and delivers programmes comprising units provided by Pearson. Responsibility for ensuring that the units and programmes meet threshold standards for Levels 4 and 5 of the FHEQ rests with Pearson. There is only one HND programme offered by the College, the title of which is not indicated in the programme specification. The programme specification is produced by the College and lists a general description of each unit offered. It does not indicate forms of assessment or identify how learning outcomes are to be achieved by assessment; it does not refer to Subject Benchmark Statements or other external reference points.

1.23 The Pearson programme design process ensures that programmes meet threshold standards for Levels 4 and 5 and are in accordance with Pearson's regulations. These are followed by the College in delivery of the programme. Compliance with Pearson requirements has been further enhanced by the recent appointment of an Academic Coordinator. The processes in place would ensure that the Expectation is met.

1.24 The team examined evidence provided prior to and during the visit, including the provision offered, responsibilities and internal approval process, and sought clarification from College staff in meetings.

1.25 The process works in practice as responsibility rests with Pearson for meeting threshold standards and with the College for delivering programmes to the required standards, which is confirmed in external examiners' reports and Academic Management Review.

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

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.27 Pearson is responsible for ensuring that credits are awarded only after appropriate assessment has been completed. To confirm this, Pearson carries out external examination of student work in line with its academic regulations and processes. There is no indication from the College that it holds assessment boards for its HND programme, which is a requirement of Pearson, but the College intends to establish these for the 2016-17 academic year. The external examiner reports provided are good with positive comments on assessment and feedback and no issues raised.

1.28 Student achievement records are completed by the Vice Principal, who is also the Quality Nominee, after verification and entered into the Pearson Student Result Form.

1.29 The College follows the Pearson regulations and procedures for awarding credit following assessment. This is confirmed by a robust two-tier process of internal verification whereby student work is marked by academic staff and verified by College verifiers. Samples of work are then further verified by consultants external to the College. Following this process, samples of work are made available to the Pearson external examiner at visits recorded in the external examiner reports and Academic Management Reports. The processes in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.30 The team examined evidence provided prior to and during the visit, including external examiner reports and Academic Management Reviews, and sought clarification from College staff in meetings.

1.31 The process works very effectively, particularly with the involvement of external consultants in additional internal verification prior to external examiner visits. This ensures the consistency of assessment and that credit is awarded only where appropriate standards are met.

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

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.33 Responsibility for monitoring and review of programmes and alignment with UK threshold standards is the responsibility of the awarding organisation, Pearson. There is no indication of the College undertaking any formal periodic review of its programme. The Academic Management Review 2014-15 undertaken by Pearson reports on admissions, assessment, teaching, staffing, learning resources, internal verification and reporting. The review is generally very positive but raised issues about the College policies and processes. An action plan was produced from this report and changes have been made including a move towards a more independent governance structure with the establishment of separate operational and strategic management teams with different membership, including external independent and student members. This structure is included in the College Quality Management System and will continue to be reviewed and monitored. Evidence of oversight is contained in minutes of meetings of the SMT (Strategic) and SMT (Operational) and in termly Tutor Meetings which are attended by the Principal, Vice Principal, Quality Coordinator, academic staff and students. The processes in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.34 The team examined evidence provided prior to and during the visit, including Pearson reports and action plans and the College quality assurance processes, and sought clarification from College staff and students.

1.35 The HNC/HND conversion rates show a completion rate of 55 per cent for 2012-13 and 37 per cent for 2013-14. To address this, the College has established a Conversion and Retention Focus Group comprising the Principal, Vice Principal, senior staff and students to examine reasons for poor achievement and actions to be taken. This Group met for the first time in March 2016 and actions are yet to be implemented.

1.36 The College Principal teaches on the programme and as such has first-hand continual awareness of what is going on in the classroom and of student opinion. The Principal produces a Principal's Annual Review comprising a concise overview of College activities and performance and intentions for the forthcoming year.

1.37 The process now in place enables effective monitoring and review of programmes with meaningful student involvement in the processes. The team **affirms** the work undertaken to improve achievement, progression and completion rates.

1.38 The previous structure did not provide for effective monitoring and review of programmes beyond that of the awarding organisation. The revised structure allows for detailed monitoring and review by senior staff, external committee members and students.

1.39 The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the risk is moderate due to weaknesses in the operation of part of the provider's academic governance structure.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

1.40 The College follows Pearson regulations for external examination of students' work following marking and internal verification. External examiner reports indicate positive comments on assessment, marking and feedback and support given to students. There have been some instances of results being blocked because sufficient samples were not available at the time of examiner visits, but these have been released following a subsequent visit. The generally positive Pearson Academic Management Review would suggest that, as the awarding organisation, it is satisfied that its threshold academic standards are maintained. The processes in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.41 The team examined evidence provided prior to and during the visit, including reports from Pearson, action plans and the internal verification and external examination processes, and sought clarification from College staff in meetings.

1.42 To further ensure that threshold academic standards are delivered and achieved, the College has retained an external Quality Assurance Adviser who also sits on the SMT to monitor standards and advise on quality matters. This adviser is also involved with other external experts in the second level of verification following the internal verification by College staff and prior to verification by Pearson external examiners. This appointment appears to be working effectively and adding to the robustness of quality assurance at the College.

1.43 The revised management structure and inclusion of external expertise provides for effective assurance that threshold standards in delivery and achievement are met. The appointment of the Quality Coordinator provides further monitoring of academic quality to ensure standards are met. The process is appropriate for an institution of this nature and size of provision.

1.44 The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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: Summary of findings

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

1.46 All of the Expectations for this judgement area are met and the associated levels of risk are low, apart from Expectation A2.2 which is not met with a moderate level of risk and A3.3 which is met with moderate risk. In these sections the College is also required to adhere to the procedures of its awarding organisation. There are two recommendations in this section which relate to ensuring that programme specifications fully meet Pearson requirements and to holding examination boards in line with Pearson requirements. These recommendations also refer to Expectation B6.

1.47 There is one affirmation in this section which relates to the work undertaken to improve student achievement, progression and completion rates.

1.48 The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards at the College **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1 The College does not design or develop its HNC or HND programmes; these comprise units provided by Pearson. The College offers an HNC comprising eight units, on completion of which students can study a further 10 units to achieve an HND. Students can opt for one of five pathways within the HND Business in Marketing, Management, Human Resources, Business Law or Accounting by studying different combinations of units which are included in the Student Handbook.

2.2 There is no indication of the process for deciding which Pearson units to include in its programme. There is no indication of reference to local market information or other information on skills needs to inform the content of the programme. There is also no indication of an internal approval process for the programme prior to submission to Pearson for approval to deliver. There does not appear to be any involvement of external bodies from industry in the development of the programme or consideration of its content. Staff indicated that they did not make decisions regarding which units to offer but had offered an option unit in International Marketing to replace one in Marketing in response to student feedback.

2.3 The College has fed back to the awarding organisation, Pearson, that it felt that some units are now out of date and not relevant to the needs of current students or industry. The Higher National Business programmes offered by Pearson are currently under review with new specifications to be introduced for the coming academic year. The College is involved in the review of units as part of the Pearson consultation process.

2.4 The process would allow the Expectation to be met as the College offers a programme comprising Pearson units in line with its regulations regarding the combination of core and option units, level of units and credit values.

2.5 The team examined evidence provided prior to and during the visit, including details of provision, responsibilities and the internal approval process, and sought clarification from College staff in meetings.

2.6 The process works in practice but there is little evidence of staff or student input into decisions about units to offer to design programmes to meet specific needs of students or industry. The College intends to develop engagement with local industry to better prepare students for employment and encourage industry input into the design of programmes. The revised programmes available from Pearson for 2017 may allow for greater involvement of the College in the design of programmes.

2.7 The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.8 Responsibility for the recruitment of students and setting entry standards lies with the College. Students apply direct to the College, with some coming through UCAS clearing.

2.9 The Senior Management Team - Strategic determines what programmes will be offered. The College has an admissions policy, including an appeals and complaints process. The Admissions Officer and team manage the admissions process and also the provision of information to potential students about the programme, on the website and through hard copy materials.

2.10 The College recruits through its website, marketing materials, the services of agents and word of mouth. The College Admissions Department sends out a pre-information pack for prospective applicants. This contains full details about the programme, including fees, a student handbook, programme content, the structure of delivery and how the programme is assessed. The College website has separate sets of information on admissions procedures for UK/EU students and for international students.

2.11 The College recruits many of its overseas students through agents and has a standard Agents Agreement. The admissions staff scan applications, interview students and make admissions decisions for applicants who clearly meet the College admission requirements. Where there is any doubt, an academic member of staff is involved and makes the final admissions decision. The processes in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.12 The team met staff responsible for student admissions and also met students, and scrutinised admissions processes and pre-enrolment support documentation and website information available to applicants.

2.13 The appeals and complaints process for admissions has not been invoked within the period covered by this review.

2.14 All students have a one-to-one interview, either face-to-face, via internet videoconferencing or telephone. Students whom the team met were very complimentary about the admissions processes, information and support that they received prior to enrolling at the College. The clear and supportive admissions processes which prepare students for an effective learning experience are **good practice**.

2.15 On the evidence provided of clear and supportive admissions policies and procedures, the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching

Findings

- 2.16 The College has a Teaching and Learning Strategy which aligns with the Quality Code Expectations and Pearson requirements.
- 2.17 Tutor meetings provide a focus for staff discussion on student performance and sharing of practice. Senior Management Team - Strategic and Senior Management Team - Operational monitor student performance.
- 2.18 Students are taught in small classes of 10 to 15. Students receive a generic HNC/HND programme handbook at induction and are issued with unit briefs (unit handbooks). There is a module study plan.
- 2.19 The College has a small library on site and tutors are able to suggest new library resources. Students can also access library resources at Oxford Brookes University for a small additional fee. The College also has a buy-back arrangement for some core textbooks.
- 2.20 Students can give feedback on teaching and learning and on resources at Student Council and tutor meetings and mid-term tutorials. The Vice Principal holds mid-term teaching and learning tutorials with each student. The processes in place would allow the Expectation to be met.
- 2.21 The team met teaching staff and students and scrutinised documentation, including student feedback and minutes of Strategic and Operational Committee meetings, Tutor meetings and Student Council meetings.
- 2.22 Tutors are generally well qualified with business experience, but the level of higher education teaching qualifications is generally low with a Level 3 qualification being the main development opportunity for staff. There is little evidence of formal staff development, continuing professional development (CPD) or scholarly activity to support or enhance delivery. The team **recommends** that the College should formalise staff development to increase the level of scholarly activity and the proportion of staff with appropriate higher education teaching qualifications.
- 2.23 Tutors have regular tutor meetings which also now include student representatives, and these provide a focus for staff discussion on student performance and sharing best practice. Staff whom the team met talked about the inclusive and supportive environment for developing their teaching practice. The College has a teaching observation process and Open Observation process. Staff whom the team met gave examples of mutual learning between observers and those being observed. The effective sharing of best practice, including positive use of observation which facilitates the team ethos among staff, is **good practice**.
- 2.24 Staff and students talked enthusiastically to the team about the use of digital technology in teaching and learning. The positive, enthusiastic and consistent approach to

the implementation and use of digital technology, which enhances student learning opportunities, is **good practice**.

2.25 The team concludes that the positive and supportive learning environment meets the Expectation 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

2.26 The College has a Senior Management Team - Strategic and a Senior Management Team - Operational as the new senior committees responsible for programme strategy and delivery. The College has a strategic plan and a learning and teaching strategy.

2.27 There is a student learning agreement in place. Student feedback is sought through a variety of means, including questionnaire results, mid-term learning tutorials and membership of College committees as well as an informal open-door policy.

2.28 The College generates data from all departments and this includes recruitment, admissions, retention, student feedback and conversion ratios to make informed decisions to enhance the development and achievement of its students.

2.29 The College uses the Pearson Academic Management review as the main focus for monitoring student performance data. The Strategic Management Team - Operational is the main forum for scrutinising operational statistics. The processes in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.30 The team met academic staff, support staff and students and examined documentation, including minutes of meetings, student progression and transition reports, policies and procedures and strategic plans.

2.31 The team found evidence of strategic development of facilities for learning. The developments were informed by feedback from students and mainly focused on information technology such as the development of the virtual learning environment (VLE), smartboards and wireless access. There is also some provision of leisure facilities for students.

2.32 There is a high level of individual attention to students but limited evidence of oversight of student cohort performance and identification of core issues. Progression statistics are recognised as an issue, but although there are some targeted activities, there is limited evidence of getting to the root of the problem. The College has recently involved a student representative in seeking student views on how progression could be improved.

2.33 The team concludes that the College has a sufficient process for monitoring and evaluating arrangements and resources to allow students to meet their potential, but that there is room for a more sophisticated approach to the use of data, particularly if student numbers grow. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student Engagement

Findings

2.34 The College states that, 'In line with its Mission and ethos, the College differentiates its offering with focus on individual students and a personalized approach to all aspects of their learning experience'. There is no clear indication of how this is to be achieved but meetings with staff and students provided evidence to support this statement.

2.35 The College has established a Student Council, membership of which is open to student representatives. The Student Council Handbook provides comprehensive information to students about the Council and the advantages of being part of it, including the advantages of being a student representative and the transferable skills developed as a representative which can be applied in their future business careers. The Student Council emails indicate some issues around circulation of minutes of meetings. The format of minutes is inconsistent and some are rather brief. A member of the Student Council is also a member of the College Strategic Management Team. The SMT minutes are also rather brief, although they do include a list of attendees to indicate student attendance and there is a brief reference to student questionnaires. The objectives of the Student Council are included in the student submission which was produced by members of the Council. The submission makes reference to the recommendations of the REO Annual Monitoring Report 2015 to increase student involvement and include them in management meetings.

2.36 There is student representation on the termly Tutor Meetings where issues raised by students are considered and results of student questionnaires are analysed. The minutes of these meetings clearly show consideration of students' issues. Results of student questionnaires are provided but these give little useful information; simply scores for some units with no indication of response rates. However, an overall success rate of 87 per cent is recorded.

2.37 The College operates an informal open-door policy by which students are encouraged to discuss issues with all levels of staff. Students confirmed that staff are accessible and happy to help them. The processes in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.38 The team examined evidence provided prior to and during the visit, including minutes of Student Council, Strategic Management Team and Tutor meetings, and sought clarification from College staff and students in meetings.

2.39 Students met by the team expressed complete satisfaction with the opportunities for them to raise issues, express their opinion and engage in discussion with staff, with whom they felt they had an equal and symbiotic relationship as partners rather than just as students and teachers. The effective partnership between the College and its students, which enables them to fully develop their academic, personal and professional potential, is **good practice**.

2.40 The processes in place to ensure student engagement provide a formal structure which supports and builds on the informal process of free discussion between students and staff, which has developed over time. The student representation at senior committees and the effective involvement of the Principal and Vice Principal in teaching and Tutor Meetings provide for a mutual understanding and consideration of issues.

2.41 The process works very well in practice with formal and informal processes ensuring effective student engagement and positive relations between staff and students appropriate to provision of this size.

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

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.43 The College has a Teaching and Learning Strategy which states that its vision is to 'empower students to engage critically and creatively with their programme of study' and provides a list of principles to achieve this.

2.44 Assessment is designed by Pearson who also provides all assessment tasks and criteria for marking. Unit briefs are provided which are included in unit descriptors which are supplied by Pearson. Assignment briefs are approved by a Pearson-appointed external verifier prior to being given to students.

2.45 A programme specification is provided which lists the aims of 16 units but not of all units which are offered across all pathways. This is a College document but contains a footer from GT Academics 31/12/15 which would suggest their ownership. This specification does not conform to Pearson's own specification, nor does it meet Pearson's requirement for centres to produce their own programme specification. The team **recommends** that the College ensures programme specifications that fully meet Pearson requirements (see also Expectation A2.2).

2.46 The Teaching and Learning Strategy does not make reference to the Quality Code, Chapters B3 or B6 or to the BTEC Guide to Assessment Level 4 - 7.

2.47 The College states that it 'follows Edexcel assessment policies, regulations and processes, including those for the recognition of prior learning. The College publishes them and makes them available to all students in the relevant Handbooks'.

2.48 The College has an accredited prior learning (APL) process which appears to be a Pearson BTEC document. This includes examples of certified APL which have been approved. Information is also included in the Student Handbook and Admissions Policy. There is no indication of a process for accreditation of non-certificated experiential learning (APEL). Meetings with staff indicated that there had been no recent applications for accreditation of prior learning.

2.49 The College has procedures for identification and investigation of academic misconduct. Students are informed of these in Student Handbooks and at induction and reminded when briefs are distributed. There is no indication of informing external examiners of suspected academic misconduct. The College uses plagiarism-detection software to help detect incidences of academic misconduct. Because of the small class sizes and close working relationship between staff and students, any work submitted by students that is uncharacteristic of their usual performance can be easily detected and dealt with informally. This is done by interview with the student and a requirement to undertake a viva voce. Meetings with staff indicated that there had been no recent formal investigations of academic misconduct. The processes in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.50 The team examined evidence, including assessment briefs and external examiner reports, and met staff and students.

2.51 External examiner reports and Academic Management Reports from Pearson make positive comments on the standard of marking and feedback and the support given to students. The College does not currently hold assessment boards to consider student marks, progression and approval of awards, although this is a requirement of Pearson. The Internal Process to Ensure Academic Standards includes a note on yearly exam boards that 'The Lead Internal Verifier and Quality Nominee meet to double check grades awarded and students' eligibility for awards'. Minutes of the Management Team - Strategic and Senior Management Team - Operational meetings do not indicate consideration of results or approval of progression and awards. The College intends to introduce assessment boards for the 2016-17 academic year. The team **recommends** that the College holds examination boards in line with Pearson requirements (see also Expectation A2.2).

2.52 The comprehensive internal verification process whereby student work is verified by College staff and again by external academic consultants prior to external examination provides effective monitoring of assessment.

2.53 Students met by the team expressed satisfaction with the level and timing of assessment and the usefulness of feedback. They also commented favourably on the support given by staff.

2.54 The assessment processes follow Pearson regulations and are verified by Pearson with positive reports from external examiners and positive comments by students. Again, the small numbers of students and good communication between staff and students ensure effective consideration of assessment and support.

2.55 The assessment process works with measures in place to ensure appropriate academic standards are met and learning outcomes are achieved. The introduction of formal assessment boards would provide clear evidence of learning outcomes achieved for credit and qualifications awarded.

2.56 The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the risk is moderate due to weaknesses in part of the College's academic governance structure.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Moderate

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

Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining

Findings

2.57 External examiners are appointed by Pearson according to its criteria for appointment. Visits are made to the College to examine samples of student work following marking and internal verification in line with Pearson sampling requirements. Some external examiner reports indicate that marks have been blocked because insufficient samples of work were provided and that additional visits had to be made, but these have now been released following a further visit.

2.58 There is no indication of the process for considering and responding to external examiner reports. External examiner reports are posted on notice boards providing access to staff and students. The Internal Process to Ensure Academic Standards states that the Quality Nominee is responsible for monitoring reports and communicating actions to SMT. Action plans compiled following external examiner reports are created by SMT - Operational following meetings and reviewed by SMT - Strategic. The remit of the SMT does not specifically refer to consideration of reports or actions. Minutes of SMT - Operational and Strategic meetings seen by the team do not include consideration of reports or action plans or involvement in responses to them. The Quality Nominee, who is also the Vice Principal, is responsible for responses to external examiner reports. There is no indication of assessment board approval of marks, progression and final awards. However, the processes in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.59 The team examined evidence provided prior to and during the visit, including external examiner reports and responses, and met staff and students.

2.60 There is no indication of how external examiner reports are used. Action plans for visits in February 2014 are provided with an indication of issues being addressed but evidence of follow-up is lacking. However, meetings with staff indicated that all comments made by external examiners have been acted upon and subsequent reports confirm this. There is no evidence in minutes of Tutor Meetings of consideration of reports or action plans.

2.61 Students met by the team indicated that they were aware of the external examination process and had access to reports on notice boards.

2.62 The College is following Pearson regulations for external examining and has provided access to appropriate samples of assessed work. External examiner reports are positive with favourable comments.

2.63 There is little formal evidence of consideration of reports or completion of actions plans, although these appear to have been done. Reports from Pearson are uniformly positive but there is little evidence of how the College would deal with negative comments in reports.

2.64 The team concludes that the Expectation is 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

2.65 The College has responsibility for programme monitoring and review. The Academic Management Review is a report on the College by Pearson, and the Action Plan AMR identifies action points. There is also a Pearson guidance document to the AMR process. The College states that students are involved in annual monitoring but did not provide details to the team of how this is achieved. There is no indication of an overall annual monitoring report for the College.

2.66 The College produces a Quality Management System which includes its mission for ensuring academic quality and management structure together with guidance from QAA on programme design and approval and a list of all Expectations and Indicators of the Quality Code.

2.67 The Principal produces an annual report which is a general overview of the College performance over the previous year. The Vice Principal produces a termly report and also attends termly Tutor Meetings which serve to monitor the programme.

2.68 The revised College management structure includes two elements of the Senior Management Team - Operational which has oversight of standards, performance and issues and making proposals, action plans and reporting to the Senior Management Team - Strategic for monitoring and approval. This team also has responsibility for the financial position and strategic development of the College. There is student representation on these teams. The processes in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.69 The team examined evidence, including processes for monitoring and review, responsibilities and reports, and met staff and students.

2.70 The College follows Pearson's regulations and processes whose reports indicate satisfaction with monitoring and review procedures to ensure maintenance of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. Given the small higher education provision and close working relationships within the College, the revised process will enable appropriate monitoring and review of the programme.

2.71 The previous monitoring and review processes have been effective for the College's internal purposes and for reaction to external reports which, due to their generally positive nature, have not required detailed monitoring to be in place. The new organisational structure will enable and ensure that more formal monitoring and review will take place.

2.72 The revised structure is relatively new and will be subject to some modification as it matures. The team **affirms** the work undertaken by the Operational and Strategic Management Teams to increase oversight of the programme.

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

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints

Findings

2.74 The College has a number of processes for considering appeals and complaints. This largely consists of an open-door policy by which students can discuss issues with tutors, and mid-term tutorials held with the Vice Principal.

2.75 The Student Handbook contains processes for appeals, complaints and grievances provided by Pearson and by the College. Procedures for appeals and complaints are also included in the College Complaints Procedure, which is mainly concerned with academic appeals but includes the processes for complaints and grievances. The processes in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.76 The team examined evidence, including procedures for complaints and academic appeals, and met staff and students to confirm their understanding of the processes.

2.77 Meetings with staff indicated no formal academic appeals for consideration or complaints that had not been dealt with informally.

2.78 The processes and information about these processes are in place and accessible to students, enabling them to make formal or informal appeals and complaints.

2.79 Students met by the team indicated satisfaction with the ways that complaints were handled informally by the College staff.

2.80 The College has effective processes for dealing with complaints and appeals internally due to the good communication and working relationship between staff and students and the stated confidence that students have in presenting issues to staff at all levels. Consequently, there is no indication of appeals or complaints being made to the awarding organisation or to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator, although processes are in place to do so if required.

2.81 The process works in practice as policies and procedures are in place for formal appeals and complaints, but the size of provision, accessibility of staff, effective communications and mutual respect between staff and students ensure that they can usually be resolved informally.

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

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.83 The College does not offer work placements or any other work-based learning opportunities, therefore this Expectation does not apply.

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

2.84 The College does not offer research degrees, therefore this Expectation does not apply.

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

2.86 All of the Expectations relating to the College's quality of student learning opportunities are met with low risk apart from Expectation B6, which is met with a moderate risk. The review team identifies four areas of good practice in this section: the clear and supportive admissions processes which prepare students for an effective learning experience; the effective sharing of best practice including positive use of observation which facilitates the team ethos among staff; and the positive, enthusiastic and consistent approach to the implementation and use of digital technology, which enhances student learning opportunities and the effective partnership between the College and its students, which enables them to fully develop their academic, personal and professional potential.

2.87 The review team makes one recommendation in this section that concerns formalising staff development to increase the level of scholarly activity and the proportion of staff with appropriate higher education teaching qualifications. Two recommendations in section A also refer to Expectation B6.

2.88 There is one affirmation relating to the work undertaken by the Strategic and Operational Management Teams to increase oversight of programmes.

2.89 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 provides information in paper and digital form to potential students and other stakeholders. The College does not produce a hard copy prospectus but course details are available on the College website, which was recently awarded .ac.uk status. There is an option on this site for information to be translated into a number of languages.

3.2 The College does not have a policy for information but it does have an approval process before information is published. The Managing Director and Principal are authorised to give final approval for publishing the information. Programme and academic information is gathered by programme teams and produced by the Marketing Department.

3.3 Information to applicants and new students is provided electronically and includes the Pre-arrival Pack, Accommodation Pack and Brochure with additional information, for example Student Handbooks, provided on arrival.

3.4 The College uses social media to communicate with students and circulate information. This is managed and monitored by the Student Welfare Officer and Marketing Department. There is no College policy for the use of social media. The College is developing alternative methods to obtain a more effective and immediate information system for students, which includes online messaging or social media. The processes in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

3.5 The team met senior, academic and support staff as well as students, scrutinised documentation and externally facing web pages, and saw a demonstration of the use of digital technologies by the College.

3.6 The students whom the team met were happy with the accuracy and timeliness of information that they received and were actively encouraged to contribute ideas to improving the content and presentation of information, for example taking up a suggestion to include a translation facility on the website's course information pages to help the families of potential overseas students.

3.7 The College has commissioned an external audit of the website to ensure that its content is compliant with UK Visas and Immigration protocols. The upkeep of the site is managed externally by an agency. The College reviews the website monthly.

3.8 The team concludes that the provision of information by the College is well managed and that considerable effort is taken to ensure the accuracy and quality of information meet the needs of students and potential students. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

3.10 The Expectation for this judgement area is met and the associated level of risk is low. There are no features of good practice, recommendations or affirmations.

3.11 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 does not have a strategy or definition of enhancement and enhancement does not appear as a standard agenda item of meetings. The Quality Management Document lists all Expectations and Indicators of the Quality Code and guidance from QAA on programme design but makes no reference to enhancement. The examples of enhancement provided by the College refer to staff development, additional tutorial provision and academic support for students, all of which should be integral to the provision rather than enhancement, but have been initiated in response to student and staff feedback. The College has very good communication between staff and students who feel confident in bringing issues and requests to senior staff for consideration and that consideration is sympathetic and speedy.

4.2 The team examined evidence, including minutes of meetings and reports of observations, and met staff and students.

4.3 Some examples of enhancement were provided in meetings with staff, including improvements to IT provision and social accommodation for students implemented in reaction to student feedback. Meetings with the Principal, senior staff, academic staff, professional and support staff, and students revealed little understanding of enhancement or a strategic approach to it but rather a willingness to gather and consider student feedback and respond positively to it.

4.4 Staff at the College undergo teaching observations at which examples of good practice in teaching and learning are identified and shared. These can also be shared at termly Tutor Meetings. Many staff also teach at other institutions and can bring examples of good practice from there to their teaching at the College.

4.5 The size of provision and close working relationship between all staff and students encourage the sharing of good practice. The effective levels of student engagement provide feedback which can be quickly acted upon.

4.6 The College reacts well to student feedback, leading to some enhancement of student learning opportunities, but a more fully articulated strategy would lead to a more effective approach and greater understanding. However, students expressed a high level of satisfaction with the College both in meetings held with the review team and in questionnaires. The team **recommends** that the College fully articulates its strategic approach to the enhancement of learning opportunities.

4.7 The team confirms that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

4.9 The Expectation in this area is met and the associated level of risk is low.

4.10 There is one recommendation relating to the College fully articulating its strategic approach to the enhancement of learning opportunities.

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

5 Commentary on the Theme: Digital Literacy

Findings

5.1 The College established an IT Steering Committee in September 2014 which meets every quarter to identify issues and developments in the College IT system. This Committee includes student representatives and external advisers and is informed by the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) and other external bodies.

5.2 The College's commitment to digital literacy includes ensuring that all students have the required IT skills to complete the programme, parts of which demand professional levels of the application of digital literacy. It also ensures that teaching and support staff are fully competent to fulfil their roles. The Student Welfare Officer has responsibility for supporting staff and students in their use of technology. This includes student induction to College IT facilities and staff training in Tutor Meetings.

5.3 The staff whom the team met were enthusiastic about the new VLE and digital literacy. They described a pilot the previous year for the introduction of a new VLE, with three ambassadors piloting and supporting colleagues this academic year as the VLE rolled out to all units. Students submit most of their assessments through the VLE.

5.4 The College has also recently upgraded and standardised interactive whiteboards in all teaching rooms. Staff and students gave examples of their use in enhancing learning. An interactive whiteboard has been added to the computer teaching room at student request to make it easier for tutors to demonstrate software to whole class groups. Students were complimentary about the use of the VLE and the interactive whiteboards in adding to their learning experience. Staff commented that they picked up tips for enhancing their IT skills from students.

5.5 The College has also introduced a social media page to actively support the social side of College life and this is also used to keep in touch with alumni.

5.6 Students are encouraged to bring in their own laptops, and wireless access in the College has been enhanced to support this. Laptops are available for students to borrow if they do not have their own machine.

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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