Higher Education Review (Plus) of Pearson College

May 2014

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Plus) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Pearson College. The review took place from 19 to 20 May 2014 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Julie Andreshak-Behrman
- Dr Alan Howard.

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

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

- makes judgements on
  - the setting and maintenance of threshold 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.

In Higher Education Review (Plus) there is also a check on the provider's financial sustainability, management and governance (FSMG). This check has 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 of their education provider.

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.

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

The themes for the academic year 2013-14 are Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement and Student Employability,[2] and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

The QAA website gives more information about QAA and its mission.[3] A dedicated section explains the method for Higher Education Review (Plus).[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/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code.
[2] Higher Education Review themes: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106.
[3] QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us.
[4] Higher Education Review (Plus): www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Educational-Oversight-.aspx

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Pearson College

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

- The maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation **meets** UK expectations
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information produced about its provision **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

Good practice

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

- The role of the Degree Concept Teams in developing new programmes (Expectation B1).

Recommendations

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

By September 2014:

- embed within its quality assurance procedures a structured opportunity for dialogue between staff and students (Expectation B5).

By January 2015:

- clarify the purposes and operation of the peer observation process (Expectation B3).

By April 2015:

- adopt a systematic approach in the identification and provision of learning resources (Expectation B4).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The actions being taken to integrate Escape Studios into the College's processes and procedures (Expectation A3).

Theme: Student Employability

Pearson College takes a holistic approach to employability and makes a concerted effort to embed employability into every aspect of course design, delivery and the overall student experience. Employability features as a key part of the programme design process where employers and academics determine the relevance and currency of what the College offers through Degree Concept Teams.

A wide range of opportunities are provided for students to engage with the world of work. These include internships, access to industry mentors and achieving a Pearson Diploma. The latter is a competency-based qualification built on the requirements and skills identified by employers. The College has a designated Head of Talent Development who is responsible for supporting and developing students' employability.

Financial sustainability, management and governance

The financial sustainability, management and governance check has been satisfactorily completed.

About Pearson College

Pearson College is a wholly owned subsidiary of Pearson PLC who are an international educational publishing company providing learning materials, technologies, assessments and related services to teachers and students of all ages.

The College was incorporated in 2012 and recruited its first cohort in September of that year. The College's mission is:

> to become the UK's leading university for in-depth industry engagement which helps our students develop the knowledge, intellectual capacity and professional experience they need for their long term careers. Our courses are designed to be academically demanding, industry informed, and to inspire students with a real interest in how their chosen discipline plays a role in the modern professional world.

The College is located at 80 Strand, London and has access to additional learning space and resources at Birkbeck, University of London. Additional study space is available at Makerversity, Somerset House, London.

Fifty students are studying on the single three-year programme in Business and Enterprise that leads to a Pearson Higher National Diploma (HND) in Business and a BSc (Hons) Business and Enterprise top-up validated by Royal Holloway, University of London. Forty-nine students are studying, by direct entry, on the BSc (Hons) Business and Enterprise top-up programme. No students have yet graduated from the College.

The College Principal and Managing Director is supported by a senior management team who have responsibility for curriculum delivery, and all the necessary support and professional services to underpin the College's functions.

Strategically, the College is looking to develop its activity around the four areas of business, applied science, creative industries, and education. Currently, the College is validating two new programmes to start in September 2014. The first is a BA (Hons) Business Management (with various specialisms) validated by Ashridge Business School and the second is a BSc (Hons) Paramedic Science validated by Bournemouth University and accredited by the Health and Care Professions Council.

In October 2013 Escape Studios became part of the College, and this is seen as the first stage in the development of a School of Creative Industries. Escape is located in premises at Shepherds Bush, London and offers courses in visual effects and animation. Escape Studios offer programmes validated by the University of Bradford. These include: PgCert Compositing for Visual Effects and PgCert 3D for Visual Effects (there is currently one student enrolled on each of these programmes). The MA Visual Effects, although validated, is not currently being offered and a revised version is under development. Escape Studios is currently working through an integration process with the College.

The College has not undergone a previous QAA review.

Explanation of the findings about Pearson College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

Explanation of the findings about Pearson College

1 Judgement: Maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards

Expectation (A1): Each qualification (including those awarded through arrangements with other delivery organisations or support providers) is allocated to the appropriate level in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ).

Quality Code, *Chapter A1: The national level*

Findings

1.1   The College works with awards at Levels 4 through to 7 and currently delivers a BSc Business and Enterprise programme comprising a Pearson HND in Business and a BSc (Hons) Business and Enterprise, and top-up validated by Royal Holloway, University of London. Following the October 2013 acquisition of Escape Studios, the College's portfolio has expanded to include three University of Bradford validated degrees. These are: MA Visual Effects (this course is being revised and is not currently offered) and PgCert for Compositing for Visual Effects and for 3D Visual Effects. The College has embarked upon validation for a range of new courses, namely BSc (Hons) Paramedic Science (Bournemouth University and the Healthcare Professions Council) and six BA (Hons) Business Management degrees (Ashridge Business School).

1.2   The College does not have degree awarding powers and therefore works with degree-awarding bodies and an awarding organisation. Consequently, the responsibilities for determining award levels and outcomes lies with the relevant degree-awarding body or awarding organisation. The College consistently maps each new award against the level descriptors. The College has undertaken a mapping exercise against Level 6 of the FHEQ for each degree programme prior to submitting it for validation and for HND programmes follows the prescribed outcomes by the degree-awarding body or awarding organisation. Much of the work regarding levels, learning outcomes and compliance with degree-awarding body and awarding organisation requirements takes place within the context of the Design Concept Teams, organised around each new programme.

1.3   The review team accessed programme specifications, meeting minutes, FHEQ mapping and validation reports with respect to Expectation A1.

1.4   The College works effectively with its degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation to ensure compliance with all delivery, assessment and award requirements. The main liaison for the degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation is the Vice-Principal for Academic Quality and Enhancement. The College recognises that it may be necessary to devolve some of these responsibilities to other members of staff as it expands and grows. Staff and students are aware of the requirements and relationships of their degree-awarding bodies and articulated the meanings of each level clearly and fully.

1.5   The review team concludes that all qualifications are allocated to the appropriate level of the FHEQ. Expectation A1 is therefore **met** and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A2): All higher education programmes of study take account of relevant subject and qualification benchmark statements.

Quality Code, *Chapter A2: The subject and qualification level*

Findings

1.6   The degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation have the overall responsibility for taking account of the relevant subject and qualification benchmark statements.

1.7   Through working with its degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation, and relevant professional bodies, the College creates detailed maps of learning outcomes and benchmarks against module content. The College further synchronises its courses to these requirements by engaging industry employers as part of its Design Concept Team process and by consulting with a range of professional bodies. Benchmarking is also taken into consideration in the College's annual programme monitoring report for its pilot year of the Business and Enterprise Programme.

1.8   The team reviewed a range of documents including minutes of Design Concept Team meetings, course maps and degree-awarding body documentation.

1.9   Through this evidence, the College demonstrated that appropriate attention is being given to subject and qualification benchmark statements. This was particularly clear with the new qualifications undergoing validation.

1.10   The review team concludes that the College makes appropriate use of relevant subject and qualification benchmark statements in the design and delivery of its programmes. Expectation A2 is therefore **met** and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3): Higher education providers make available definitive information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements for a programme of study.

Quality Code, *Chapter A3: The programme level*

Findings

1.11   The College's main vehicles for the dissemination of information on aims, learning outcomes and expected learner achievements are its online learning environment (OLE) (able to be accessed by all students and staff) and its public website. The College uses programme specifications to communicate expectations to prospective students via its website and prospectus for its business courses. These programme documents include the overall programme aims; expected learner outcomes; admission criteria; and teaching, learning and assessment strategies.

1.12   Complete and clear information in the form of programme specifications, assessment information and student handbooks are readily available on the OLE for the BSc and HND courses. Students confirmed that the information needed to understand what is required of them to be successful is accessible and accurate.

1.13   Changes to information that are minor are the responsibility of the programme leader. If substantive changes are required, the programme leader is responsible for engaging with the degree-awarding body or awarding organisation for approval of these changes.

1.14   The review team accessed the OLE and examined the relevant course materials, as well as reviewing the College's website.

1.15   Given the recent acquisition of Escape Studios, there is not yet complete parity among the information on aims, learning outcomes and expected learner achievements across all courses. The College has plans to work towards a more consistent approach to the dissemination of this information across courses (including the Escape Studios courses), both in its form and availability. The review team **affirms** the actions being taken to integrate Escape Studios into the College's processes and procedures.

1.16   The review team concludes that information provided to stakeholders on the aims, learning outcomes and learner achievements are clear, accurate and accessible. Expectation A3 is therefore **met** and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A4): Higher education providers have in place effective processes to approve and periodically review the validity and relevance of programmes.

Quality Code, *Chapter A4: Approval and review*

Findings

1.17   Periodic programme review is managed by the degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation with which the College delivers its qualifications. This process varies depending on the partner.

1.18   The College itself has a programme monitoring and review structure through the annual programme monitoring report. The Business and Enterprise Programme has been assessed using this structure; it is the only programme to have completed an annual cycle. The report process undertaken is thorough, analytical and incorporates external examiner reporting and student and staff feedback as key data points to create an action plan to deal with issues raised. The annual programme monitoring report is disseminated through the College's Review and Enhancement Committee and then is further disseminated to the Academic Board.

1.19   Programme leaders are responsible for reviewing information collated from end of term module feedback and taking any necessary action. The annual programme monitoring report will be the tool used for internal annual monitoring for all of the College's current and future programmes.

1.20   In the development and approval of any new courses, the College assembles a Design Concept Team responsible for contributing to a debate on all aspects of course development. The Design Concept Team is drawn from a wide-range of stakeholders, including a student representative, industry professionals and academics. This tripartite system was revealed to be particularly effective in balancing the needs and views of stakeholders. The catalyst for establishing a Design Concept Team is course design as the title suggests; however, the Design Concept Team process is an iterative one in which the Team also serves to monitor the currency of the programmes through ongoing review.

1.21   The review team investigated the review mechanisms with staff and students, studied the annual programme monitoring report and Design Concept Team and Review and Enhancement Committee minutes.

1.22   Student participation in the Design Concept Teams has been integral to this process and key in developing not only the course but also providing an excellent development opportunity for students. Participation from industry leaders and academics produces lively debate and balances workplace and educational outcomes.

1.23   Students also reported that during the course of the term the College was open to feedback directly to staff or via a feedback email address. For example, such feedback has led to changes to classroom teaching during the delivery of a module.

1.24   The review team concludes that the processes and procedures for programme approval, as well as ongoing and periodic review are well managed and fit for purpose. Expectation A4 is therefore **met** and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A5): Higher education providers ensure independent and external participation in the management of threshold academic standards.

Quality Code, *Chapter A5: Externality*

Findings

1.25 The College's teaching staff come from a variety of UK universities and/or are active in their respective industries and can therefore provide an external perspective on the College's activities. The Academic Board has in its membership external practitioners as does Escape Studios' Advisory Board.

1.26 Responsibilities associated with external examiners, validation and periodic review by the College's degree-awarding bodies and, where applicable awarding organisation, are made clear through the operating manuals and validation reports.

1.27 The review team met with the College's teaching and professional staff and reviewed the composition of the College's boards and committees.

1.28 The College engages an extensive list of external stakeholders in the process of its management of academic standards. These have included external academics and industry employers to advise on programme development, admissions procedures and a student association.

1.29 Due to the newness of the College, limited data is available from external examiners. The external examiner reports that are available are largely positive. The College provides students access to the external examiner reports via its OLE and students were aware that they can access the reports through that medium.

1.30 The review team concludes that the College is in a position to ensure independent and external participation through a variety of formal structures. Expectation A5 is therefore **met** and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A6): Higher education providers ensure the assessment of students is robust, valid and reliable and that the award of qualifications and credit are based on the achievement of the intended learning outcomes.

Quality Code, *Chapter A6: Assessment of achievement of learning outcomes*

Findings

1.31   Assessment practice is considered from the design stage of the award during the Design Concept Team process. This is in terms of appropriateness, levelness and compliance with the validation requirements. The College follows the assessment criteria for the HND modules. The degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation are responsible for appointing external examiners who review samples of completed and marked assessments. These reports are analysed as part of the annual programme monitoring report process.

1.32   Staff are trained in writing the assessments and these are then internally verified by the programme leader. For the top-up degree, assessments, once internally verified, are reviewed and approved by a committee involving representation from Royal Holloway, University of London.

1.33   The review team accessed student handbooks, HND staff assessment handbooks and external examiners reports in drawing their conclusions.

1.34   Students are made aware of all the assessment requirements in the first week of the term via the OLE. The College is currently amending its timelines to have this information available for the first day of term. Students commented that the assessments are fair and firm.

1.35   The review team concludes that the College has in place measures to ensure the assessment of students is robust, valid and reliable and that the award of qualifications and credit are based on the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. Expectation A6 is therefore **met** and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards: Summary of findings

1.36   In reaching its positive judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook. All of the expectations for this judgement area have been met with a low level of risk. There is evidence that although the College's degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation have ultimate responsibility for setting academic standards, the College is aware of its responsibilities for maintaining standards.

1.37   The College is taking appropriate action in areas where it recognises that further work would enhance practice and contribute positively to the maintenance of academic standards. The review team affirmed in Expectation A3 the actions being taken to integrate Escape Studios into the College's processes and procedures.

1.38   The review team therefore concludes that the maintenance of threshold academic standards of awards offered by the College on behalf of its degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: Quality of student learning opportunities

Expectation (B1): Higher education providers have effective processes for the design and approval of programmes.

Quality Code, *Chapter B1: Programme design and approval*

Findings

2.1 The College takes responsibility for the design of new programmes which are validated according to the processes and procedures of a partner institution with degree awarding powers.

2.2 Central to the College's approach to new programme design is the formation of a Design Concept Team. The Design Concept Team brings together industry representatives, students and academics to discuss programme content from first principles through to drafting a formal proposal. Following validation, mini-Design Concept Teams are formed around each course unit, through which an academic lead is paired with an industry lead to work on the detail of each course unit including programme specification and module outlines.

2.3 Design Concept Teams have been used to design each new programme validated since the College formed, including the BSc Business and Enterprise (Royal Holloway, University of London), BSc Business and Management (Ashridge Business School) and a new MA Visual Arts programme in Escape Studios (University of Bradford).

2.4 The review team tested this approach to programme design by reading the terms of reference and minutes of Design Concept Team meetings and speaking to staff and students who had participated in one or more Design Concept Team.

2.5 The team found that Design Concept Teams routinely included representation from industry, students and internal and external academics. A student spoke enthusiastically about their participation and it was evident that their views had contributed positively to discussion, at times acting as a bridge between divergent opinions of the academic and industry members. Design Concept Team meeting minutes revealed constructive and informed discussion with a strong focus on how the proposed programme would prepare participants for the workplace. The review team identified the role of the Degree Concept Teams in developing new programmes as **good practice**.

2.6 The team found that FHEQ level descriptors are explicitly considered and referenced, and learning outcomes being developed are mapped against the level descriptors before the programme is presented to the degree-awarding body or awarding organisation for validation.

2.7 The design and approval process for programmes is still in its first iterations and has not yet been subject to formal review. However, the team is satisfied that Expectation B1 is **met** and that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B2): Policies and procedures used to admit students are clear, fair, explicit and consistently applied.

Quality Code, *Chapter B2: Admissions*

Findings

2.8   The College currently admits students at Level 4 (HND, BSc Business and Enterprise/Management), Level 6 (top-up BSc Business and Enterprise) and Level 7 (MA at Escape Studios). The admissions process is administered by a Manager of Admissions and Student Funding, and the selection process is undertaken by a candidate review/admissions panel of academic staff.

2.9   The College interviews all applicants and those applying for a scholarship attend an assessment day. In most cases offers are conditional on achieving a UCAS points score.

2.10   The College considers candidates with different academic circumstances who do not offer standard entry qualifications. All such applicants attend the assessment day and interview. A final decision on offer is made by the admissions panel. The College considers accreditation of prior learning for applicants seeking entry to the top-up (Level 6) of the BSc Business and Enterprise programme. The Royal Holloway, University of London operating agreement sets out specific procedures for this and the final decision on offer is made by the degree-awarding body.

2.11   The review team tested the approach to admissions by speaking to current students and with staff involved in admissions, as well as scrutinising written evidence including the minutes of selection panels and relevant meetings.

2.12   The procedures and policies for admission are articulated in the internal Academic Quality Assurance Handbook and have been agreed with the relevant degree-awarding body. The review team met professional staff with responsibility for the administration of admissions who demonstrated a thorough understanding of procedure, policy and of their responsibilities.

2.13   The review team found evidence that the Review and Enhancement Committee has appropriate oversight of admissions and discusses matters of principle. For example, the Committee has recently established a College principle that unconditional offers will not be made to applicants still to sit A levels or other qualifying exams, so that they remain motivated to achieve the best results possible.

2.14   The team met students admitted to the College at different levels and with different backgrounds and qualifications. They compared the admissions process favourably with their experiences at other institutions. They thought it had helped them make an informed choice about deciding to study at the College.

2.15   The College website has a clear link on the homepage which directs prospective students to relevant information about the application processes. The website also includes information on the College's appeals and complaints process. The team also saw evidence that students are given appropriate information about registration, enrolment and induction and that unsuccessful applicants are offered constructive feedback.

2.16   The review team found that while the College has not yet fully analysed the effectiveness of its admissions policies and criteria, consideration of the previous admissions cycle is included in the annual programme monitoring process.

2.17 In evaluating the evidence the review team concludes that policies and procedures used to admit students are clear, fair, explicit and consistently applied and therefore confirms that Expectation B2 is **met** and the associated 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

2.18   The approach to learning and teaching is set out in the College Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy. Programme content is delivered by permanent and associate teaching staff through a blended approach including lectures, seminars and online materials. The OLE is central to delivery of module content and programme information. Learning resources including e-books are made available to students through the OLE.

2.19   The College provides an internship opportunity for Level 4 and Level 5 full-time students and the College organises events with industry and employers. Provision at Escape Studios has a strong focus on skills required for employment within a specialised sector of IT and design.

2.20   The review team tested and evaluated the effectiveness of the approaches to learning and teaching by reference to various documentary evidence and through meetings with a range of staff and students.

2.21   The review team read staff CVs and was satisfied that permanent and associate teaching staff are appropriately experienced and well qualified. Associates generally hold academic posts at other UK higher education institutions.

2.22   The College is developing a staff development strategy and training opportunities are made available. Two members of staff have funding to undertake a PGCHE course. In addition, all teaching staff involved in the Escape programmes have the opportunity to undertake a University of Bradford module in Learning and Teaching.

2.23   Teaching staff praised their induction and the technical support provided for using the OLE that is overseen by a Head of Learning Technology. One person had experienced in-class observation of their teaching undertaken by the programme leader. However, the team did not find evidence of a systematic approach to peer observation of teaching and it was unclear how such activities informed appraisal and staff development. The review team therefore **recommends** that by January 2015 the College clarify the purposes and operation of the peer observation process.

2.24   Students spoke highly of the professionalism of teaching staff and specifically how lecturers try to 'extract the most from us' in interactive teaching sessions. The team noted instances of mixed feedback in the minutes of Student Council and, when pressed, staff cited an example of a staffing change made in light of this feedback. From discussions, the review team found a good working relationship evident between students and staff.

2.25   The review team accessed the OLE and found varied and well presented content. Content is reviewed by the programme leader to assure standards prior to access by students. Teaching staff are clear about expectations for online content delivery and students feel it contributes positively to their learning experience.

2.26   The team found that internships are effectively managed and provide opportunity for enhancing student employability. It is evident that students on internships are well supported by a Head of Talent Development and participation can contribute to a non-credit bearing Pearson Diploma. Students maintain personal logs and both the student and the industry mentor complete feedback reports at the end of internship. Students spoke highly of their internship experience and how they feel the programme prepares them for the outside world. One student suggested linking an internship to a Level 6 module and to offer credit-bearing placements is a possibility the College could explore.

2.27   There is a good range of learning opportunities provided, although some, such as industry events in London, are less accessible to students in Manchester. However, the College now covers the cost of attendance for these students.

2.28   The College works to enhance the provision of learning opportunities (through internships) and teaching practices (particularly through the use of the OLE). Expectation B3 is therefore found to be **met**. While the review team feels a more systematic approach is needed to peer observation of teaching and clarifying its role in such activities as appraisal and staff development, the level of associated risk is moderate because the problems identified are confined to a small part of the provision.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

2.29   Academic information, including programme handbooks, policies on assessment and additional learning needs, is made available to students on the OLE. In addition students may access learning resources including e-books and some journals via the OLE.

2.30   The College arranges an activity-based induction weekend for new students prior to start of teaching. The format was revised in 2013 in response to feedback from 2012 attendees and now has greater focus on bonding and team building.

2.31   The College allocates students a personal tutor on entry and meetings take place at least twice a year. The second meeting is a workplace style appraisal. The College invites students to declare additional learning needs during application and at registration. Academic progress is overseen by the Progression and Retention Committee. A sub-committee has oversight of attendance. Class registers are taken but engagement with OLE materials is not currently monitored.

2.32   In order to confirm that Expectation B4 is being met the review team spoke to staff and students, and scrutinised relevant documentary evidence.

2.33   The review team was concerned that 15 out of the 19 Pearson employees sponsored by the company to take the Business and Enterprise programme in 2012-13 on a part-time basis, withdrew prior to completion. The high attrition rate left few students remaining on the programme in Manchester, but the team was satisfied with the action plan put in place to support the remaining students. The College has altered its procedures for enrolling sponsored staff on its programmes. Retention among full-time students (none of whom were sponsored by Pearson) was much better.

2.34   The review team found information for students on the OLE about support services and additional learning needs. The team saw an individual student support agreement which included appropriate reasonable adjustments. The team spoke to staff who are well informed about responsibilities towards disabled students and the processes and procedures for supporting students with extenuating circumstances.

2.35   The review team asked about retrospective allowance for a student diagnosed with a disability mid-session. The College had not experienced this situation but staff confirmed such cases would be considered under mitigating circumstances procedures.

2.36   Feedback from the student submission and Student Council minutes reveal concerns about access to library facilities. The team asked for evidence of the College's response. Specific action has been taken in response to specific feedback and has included subscribing to additional electronic journal packages, making paper copies of textbooks available and arranging borrowing rights for College students at Birkbeck University library. The decision on allocating resource is made by the Head of Learning Resources and a Vice-Principal. The review team **recommends** that by April 2015 the College adopt a systematic approach in the identification and provision of learning resources.

2.37   The review team noted plans to make additional study space available as the number of programmes and students increased. The College has recently facilitated access to work space at Makerversity. Students who spoke to the review team were satisfied with

current study space provision. Students generally felt staff were approachable and responsive to emails.

2.38   The review team found that Expectation B4 is being **met** because the College takes appropriate steps to enable student development and where problems have arisen the College has reacted to enable remedial action. While the review team feels a more systematic approach is needed to the identification and provision of learning resources, the level of associated risk is moderate because the problems identified are confined to a small part of the provision.

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

2.39   The Student Charter is introduced to students at induction and is linked to within the OLE. The Charter encourages students to be confident and proactive in voicing ideas or concerns and to take co-ownership of the course and the College.

2.40   The College has a range of mechanisms for engaging students including utilising online survey tools to collect questionnaire-based feedback from students on module and programme level matters, and a student co-creator scheme. Co-creators engage in varied activities on behalf of the College and may provide feedback directly to senior staff on issues of concern to students. Co-creator meetings are held monthly.

2.41   Student Council is an independent student-led forum and one function of the Pearson College Student Association, which also supports the creation and development of student societies and other social functions. Student Council membership is open to all students and one staff member attends the first part of meetings to provide feedback.

2.42   These varied approaches to student engagement enable Expectation B5 to be met. The review team tested their effectiveness by talking to staff and students, and reading documentary evidence including minutes of meetings, programme and module review reports and the results of student feedback questionnaires.

2.43   The review team looked at annual review reports for two modules that were reflective and thorough but lacking explicit reference to student feedback. However, the review team heard from teaching staff that the programme leader discusses module feedback with them. Consideration of questionnaire feedback is evident in the annual programme monitoring report.

2.44   The team noted the enthusiasm of students involved in Student Council. It was evident from the minutes that meetings occur regularly and a range of matters are discussed. However, the team found that representation from students at Manchester and Escape Studios is limited. Student Council is not a formal part of the College quality assurance structure and, although students are often represented on College committees, the minutes of Student Council are not routinely tabled. The team felt that a formal process for receiving and responding to Council business, along with greater staff engagement with Council meetings could strengthen this body.

2.45   The review team felt there were opportunities to better align the College's co-creator scheme with the student-led Council and to ensure all students are represented. The College does not organise its own student-staff liaison type committees but the team heard from senior staff that this was under consideration. The review team **recommends** that by September 2014 the College embed within its quality assurance procedures, a structured opportunity for dialogue between staff and students.

2.46   Overall, the team is confident that the College provides opportunity for student engagement and that when students raise concerns they are taken seriously by senior staff and action is often seen to be taken. The team is satisfied that Expectation B5 is **met** and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B6): Higher education providers ensure that students have appropriate opportunities to show they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the award of a qualification or credit.

Quality Code, *Chapter B6: Assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning*

Findings

2.47   Guiding principles on assessment practices are outlined in the College Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy. More detailed procedure is set out in the Academic Quality Assurance Handbook.

2.48   HND assessments are written by academic staff and are internally verified before release to students. The external examiner scrutinises assessment papers and verification processes at their annual visit. Level 6 assessments are scrutinised internally by a sub-committee comprising representatives from Royal Holloway, University of London and the College, prior to being sent to the external examiner for verification.

2.49   Student handbooks contain information on assessment matters, including guidance on academic conduct and grading requirements. Students submit work online and it is checked using the Turnitin system. Marking is completed offline and feedback returned to students on standard proformas.

2.50   The College's approach to the assessment of students enables Expectation B6 to be met. The review team tested the overall robustness of the approach by asking to view specific evidence. In particular the review team examined why there wasn't one overarching College policy on assessment processes and policy. The team also met staff involved in setting and administering assessments, as well as current students.

2.51   The review team heard that the College seeks to take overall responsibility for assessment but that the College's approach has to account for variation in policy between the different degree-awarding bodies and the awarding organisation. For example, rules on penalties for late submission of work or over-length work vary between programmes and sometimes between levels depending on the degree-awarding body or the awarding organisation responsible, making production of a single policy difficult .The team therefore spoke to professional staff who gave a detailed account of the administration of assessments and how different eventualities are managed. The team also accessed the OLE and found information on assessment matters relevant to different students. The team concludes that sound processes are in place for the administration of assessments underpinned by relevant policy determined by the degree-awarding bodies and the awarding organisation.

2.52   Scrutiny of assessments is evidently robust and assignments are mapped to the appropriate level. The review team heard final year students reflect on the greater emphasis on critical thinking and independent study at Level 6. External examiner reports, where they currently exist, confirm the suitability of assessments.

2.53   The review team found that assessment issues are regularly raised at Student Council including questions about exam/coursework weightings, exam timings and staggering of deadlines. Students felt that the assessment burden was too onerous in the first term of the HND. The College reviewed this and made changes, which students indicate improved matters.

2.54   The review team concludes that the College takes reasonable steps to manage student workload and that the assessment regime is appropriate to the level of study and learning outcomes being tested.

2.55   The College works closely with its degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation to ensure that students have appropriate opportunities to demonstrate achievement of the intended learning outcomes for their award. Assessment strategies, including formative and summative components, are designed to reinforce learning and provide different methods to test students' abilities. Therefore the review team is satisfied that Expectation B6 is **met** and the associated 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

2.56   The degree-awarding bodies and the awarding organisation are responsible for the appointment of external examiners. The College is responsible for providing external examiners with the information, documentation and evidence they request, and for complying with their recommendations.

2.57   The Academic Quality Assurance Handbook provides guidance on external examining processes and procedures. External examiner feedback is considered as part of the annual programme monitoring process. External examiner reports are made available to students on the OLE.

2.58   The review team read the 2013 and 2014 reports for the HND Business and Enterprise and the 2013 report for the MA Visual Effects Production, and tested how reports were used by the College.

2.59   In 2013 the HND external examiner report raised the issue of feedback, recommending changes to the way in which referral grades and feedback are recorded and disseminated. This review team found that this issue was addressed in the annual programme monitoring report. In 2014 the external examiner commented that quality and consistency in student feedback is now much improved, and all academic records are methodically and diligently recorded.

2.60   The University of Bradford external examiner responsible for MA Visual Effects Production (with Escape Studios) also reports on a number of other Bradford programmes. However, the form used for this purpose is well designed with a separate section, 'Working with Partners', in which comment on the Escape Studios programme is clearly made. The report highlighted the practical nature of the course.

2.61   The team found external examiner reports available to students on the OLE. There is not currently a formal process through which students can provide comment to inform a College response to the external examiner; however, a College response to the HND external examiner is not required.

2.62   In seeking to test and evaluate the College's approach to meeting this expectation the review team was constrained by the limited evidence reflecting the newness of provision. The first students graduate from the BSc Business and Enterprise programmes in 2014.

2.63   However, the review team is satisfied that the College responds positively when issues are identified and that reports receive appropriate consideration within the quality assurance structure. Consequently the review team judges Expectation B7 to be **met** and associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B8): Higher education providers have effective procedures in place to routinely monitor and periodically review programmes.

Quality Code, *Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review*

Findings

2.64   The Academic Quality Assurance Handbook outlines policy on monitoring, review and enhancement of programmes.

2.65   The College has an annual monitoring process for each programme which uses data from sources including admissions, student feedback, external examiner reports and progression and retention information. The annual programme monitoring report is produced according to an agreed template; an action plan is completed for each section and any potential areas of good practice identified so they may be disseminated more widely. The annual programme monitoring report is tabled at the Review and Enhancement Committee for approval and then at Academic Board. The Review and Enhancement Committee monitors progress with action items.

2.66   Responsibility for annual monitoring of the BSc Business and Enterprise programme rests with the degree-awarding body, Royal Holloway, University of London.

2.67   The review team tested the monitoring process by reviewing the available annual programme monitoring report for 2013 and by talking to senior staff.

2.68   The team noted that externality is provided in the review process by consideration of external examiner reports. It was not clear how much input external academic and industry members of Academic Board had in the process. The team acknowledge that the process is in an early stage of implementation.

2.69   The first Level 6 review by Royal Holloway, University of London of the BSc Business and Enterprise will take place in 2014 when the first students complete the programme. The team heard that alongside this the College intends to write its own annual programme monitoring report covering all three years of the programme as part of its aim to take on greater responsibility for the quality of its provision.

2.70   The College is currently reviewing the monitoring and review processes in place for the programmes at Escape Studios and intends to make them consistent with those of the College as far as is possible. In so doing it is liaising with its degree-awarding body, the University of Bradford. Escape Studios staff are included in the membership of the Review and Enhancement committee and are assimilated within the Pearson College organisational structure.

2.71   The review team recognises that the College seeks to develop its own academic governance structure to take on greater responsibility for setting, maintaining and assuring standards. In so doing the College should ensure that all such activity is compatible with the requirements of the degree-awarding bodies and the awarding organisation who hold ultimate authority for setting, maintaining and assuring standards.

2.72   The review team is satisfied that Expectation B8 is **met** and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B9): Higher education providers have fair, effective and timely procedures for handling students' complaints and academic appeals.

Quality Code, *Chapter B9: Complaints and appeals*

Findings

2.73   The College has agreed policies and procedures with their degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation for student complaints and appeals, and these are made available to students on the OLE.

2.74   The final stage in a formal complaint involves referral to the degree-awarding bodies or the awarding organisation. The procedures make provision for students to be accompanied at any hearings. The appeals and complaints process, as well as monitoring issues arising out of appeals or complaints, is reviewed via the annual programme monitoring report process.

2.75   The review team looked at the relevant documentation but was unable to fully test the effectiveness of these procedures as there have as yet been no complaints or appeals.

2.76   Based on the available evidence the review team is satisfied that Expectation B9 is **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

2.77   The College has responsibility for the quality of the learning opportunity where learning takes place in the workplace. The College provides work-based learning opportunities for Level 4 and Level 5 students primarily on the business programmes. These internship opportunities are not credit-bearing.

2.78   The review team therefore evaluated the effectiveness of the College's approach to the management of internship opportunities. The team examined the internship guide for students and employers, and example student and employer feedback forms. The team also spoke to the Head of Talent Development and students.

2.79   The internship guides provide clear information on the respective responsibilities of the manager and intern. Students confirmed that a progress check is undertaken to ensure that the internship is on track and performance is in line with expectations. The review team noted the enthusiasm of students for their engagement with employers and how it contributed to their own personal development.

2.80   Overall, the review team found that the College satisfactorily manages its relationships with employers and processes are in place to secure the quality of student learning opportunities. The team concludes that Expectation B10 is **met** and the associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research degrees*

Findings

2.81   The College does not offer research degrees.

Quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.82   In reaching its positive judgement about the quality of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook and noted that all Expectations have been met.

2.83   Factors contributing to the positive judgement include: the good practice identified in the use of Degree Concept Teams and involvement of students, academic staff and employers in these. In addition the review team noted the positive feedback from students on the support available and opportunities for involvement in their programmes and study, the management of admissions, the activity based student induction, the OLE and the use of internships.

2.84   Although the review team made three recommendations in this area, it is of the opinion that these recommendations are designed to enhance the quality of learning opportunities by structuring the current arrangements for dialogue between staff and students, clarifying the peer observation process and adopting a systematic approach in the identification and provision of learning resources.

2.85   In concluding that the quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations, the review team is of the view that the two expectations that pose a moderate level of risk do not present any serious risk to the management of this area.

3 Judgement: Quality of the information produced about its provision

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 main vehicles for transmission of information are through its websites (Pearson College main website and that of Escape Studios), as well as its OLE and what is termed the virtual learning environment (VLE) at Escape Studios.

3.2   The College focuses on the consistency of its digital marketing to send a clear and coherent message to its intended audiences. The College has a sign-off procedure for changes, additions and updates to their public information. The Head of Marketing and Vice-Principal External Relations are ultimately responsible for vetting and checking all changes to the College's websites and any printed materials.

3.3   The review team reviewed the College websites and its OLE, and met with students and staff to draw its conclusions.

3.4   The review team found the information on these media to be clear and comprehensive, and this was also verified by the College's students. The information that students received prior to attending the College has been in keeping with the reality of the experience. The admissions process was transparent and understood by students. Key academic and administrative policies are clearly articulated and accessible.

3.5   The College emphasises its use of student voice to articulate to its stakeholders the breadth and depth of the student experience. Having a decade of graduates, Escape Studios utilises former students as exemplars of the avenues of progression possible for its graduates. The College's business programmes have yet to have any graduates, but current students feature on the website to communicate their experiences. Pearson College intends to continue to integrate Escape Studios into its overall information strategy.

3.6   The OLE is used robustly to post all course-related materials, including assessment information, course notes, readings, and policies and procedures. The Head of Student Technology and Learning Resources is responsible for verifying that the requested information has been posted on the website at the start of the module. Teaching staff were particularly complimentary of the training and support received with regard to the OLE. The expectations for its use were clear and enforced.

3.7   Overall, the review team found that the College manages its information in a way that assures that it is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The team concludes that Expectation C is **met** and the associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Quality of the information produced about its provision: Summary of findings

3.8   In reaching its positive judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook. The Expectation in the area of information about higher education provision has been met with a low level of risk. The College is aware of its responsibilities for assuring information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy and this was confirmed by the students.

3.9   Therefore, the review team concludes that the quality of the information produced about its provision **meets** UK expectations.

4 Judgement: 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 As the College is relatively new (first intake 2012) the review team felt that their priorities had been to implement provision which met expectations and to respond to areas of concern identified in student feedback. Several parts of this report identify ways in which this has occurred and the team has judged that all expectations are met.

4.2 In looking for evidence of examples of strategic enhancement activity the review team placed emphasis on the College's own self-evaluation document and discussions with College staff. The team felt that a comment made in one meeting that 'enhancement is not about fixing issues, it's about looking proactively at ways to improve' articulated a culture and ethos that came across more generally in meetings with staff. It helped confirm the review team's impression that the College had a positive approach to enhancing quality and standards.

4.3 The team has noted examples that provide evidence of strategic decisions being made to enhance areas of activity. These include the current good practice in the operation of the Design Concept Teams and the potential offered through the developing co-creator scheme.

4.4 The review team heard from a range of students in their own video-based student submission and in a review visit meeting. The team found students to be proud of their College and that students see themselves as partners with staff in its future growth and success. The review team feels the co-creator scheme will help facilitate this partnership and ties in well with the Student Charter, which seeks to encourage students to be 'proactive in voicing ideas or concerns and to take ownership of the course and the college'.

4.5 The review team also found evidence of approaches to enhancing the student learning experience through the internship scheme and the strategic appointment of a Head of Talent Development to support student development and employability. The team heard one suggestion for further enhancement by possibly linking internships with credit-bearing modules.

4.6 Other areas offer the potential for further proactive strategic management as the College portfolio of programmes develops and demand for learning resources increases.

4.7 However, overall the review team consider that deliberate steps are being taken to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities and that the Expectation is **met** and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.8   In reaching its positive judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook. The Expectation for enhancement of learning opportunities has been met and the risk is low. Although the first intake of students was in 2012 and as a consequence the College is still establishing itself, the review team identified that there was an ethos and culture of quality enhancement across the College. This was supported by the students in their submission and meeting with the review team.

4.9   Therefore the review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1 Employability is key to the mission of the College. It features as an important part of the course design process where industry employers and academics support the relevance and currency of what the College offers. The College takes a holistic approach to employability and makes a concerted effort to embed this key aspect of their mission into every part of course design, delivery and the overall student experience.

5.2 During the student cycle, the opportunities for engagement with the world of work are multiple. The College has a designated Head of Talent Development responsible for meeting with all students to develop a professional development plan. Personal tutors are responsible for continuing to guide students through this plan during their time at the College. Students are also able to access the Head of Talent Development for further guidance and advice on professional development.

5.3 Students on Level 4 and 5 in business are required to complete the Pearson Diploma, and it is optional for students at Level 6. This is a competency-based diploma based on a set of skills that have been determined by research into employers' needs. As this is Pearson College's first cohort of business students, no students have completed this diploma as of yet and therefore it has yet to be reviewed.

5.4 Full-time BSc students, subject to their performance on the course, are guaranteed a (minimum two-week) non-credit internship placement, which is sourced and monitored by the Head of Talent Development. Students submit ongoing reflections and submit feedback at the end of the placement. The intern's supervisor also submits feedback on the student. The internship experience can feed into the Pearson Diploma. The feedback is taken into account as a means of ongoing development of the provision.

5.5 Industry mentors (for Escape Studios) and Pearson Mentors from Pearson PLC for business students can be assigned on request. These mentor programmes are aimed at giving students an opportunity to engage with professional practice and seek advice and information from those in the field.

5.6 As the College is yet to have any business graduates, it is not possible to determine the effectiveness of the courses and student employability structures on postgraduate progression. However, the College aims to develop qualitative and quantitative data and feature this information appropriately in its materials. As stated earlier, Escape Studios graduates currently feature on the website.

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 in the Higher Education Review (Plus) handbook.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

e-learning
See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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