Higher Education Review of Preston College trading as Preston's College

April 2016

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Preston College trading as Preston's College. The review took place from 25 to 27 April 2016 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Ms Sally Dixon
- Mr Chris McIntyre
- Mrs Sarah d'Ambrumenil (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 5.

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

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

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

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

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Preston College trading as Preston's College

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Preston College trading as Preston's College.

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

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Preston College trading as Preston's College.

By September 2016:

- ensure that information provided to students about assessment results is communicated appropriately (Expectations C, B6).

By December 2016:

- deliberately and routinely enable students to engage in the strategic decision making of the College, as partners in their educational experience (Expectations B5, B3)
- design and implement an effective approach to the management of placement learning opportunities to provide for strategic oversight and consistent practice (Expectations B10, B6)
- systematically and effectively implement, monitor and evaluate the College's enhancement processes to support a higher education ethos (Enhancement, B3).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The actions being taken by the College to improve information to applicants and prospective students about the admissions process (Expectations B2, C).
- The steps being taken to develop an institutional higher education annual monitoring report to provide a consolidated overview of all the College's higher education provision (Expectations B8, A3.3).

Theme: Student Employability

The College's mission is to make its students 'THE most employable', and its approach to employability is to provide students with opportunities to engage in project work and enable students to experience a real work environment. The College has instigated a number of

projects to increase students' engagement with employers and with real working environments.

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

About Preston College trading as Preston's College

Preston College trading as Preston's College is a further education college in Lancashire which states as its aims to serve its community, to make its students 'THE most employable' and to support all students irrespective of their background, future ambition or entry point. The College provides provision spanning from entry level to Level 7. The total number of students at Preston College trading as Preston's College in 2014-15 was about 12,400, of whom about 300 were studying for a higher education programme.

The College's higher education provision is delivered in collaboration with the University of Central Lancashire and Pearson Education, and through a new partnership for 2015-16 with the University of Derby. The College also offers higher education through a franchise agreement with Edge Hill University, but this is in the final year of delivery.

The College has undergone significant changes to its management structures, with the aim to embed an 'Enterprising College' approach. This has resulted in the development of three directorates, all of which have a stake in the management of the College's higher skills provision. Higher skills is a term used by the College to describe a full range of higher level qualifications, including higher education programmes. The College's overarching approach to higher skills is described in its Higher Skills Strategy, and reference to this Strategy is made in this report.

QAA undertook an Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review of Preston College in December 2011. Recommendations made in that report, which related to defining the role of specific staff and committees, have been addressed in that there have been significant changes to the management structure. The effectiveness of the new structure is considered in this report. Other recommendations in the previous QAA report focused on scholarly activity for staff, management of work-based and work-related learning and the College's published pre-entry information. While these recommendations have been addressed in part, some of the improvements remain ongoing and this report highlights this through further recommendations in relation to work-based and work-related learning, and information about the admissions process.

Explanation of the findings about Preston College trading as Preston's College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

Explanation of the findings about Preston College trading as Preston's College

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 Preston College trading as Preston's College (the College) offers provision in collaboration with Pearson in the delivery of Higher National awards; through both franchise and validation arrangements with the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) and the University of Derby; and through a franchise arrangement with Edge Hill University that is in its final year of delivery.

1.2 For UCLan provision, responsibility for ensuring that qualifications are positioned at the appropriate level of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) lies with the awarding body, and programmes are approved and checked against the requirements of the frameworks through the UCLan validation process and reviewed through the UCLan periodic course review process (PCR) every five years. Any necessary action resulting from changes to Subject Benchmark Statements, PCR, or external examiners' or industrialists' recommendations are fed to the College for implementation. The College works closely with UCLan in programme design to ensure that programmes meet the requirements of the FHEQ. Responsibilities are defined in the Roles and Responsibilities appended to the Memorandum of Cooperation.

1.3 For University of Derby provision, a number of franchised programmes are offered, as well as a validated foundation degree and a BSc (top up). Within the franchised provision, academic standards are maintained by the College and overseen by the University, which

has the overriding responsibility to ensure that academic standards are met and that the benchmarks have informed the programme design. Details of programme design processes are set out and programme staff must ensure that the FHEQ is referenced with regards to the level of the programme, and that the Subject Benchmark Statements have been considered.

1.4   In validated provision with the University of Derby, the College has followed the Programme Design Handbook and the academic regulations to ensure that it meets the requirements of the FHEQ and associated benchmark statements. The review team saw an example of a course devised by the College making reference to foundation degree and subject benchmarks and ensuring that it meets the requirements of both the University frameworks and external accredited bodies. Work-related study is seen as important within the foundation degree and modules have been devised to comply with the requirements of the benchmarks of foundation degrees. The naming conventions identified by the FHEQ were followed by ensuring that the outcomes were at the appropriate levels and matched the relevant Subject Benchmark Statements.

1.5   For Pearson provision, programme teams develop programme specifications that are bespoke to their area of provision, and these specifications follow Pearson Assessment Handbook guidelines. The BTEC specification sets out clear aims and outcomes linked to the FHEQ and referenced to subject-specific benchmarks, and modules are allocated credits in line with the Higher Education Credit Framework. Each course specification outlines the credit required to gain a Higher National Certificate or Diploma and programme handbooks contain necessary details.

1.6   Edge Hill University provision is in its final year at the College and consists of one franchised foundation degree. Responsibility for ensuring that the provision meets the requirements of the FHEQ lies with the University as the degree-awarding body, as set out in the collaborative contract. Academic standards are maintained by the College and overseen by the University and the programme is approved and validated through the University's validation process and reviewed through the University periodic course review process.

1.7   The team met staff and students and confirmed that all matters pertaining to the setting and maintaining of standards are managed effectively in the partnership arrangements, and are subject to the appropriate guidance, processes and procedures for design, validation and review, which ensures that requirements are met.

1.8   The ultimate responsibility for the allocation of qualifications to the appropriate level in the FHEQ rests with the associated awarding body or organisation, and the team concludes that the College fulfils its requirements to work within the parameters and guidelines of its partners. Therefore, this 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

1.9   The College follows awarding body guidelines for its frameworks and regulations to ensure that it secures academic standards. Responsibility for academic standards and quality are laid out by the partner Universities and the College follows quality assurance procedures in line with the requirements of the partners and for Pearson. The College has developed a set of policy documents in relation to Pearson programmes, which covers academic regulations and appeals procedures.

1.10   A previous quality and standards group monitored the provision at programme level and considered changes made by the awarding bodies. The group ensured that the College and the teaching teams were adhering to the established awarding body processes. It reported to the College Management Team (CMT), which managed and agreed all processes in relation to higher education and informed the Executive Leadership Team and the Governing Body.

1.11   Given its ambitions in higher education, the College progressed its Higher Skills Strategy and established bespoke Governance structures for higher education for the academic year 2015-16. The Higher Education Quality Group is now the Higher Education Programme Management group and a Higher Skills Quality Improvement and Standards Group has been established which has responsibility for the oversight of the management of the higher education provision. It ensures that academic frameworks and regulations are in place, reviews curriculum design before validations to ensure compliance with awarding body approval processes, and further develops enhancement initiatives. Decisions of this group go forward for CMT approval and it reports to CMT on progress from subgroups on student engagement, marketing and admissions. This is intended to provide the opportunity for all functions of the College to analyse the curriculum fully to ensure that resource needs are available before the formal validation procedures with the University are undertaken.

1.12   The Committee and regulatory environment are clearly defined and operate in an appropriate manner. Staff and managers understand their responsibilities and there is evidence of a supporting strategy and policy material to support the work of the College in establishing transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern the award of academic credit and qualifications. This would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.13   The team tested the operation of this Expectation by examining documentation, in particular material pertinent to the arrangements and regulations with partners and the committee operation, and sample minutes.

1.14   The team also spoke to a range of staff and met committee members and students. In these meetings the team heard from academic and support staff and students about the previous and new arrangements for the management of higher education provision, and about staff and student engagement in the design and operation of the committee structure and its intention to better support higher education. Senior staff spoke of their engagement in the design of the structure and the ways in which it engages different staff at appropriate levels and is intended to accommodate student involvement. Academic staff are aware of

the regulatory environment and the responsibilities shared with partners, and of the new structural arrangements. Students are broadly aware of the regulatory environment and are clear about specific elements of the regulations, policies and procedures of opportunities to be engaged in representation.

1.15   The academic frameworks and regulations established at the College to govern the award of academic credit and qualifications are appropriately designed and effectively used, and engage staff and students, although, as noted in Section B5, more should be done to enable students to engage more generally in the strategic decision making of the College.

1.16   The team is satisfied that effective frameworks and regulations are in place and in use, and that the Expectation is met and the risk 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

1.17   The College and the awarding bodies keep records of the validated provision using programme specifications, based on the requirements of the awarding bodies. The awarding bodies keep the definitive record of franchised provision and this is updated as changes are made. These programme specifications are accessible to staff through the intranet and, once finalised, students can access them through the virtual learning environment (VLE).

1.18   Programme specifications are approved and revised through validation processes, periodic reviews and minor change processes as required by the awarding bodies. Programme specifications for Pearson provision are approved each year by the Head of School. Changes are made to the structure and units of the course depending on the needs of students.

1.19   All programme specifications include programme aims, intended learning outcomes, relevant benchmarks statements, teaching and learning methods and expected achievement levels. All learning outcomes are clearly identified, together with how these will be assessed, in the appendix to the programme specification.

1.20   The design of processes would meet the requirements of the Expectation. A definitive record of the provision is maintained and can be accessed by staff and students. There are processes for routine review and for minor amendments to the definitive record as required by the College or the awarding body.

1.21   The team received information about the definitive records in the self-evaluation document submitted by the College for this review, and in other written evidence received prior to the visit. During the review visit, the team confirmed with staff and students that they are aware of where they can access the definitive record. The team also triangulated information to confirm which staff have responsibility for publishing students' transcripts.

1.22   The process works effectively in practice and has been developed following recognition that it could be made more robust. The required annual sign-off by Heads of School for Pearson provision was developed as a result of a change to a programme specification where units were altered in line with students' career aspirations. At the time, the only oversight of this process was through evaluation in the Annual Monitoring Report. It was agreed that this process did not provide a suitable level of oversight and therefore Heads of School were required to provide scrutiny prior to the implementation of any change.

1.23   The team found that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low. This conclusion is as a result of the robust process that the College implements and the core responsibility lying with the degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation to retain appropriate records of the programme.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.24   The College has developed a strategic plan for higher education that affirms its intention to work with awarding bodies, organisations and industry in order to grow and further develop its higher education portfolio. Its higher education courses are subject to the regulations of either the College's validating university or, in the case of Higher National awards, the awarding organisation, Pearson. The College has a process for programme development and approval.

1.25   The College's Higher Skills Quality and Improvement Group has responsibility for oversight of the development of programmes. The College's planning procedures, involving both curriculum and senior staff, preface the development and approval processes for new programmes operated by the validating university and awarding organisation, and this would enable the College to meet the Expectation.

1.26   The review team scrutinised documents relating to the universities' and awarding organisation's requirements on programme development and review, and documentation describing the course planning processes and recording development and approval processes at the College. The team also met staff concerned with course development and approval at the College.

1.27   Following a decision to launch new provision, a process of resource planning confirms that the staff and physical infrastructure in place is appropriate to assure the standards of academic delivery. This is followed by the detailed preliminary activities to prepare the documentation required by the validating university or the awarding organisation in order to secure approval for course delivery.

1.28   The College's internal processes for developing proposals for higher education provision, together with its staff, resource base and organisational infrastructure, have enabled the College to successfully gain approval to deliver courses awarded by the University of Central Lancashire, the University of Derby, Edge Hill University and Pearson. While the awarding partners retain ultimate responsibility for academic standards, the College appears to be effective at discharging its delegated responsibilities for contributing to the development and approval of the curriculum and its associated academic standards.

1.29   Overall, the processes for the internal approval and development of new programmes are in place and understood by staff, which leads the team to conclude 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

1.30   The College's arrangements for assessment are conducted as required under its arrangements with the University of Central Lancashire, the University of Derby, Edge Hill University and Pearson. Pearson and the universities have ultimate responsibility for ensuring that credit and qualifications are awarded based only on the achievement of relevant learning outcomes, and that both UK threshold standards and their own academic standards have been satisfied.

1.31   For the University of Central Lancashire provision the College follows the assessment and assessment board process outlined in UCLan's Assessment handbook. The module and assessment boards ratify the assessment decisions. For University of Derby provision the College follows the assessment regulations set by the University. All assessments are double marked by the link tutor at the University of Derby. As it is the first year of operation there is no evidence of assessment boards. For Edge Hill University provision the assessment briefs are written by University staff. For Pearson provision College staff write the assessments in line with the Centre Guide for Assessment Level 4-7. The College holds assessment boards for Pearson provision. Arrangements are in place for annual monitoring of student achievement.

1.32   These institution-level arrangements would be sufficient to enable the College to meet the Expectation.

1.33   The review team explored the College's alignment with the Expectation by scrutinising the assessment policy and associated procedures, external examiners' reports, annual self-evaluation reports and records of assessment boards and meetings that have a role in assessment. The team also met senior staff, teaching staff, and students and student representatives.

1.34   On provision that is run under a franchise agreement the assessments are set by the validating university. The responsibility for setting assessments on University of Derby and University of Central Lancashire provision is shared. On Pearson provision the College is responsible for setting assessments.

1.35   For Pearson provision, course assignment cover sheets provide a framework to identify learning outcomes for students and to demonstrate coverage during internal verification. Internal verifiers and University moderation processes confirm that all learning outcomes have been addressed, that grading has been properly conducted, and achievement appropriately recognised. The College additionally makes use of the discussions with BTEC standards verifiers. Students confirmed that they are fully aware of the particular learning outcomes being addressed in assessment, and that feedback is clear.

1.36   External examiners confirm specifically that learning outcomes have been addressed and achieved. Similarly, minutes of assessment boards show that internal verification has taken place, and that assessment has been properly completed before the award of credit is recommended. Reports from external examiners reassure both the universities and Pearson that credit is being awarded based on the achievement of relevant learning outcomes, and that both UK threshold standards and their own academic standards have been satisfied.

1.37   Overall, the College has systems in place to ensure that the assessment of students is robust, valid and reliable, and that the award of qualifications and credit is based on the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met in both design and operation and that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.38   The College has put monitoring processes in place in which an annual monitoring report (AMR) is produced for each course. The performance of courses is further monitored through regular operational meetings between the curriculum managers and senior College management. In addition, the College holds Course Review meetings three times per year with the third focusing on its higher education provision. The College also produces an institutional annual monitoring report for the University of Central Lancashire.

1.39   The validating universities and Pearson have well defined systems in place, fully detailed in their regulations, handbooks and agreements with the College, which enable them to ensure that processes for the monitoring and review of programmes are implemented, and which are able to address whether academic standards are being maintained. The oversight of the awarding body and organisation, combined with the College's systems for course monitoring and review, would enable the College to meet the Expectation.

1.40   The review team examined documents showing the universities', Pearson and College procedures for programme monitoring and review and the recommendations and good practice detailed in external examiners' reports. The team also explored the application of these quality assurance procedures in meetings with senior and academic staff.

1.41   The course-level AMRs are detailed and reflective, addressing developments in delivery, quality and standards, student achievement and information. The College also uses a series of business reviews through the academic year alongside mid-year school performance reviews. These feed into the Collage Self-Assessment Report (SAR). The College has started to implement the production of a consolidated SAR, which will focus on its higher education to improve oversight, and an affirmation is made in this area under Expectation B8.

1.42   The awarding bodies and organisation have sound procedures in place to ensure the maintenance of academic standards. External examiners confirm that academic standards are met. Overall, there are processes in place for the routine monitoring and review of individual courses at programme and curriculum area level. The College aligns its processes with the requirements of the universities and Pearson and therefore the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3.4): In order to be transparent and publicly accountable, degree-awarding bodies use external and independent expertise at key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards to advise on whether:

- **UK threshold academic standards are set, delivered and achieved**
- **the academic standards of the degree-awarding body are appropriately set and maintained.**

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

Findings

1.43   The College's Higher Skills Strategy commits it to engagement with external professional advisers in curriculum development, in the enhancement of employability skills and experiences for students, and in the development of learning resources and opportunities. Operationally, the College uses external advisers, including local employers, who inform programme design and assessment and aim to ensure the enhancement of students' employability skills. In addition, employers may be invited to the validation panels to give advice on industry requirements.

1.44   Information and guidance concerning the work of external examiners and their relationship with the College and its programmes is available in awarding body documents, and the College uses these in the operation of its provision. Pearson appoints external examiners for the Higher National provision and the College's Learning and Development Manager and the programme teams evaluate the reports, which are also referenced at the annual Course Review. Actions that arise are included in the Annual Monitoring Report. The College has appropriate standard material on external examiner operation in the regulations of its partners and in its own regulations.

1.45   No external examiner reports are available for University of Derby provision as this commenced in September 2015. For the University of Central Lancashire provision, there were no essential actions arising from the reports; areas of good practice were highlighted and an analysis of these is included in the Institutional Annual Monitoring Report. In 2013-14 there were essential actions identified in the Dance provision that were addressed in the Annual Monitoring Report and the associated action plan. In 2014-15 no new essential actions were noted and the report identified actions taken to satisfactorily resolve issues noted the previous year.

1.46   The review team considered the College approach to this Expectation by scrutinising a range of College and partner documentation including regulatory material, external examiner reports and action plans, board minutes and monitoring material. The team spoke to management and academic staff and students.

1.47   The College Higher Skills Strategy indicates that, 'Employers should form part of the design, delivery and assessment of all courses' and that there is a commitment 'to work effectively with employers to inform our curriculum and quality enhancement' and 'to maintain and develop collaborative arrangements of quality enhancement activities with university partners and assessment of all courses'.

1.48   The Principal spoke of taking the relationship with employers beyond the transactional and to drive into wider partnerships that bring employers into curriculum and learning resource development. Senior staff were able to explain how these intentions are operationalised through cross-College strategies that support the higher education agenda, including the Real Work initiative, and through work done with Employer Boards in

construction, where a real work environment was designed with input from a local building firm. Input to programme development activity and validation helps to ensure that employers check validity of programme concepts and details. Senior staff emphasised that the Enterprise and Learning Strategy and the focus on employer skills are heavily supported by employers and are key to staff engagement in employer partnerships and to the College aims to meet the needs of its stakeholders.

1.49   Academic staff whom the team met are clear about the strategic intention to use external input, and provided clear examples of engagement across a number of discipline areas, including explicit projects that have derived from this activity. Some of the activity cited related to wider institutional initiatives, but staff are clear that there are specific benefits to the higher education provision. Staff spoke about the value of initiatives such as the STEM Employers Forum in developing soft skills to enhance student employability. Academic staff were also able to discuss the impact of professional body advice in the development of assessments, for instance in the case of Counselling and Dance, and are clear about the process by which they manage input from external examiners.

1.50   Students whom the team met are generally aware of staff engagement with industry advisers, and know about specific projects and initiatives that have derived from this in subject areas such as construction. Some are aware of outcomes related to their programmes of the Real Work approach.

1.51   The College has a strategic commitment to the use of independent professional expertise, and can demonstrate operational engagement and practical outcomes from this commitment. It uses external examiners and their advice and reports effectively in monitoring and review. The team concludes that the Expectation is met and that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

1.52   In reaching its judgement about the maintenance of academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and other awarding organisations, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.53   The Expectations in this area are met and the associated levels of risk are low. The review team concludes that the processes in place are sufficient for the College, working with the awarding bodies and organisation, to meet the Expectations for the maintenance of academic standards.

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

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1   The College's strategic plan for higher skills, which covers higher education provision, focuses on employers' needs, vocational relevance and widening participation. New higher education courses or revalidations of those already existing are subject to the regulations of either the College's validating university or, in the case of Higher National awards, the awarding organisation, Pearson.

2.2   As part of the College's process for programme development and approval, it has put in place formal procedures to govern the consideration of launching new provision, and also of exercising possible opportunities to contribute to the shape of the curriculum. The College's planning procedure, involving both curriculum and senior staff, combined with the development and approval processes for new programmes operated by the validating university and awarding organisation, would enable the College to meet the Expectation.

2.3   The review team examined documents relating to course planning at the College, the universities' and awarding organisation's requirements on programme development and review, and documentation recording development and approval processes, and held meetings with employers and staff concerned at all levels within the College.

2.4   The team learned that the strategic plan informs the College's analysis of regional skills and development needs, and thence its consideration of programme developments and partnerships with universities. Potential new provision is considered in greater detail to scope the likely market, the staffing needs and availability. The proposals are tested by the College's Executive leadership team.

2.5   The College shared how these processes are being used to shape its developments and the level of liaison between itself and its partner universities. For the College's Higher National provision, the detailed course planning procedure is clear. It is detailed and includes the key academic and internal administrative processes.

2.6   The College's internal processes for developing curricula for higher education provision, together with its staff and organisational infrastructure, have enabled it to successfully gain approval to deliver courses awarded by the University of Central Lancashire, the University of Derby, Edge Hill University and Pearson. While all awarding partners retain ultimate responsibility for academic quality, the College is effective at discharging its delegated responsibilities for the design and approval of higher education programmes.

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

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.8   The College has a Higher Education Admissions Procedure, accessible through the College website, which references the admissions procedures of awarding bodies. The policies and procedures outline the student application process and set out how entry criteria are applied. They detail the arrangements for the consideration of work-related experience and the requirements of the interview or audition process where programme type requires this process. Interviews are scheduled at the start of the year by the curriculum teams to enable the admissions team to send out letters with an interview slot efficiently.

2.9   Entry criteria is set in conjunction with the partner institution and the admission process varies depending on the requirements of the awarding body. All admissions to University of Derby programmes are agreed with the link tutor prior to offer; University of Central Lancashire offers can be made by the College in accordance with agreed entry requirements. All entry criteria are outlined in the course leaflets on the website.

2.10   Prospective students applying to the University of Central Lancashire full-time provision apply through UCAS and all other applicants use the online College application form. The College does not currently consider applications from international students.

2.11   Monthly Programme Management Meetings monitor application data, oversee the timeliness of applications and interviews and discuss matters arising. A strategic overview of applications is monitored at the College Management Team meeting alongside all applications to the College.

2.12   Applicants can contact the College by phone or by appointment if they have any questions. Following the submission of an application form, the College aims to give a response within three working days. Where applicants have not met the entry criteria, they are pointed to other appropriate study within the College.

2.13   Where applicants identify a disability, the College will provide information to the student regarding the Disabled Students Allowance and correspond with the applicant to ensure that the College can offer appropriate support prior to an offer being made.

2.14   Applicants are informed of the Disclosure and Barring Service Requirements within the Higher Education Admissions Policy and there is a generic reference regarding the need to report relevant convictions within the application form.

2.15   Applicants are able to use the College Complaints Procedure, although it makes no specific reference to applicants within its stakeholder groups. The College provides a link to the Procedure in its offer and in its rejection letters to applicants.

2.16   The current process would enable the Expectation to be met. Prospective students are able to access information regarding their programme requirements, entry requirements and how to apply. Following application, the College has a robust process that enables applicants to receive a decision quickly. Further information is provided for those applicants

that might need support while studying. Applicants are provided with a web link to the formal complaints procedure where they are dissatisfied with the admission decision or a part of the admissions process.

2.17   The team considered the evidence that was provided by the College prior to the visit, including the Higher Education Admissions Procedure and the information available to prospective students on the website. The team then tested this information against the experience and knowledge of staff and students during the visit.

2.18   Students and staff noted that during the last academic year there had been some gaps in the provision of information to applicants, most notably in relation to the complaints procedure, and in one instance regarding the start date of the programme. The College has recognised that there was a gap in the provision of information to applicants and this gap was considered by the Marketing Subgroup during this academic year. The Marketing Subgroup has already made changes to the offer and rejection letters that applicants receive to ensure that applicants are aware of the Complaints Procedure. The Marketing Subgroup should continue to consider and implement the agreed actions, ensuring that throughout the application process, applicants have access to all the necessary information. The team **affirms** the actions being taken by the College to improve information to applicants and prospective students about the admissions process.

2.19   This Expectation is met and the level of risk is low. The College operates a robust application and monitoring process. Weaknesses within the provision of information have been recognised and action is taking place in a timely way.

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

2.20   Learning opportunities at the College are contextualised by the Higher Skills Strategy and supported by institutional and school-level Teaching and Learning strategies, by the Enterprising Learning Strategy, and through initiatives such as MySkills, which supports the development of transferrable skills. The College indicates that it is committed to the continuous improvement of teaching, learning and assessment and claims good progress, acknowledging the role of staff and partner institutions. Student opportunities have been enhanced by strategic approaches that include an ongoing commitment to employer engagement in programme design, and local teaching and learning strategies that develop students' academic ability and employability.

2.21   Learning outcomes are set by the awarding bodies and checked for fitness for purpose against local measures of accessibility and appropriateness. Programme handbooks and specifications clearly link the learning outcomes to the forms of summative assessment used. Varied teaching and learning experiences are offered and handbooks provide information about the support available to students. Teaching staff work closely with student support colleagues to cater for student needs, and reasonable adjustments are made.

2.22   Teachers and subject experts are expected to maintain both continuous professional development and professional standing. Staff may be supported by further study and staff development, informed by teaching observation and appraisal. Support opportunities are offered through internal sharing of good practice and mentoring and through the continuing professional development programme. Five days each year are allocated for development activity and there has been recent development of online continuing professional development (CPD) modules with an intention to increase this offer in the future.

2.23   The College provides appropriate and flexible learning environments and has improved both the physical resources and the virtual environment. Students are engaged in the development of these resources, know how to engage with them, and there are examples of students having influenced change. Programme Handbooks and electronic resources provide details of learning opportunities and support, and initiatives like the Real Work Environment help to add a degree of professionalism and employment-related experience. Student feedback informs the vision for teaching, learning and assessment. Issues that arise are considered at all levels and students are encouraged to be involved through the College Council. The MyCourse VLE is under ongoing development, and students have 24-hour access to their learning materials with students on franchised courses having access to the awarding university's VLE. Assistive learning technologies are made available to targeted groups and the College aims to ensure that assistive technologies are available to all in future.

2.24   Programme handbooks contain information about learning opportunities and other support. Learning opportunities that are dependent upon an employer's availability are clearly signposted. The College aims to enable its students to achieve independence in

learning, and they are required to engage on a professional real-world basis. The Real Work Environment strategy seeks employer support to sponsor areas of the College with their working practices and codes of conduct, to add a level of realism and accountability to studies and to bring curriculum areas to life in a way that traditional study might not. Project-based learning approaches allow students to demonstrate their knowledge outside the context in which it was first learned.

2.25   Executive staff whom the team met are clear about the strategic basis of the College's approach to the provision of learning opportunities, and the centrality of employability, explaining clearly the move from seeing employers as business contacts to them being instrumental to the development of programmes and the learning environment. They are also able to explain the way in which students are engaged in this. Senior staff speak confidently about both the strategic approaches and how these are implemented and operationalised through institutional structures. They are clear about commitment to staff development, and the values of specific approaches such as the Enterprise Learning Strategy and the way in which the College is introducing non-traditional learning methods.

2.26   Academic staff whom the team met fully understand both strategic and operational approaches to the provision of learning opportunities, and the institution's approach to the provision of resources engaging with external professional groups. They were able to talk knowledgeably about a range of employment-related initiatives and also understand the role of such approaches of MySkill. Staff are positive about induction and ongoing staff and continuing professional development opportunities.

2.27   Notwithstanding the positive strategic and operational address to the provision of learning opportunities, the team has concerns that there is a limited higher education ethos. Approaches to higher education are contextualised by the Higher Skills Strategy, with a focus on higher skills and directly employment-related matters, which does not create an ethos for higher education. The higher education ethos at the College is therefore insufficiently distinguished and not as supportive to higher education student development as it could be. This was confirmed in meetings with students and is considered later in the report.

2.28   In addition, the Higher Education Action Plan indicates that higher education student engagement requires improvement, that there is 'lack of HE Ethos in the college for learners who progress' and that this has a negative impact on the higher education student learning environment and opportunities. This was confirmed by the review team and is considered later in the report. The College has a number of initiatives in hand to improve the situation, which range from plans to make better use of student feedback to the identification of social spaces for higher education students, but these are relatively recent in design and implementation and as yet there is little evidence of impact.

2.29   The approach to the provision of the learning and teaching environment follows from the College strategic vision and ethos, and is described in some detail, with particular emphasis on higher skills and employability. There is emphasis on non-traditional teaching and learning methods and the engagement of academic and professional partners. The quality and impact of the higher education learning environment is improving and students are supported in both academic and personal development. While there are wider issues relating to student engagement and developing a higher education ethos, these are addressed later in the report and the team concludes that this Expectation is met and the 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

2.30   The College monitors and evaluates arrangements and resources for student development through business planning, course reviews and student surveys. Senior management and governors have endorsed the Higher Skills Strategy and the Enterprising Learning Strategy, indicating that they are committed to ensuring that the College enhances learning opportunities. Strategies are reviewed at Governor level and then through Executive Leadership Team (ELT) and CMT.

2.31   The College has a bespoke induction programme for each year of study, a VLE introduction and workshops in academic skills. All programmes have a timetabled tutorial each week, where development needs can be discussed. Students' progress is recorded using an integrated monitoring and support system that enables teams to identify any areas of concern to other members. Academic skills are developed throughout programmes and all FdA programmes have personal development planning built in. Some other students complete an assessment piece on career development or are involved in each other's employment-related presentations. Within teaching and assessment, My Skills activity allows reflection on which skills have been practised.

2.32   The College provision of learning resources is strategically led and supported by a commitment to partnership with higher education awarding bodies. The Higher Skills Strategy focuses on employability of students in the context of local and regional needs and aims to engage employers and the professional environment within strategic plans and aims. These strategic commitments are operationalised through the Board and the Executive and College Management Team and a range of resources are available for higher education students.

2.33   Learning space resources provided for students include specialist and general working environments, the Learning Zone, and additional resources, including the iSTEM building and Careers and Counselling services, and both academic tutor and pastoral support are provided.

2.34   There has been recent investment in the physical resources that make up the learning environment, including a £2m learning zone and £13m iSTEM building. Students have access at times that suit them and can use resources for academic and skills development within and outside of formal sessions, supported by their tutors and/or by the newly appointed Advanced Skills Technicians.

2.35   The College indicates a commitment to both the increase of non-traditional learning approaches and the provision of employability-led learning experiences through the Enterprise Learning Strategy, with support for students provided by a personal tutor programme and by the MySkills approach to transferrable skills.

2.36   Academic skills development is supported both within programmes and in professional development planning. Staff are appropriately qualified and experienced in their professional areas and have access to development opportunities.

2.37   The team scrutinised a range of College documentation related to learning and teaching arrangements, and resources from strategic commitments to programme-level material, operational policies and procedures, and information outlining examples of support.

The team also saw evidence of student feedback and evidence of institutional responses. The team also met students, management, academic and support staff to test their understandings of the operation of the learning and teaching arrangements and resources, their management, and the policies, processes and procedures that support them.

2.38   Students whom the team met are generally positive about the range of environments provided to them and indicated that they receive good IT and library support. Where problems or challenges arise, students are aware of how to give feedback and they could cite examples of improvements having been made. Students indicated that they are taken to visit higher education partners and that they are aware of resources available to them. The team also heard from students about professional and personal development activities within courses and employment-related projects, including placements and external visits. They also spoke positively of recent improvements in higher education learning resources and feel that facilities are improved and that higher education areas have increased.

2.39   The team heard about the strategic planning of arrangements and of the means by which Governors and the Executive Team are engaged in delivering to this strategic view, including through new committees that focus on higher education issues, notably the Higher Skills Quality and Standards Improvement Group and its subgroups. Senior management described strategically led opportunities with employers and other partners to enhance students' professional and personal development, and executive commitment to develop new and different learning spaces for higher education.

2.40   Senior staff whom the team met are clear about the strategic lead on learning opportunities and provided examples of programme change to reflect it. They were positive about the effectiveness of the new institutional structures for higher education and spoke of better engagement between students and academic managers and staff through such mechanisms as the Learner Voice meetings. They referred to better student engagement in the new structure to provide feedback on curriculum and learning resource matters, although, as noted later in the report, this is still to be fully developed. Senior staff were also clear about the benefits to learning of the positive relationships with university partners and of the CPD and other support gained.

2.41   Academic staff whom the team met are well informed of the strategic base for their work in providing support for student development and could provide multiple examples of work within and alongside programmes that supports students' academic and professional development. They were able to testify to ways in which institutional employability and professional development-related initiatives, such as the iSTEM project, support higher education students, and also offered examples of good professional development opportunities in the construction and nursery education areas. The academic staff group understands the new institutional structures for the support of higher education and had been consulted on the changes. They are also clear about the value of development initiatives such as My Skills and the STEM Employers Forum, and about the support offered for their own pedagogical and professional development. They spoke of support from higher education partners in the design and provision of learning resources and opportunities, and of attempting to replicate those provided by the university partners. Staff have direct experience of student engagement with higher education provision and spoke of the use of learner representatives at course review, of the Learner Voice arrangements and of programme-level activity.

2.42   Professional services staff whom the team met are familiar with strategic commitments and spoke of their roles in supporting student development and of their work in resource planning within College higher education structures, as well as with both College and partner staff in planning resources and activity.

2.43   The provision of learning and teaching resources follows from the College's strategic vision and ethos, and there is emphasis on the employability and academic and professional development to support this. The resource base and the expertise of the staff are intended to support the higher education mission, and recent improvements in both College structural arrangements and learning approaches and resources are having a positive impact on student development. While these impacts are expected to improve with further developments, the team was able to confirm the effectiveness and the impact of the strategic and operational approach taken by the College, and students confirm satisfaction with the resources and approaches provided for them and are able to feed back and see improvements as a result. The Expectation is met, with an associated low level of risk.

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

2.44   The Student Charter and student handbook outline the available student engagement opportunities. All students provide feedback on their programme and student experience by completing module evaluation questionnaires and triannual surveys. In addition, students attend weekly scheduled tutorial sessions in order to provide feedback and receive updates on actions being taken.

2.45   In addition, students are given the opportunity through ad hoc focus groups and one-off invitations to College committees to provide feedback on future programmes, student resources and changes to the student experience. An example of this was the creation of the Higher Level Skills Mini Guide.

2.46   Student representatives are elected by the student cohort for each programme at the beginning of the academic year. Formal training is not currently provided to representatives at College level. However, programme teams provide an explanation of what the role entails during the induction process. Student representatives attend a College-wide student council, although there are currently no representatives from students on higher education programmes and the College is aware that it does not regularly ask the student council, which includes elected members of the higher education cohort, to consider, review or evaluate information.

2.47   Programme Team Leaders have meetings three times a year either with representatives or with all students to provide an opportunity for feedback. Each Head of Division meets with the representatives or all students within a division three times a year following each student survey, to enable students to provide feedback across disciplines.

2.48   A student representative from each division is then invited to the Higher Skills Quality Group, where strategic decisions regarding higher education are made. Information about changes made as a result of student feedback are communicated to the awarding body through the institutional annual monitoring reports and fed back to the students through 'You Said, We Did' campaigns and the weekly bulletin.

2.49   At programme level, students have a number of ways of providing feedback on their experience and elect representatives. However, beyond this level, the College has limited opportunities for students to work in partnership with the College.

2.50   Some of the current process has been implemented during the academic year and the team was unable to find evidence that consistently demonstrated that the new process is working effectively. For example, Heads of Division have been meeting students since January 2016 to collate feedback and present information to the Higher Skills Quality and Improvement Group. However, the minutes of these meetings indicate that only one division has been successful in facilitating a meeting. The College has acknowledged the shortcomings within its current provision and has created an action plan to overcome these weaknesses. While students were not directly involved in the creation of this action plan, it is already beginning to have a positive impact on the student experience with student representation recently being included in the terms of reference within the Higher Skills Quality Standards and Improvement Group, though students are not yet fully engaged with this opportunity.

2.51   There is student representation within the College's governing body, but there is not a clear structure confirming how these student representatives are able to represent the views of higher education students. This limits the opportunity students have in making decisions regarding their educational experience. The review team has been informed that a position for a higher skills student will be made available for next academic year.

2.52   Notwithstanding improvements, students are insufficiently able to work with the College as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their education. Students are not represented at key decision-making committees and there is limited communication opportunities between representatives at College level. For example, while students are invited to College groups and forums when staff believe it is appropriate, they are not routinely involved in assessing the student experience at the strategic level and making subsequent decisions. This is considered further in Section B5.

2.53   The team considered the information within the self-evaluation document, the student submission to this review, and the evidence that the College provided. This documentation included an action plan to improve student engagement and meeting minutes that confirmed that the College's aims in relation to student engagement is not currently met. The team met with students and staff members to confirm whether the processes explained in the documentation are experienced within the College.

2.54   In the future, the College is planning to incorporate student representatives formally in the Course Review system. Currently, feedback received throughout the year from students is included within the review, but the review panel is made up of staff.

2.55   Students were complimentary regarding programme staff's enthusiasm to take on board their feedback and at programme level, students feed into their experience and engage directly with staff. At College level, student feedback is closely monitored and students are given a number of different ways to provide feedback. However, there is limited dialogue and partnership working regarding College strategy and decision making across all divisions or at College level; for example, the College strategies do not include reference to students as stakeholders or partners and there are limited measurable targets to assess success. As a result the team **recommends** that the College should deliberately and routinely enable students to engage in the strategic decision making of the College, as partners in their educational experience.

2.56   The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is not met and the risk attached to the decision is moderate. While the College currently has plans in place to improve the current mechanisms for engaging with students, there has not been enough time to assess the effect of these plans or whether the plan will culminate in a partnership between staff and students at all levels of the College.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

Findings

2.57 The College's arrangements for assessment are defined within its agreements with the University of Central Lancashire, the University of Derby, Edge Hill University and Pearson (for Higher National awards). The College uses the relevant awarding universities' assessment regulations for its higher education provision. The process for the design and marking of assessments differs for each awarding body.

2.58 The College has developed its own assessment policy that aligns with the requirements of Pearson. The policy applies to College staff engaged in the assessment of its Higher National courses and gives direction on, inter alia, principles of assessment, module assessment and feedback on assessed work, late submissions, examination arrangements, assessment practice, and the approval of results in examination boards. In addition, staff appointed as internal verifiers or moderators use College summary sheets to record their scrutiny for later verification. These sheets include generic criteria for the various grades of achievement, and require confirmation that unit learning outcomes have been achieved.

2.59 The College applies the relevant university's procedures for the formal recognition of prior learning (RPL). For students on Higher National courses the College follows its own RPA procedure. Staff are expected to assess and internally verify student work within 15 days, and provisional grades are immediately reported back to the student. Staff provide feedback to students using standard structured cover sheets to assist the student in identifying what could be improved in future.

2.60 These institution-level arrangements would be sufficient to enable the College to meet the Expectation. The review team explored the College's alignment with the expectation by scrutinising its academic regulations and associated procedures, external examiners' reports, annual self-evaluation and self-assessment reports, and minutes of committees and meetings that have a role in assessment. The team also met senior academic and support staff, and students and student representatives.

2.61 The College's academic regulations are detailed and comprehensive and align with the requirements of Pearson. External examiner reports confirm that assessments are well designed, providing appropriate differentiation in challenge, and permitting students to demonstrate achievement properly. Detailed arrangements for initial moderation or internal verification are in place in order to confirm the validity of the assessment instrument. Likewise, after assessment, verification takes place to confirm and standardise the grades awarded. The College also occasionally submits marked Higher National assignments to the BTEC national checking service to ensure parity of grading with national norms.

2.62 New members of the team delivering on higher education programmes are guided through the process by the Programme Team Leaders. Academic staff confirm that there is a 'buddying' system in place for new staff. In addition, senior staff advised that the College academic staff were able to attend CPD events at the partner universities to align with the academic frameworks.

2.63   The team read and heard from students that assessment briefings are clear, and highlight the learning outcomes being assessed and the relevant grading criteria. Feedback to students is detailed, helpful in identifying aspects to be improved and usually available within the permitted 15 days. Furthermore, students confirmed that they are readily able to arrange one-to-one meetings for more personal specific feedback on their work.

2.64   The College holds assessment boards for its higher education provision and minutes of assessment boards show that internal verification has taken place, and that assessment has been properly completed before the award of credit is recommended. The College publishes results for its University of Central Lancashire provision via notice boards or the VLE. The team noted that the College does not currently produce these in an anonymised format and this issue is considered further under Expectation C.

2.65   In summary, assessment practice is sound and aligns with the College academic regulations and partner university regulations. Procedures are detailed and well managed, and emerging issues are swiftly identified and resolved. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated 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

2.66   All awarding bodies appoint external examiners for the higher education provision and use relevant criteria. The External Examiner Appointment document offers clear guidelines on issues surrounding conflict of interest and the terms of office.

2.67   Clear guidelines are set around the arrangements of both the roles of the university and the examiner. For both UCLan and the University of Derby, the College has the opportunity to nominate an individual as external examiner but the awarding body must approve this. For Pearson provision the College is not involved in the appointment of the external examiners.

2.68   Through their reports, external examiners demonstrate that the College maintains academic standards set in accordance with the Subject Benchmark Statements and within the FHEQ. The reports show that programmes reflect the benchmark statements, that assessment criteria have been set at the correct level and that assessments across all modules are of a comparable standard.

2.69   For the Pearson provision, in 2013-14 external examiners identified where there were issues with assignment briefs and the contextualisation of the higher grades, but the 2014-15 reports demonstrate that these have been rectified, and that good progress is being made.

2.70   The College has assessment processes that measure student achievement rigorously and fairly against the intended outcome of the programme, and this is commented upon positively within the external examiners reports. Within the Pearson provision good practice has been identified and the use of project-based learning is regarded as outstanding. Marking schemes have been properly applied and these are now sent to the external examiners before briefs are given to students, or exams are taken.

2.71   Reports are checked for areas of good practice, essential actions and areas of improvement and these are shared at the College Course Review. Training or mentoring may be offered as a result of issues identified, and the College has provided an example whereby the College has taken a lesson from this case and will use it to form part of the first Higher Skills Quality Improvement and Standards Group agenda item in September, when all external examiner reports have been received.

2.72   The College confirmed that any external examiner concerns about student work are discussed with the programme team and that a larger sample may be provided, or the programme team may address the concerns before the grades are awarded. All external examiner reports are available to students via the VLE.

2.73   The College receives all its external examiner reports in time for the AMR to be completed as part of the annual monitoring and review process. All AMRs are expected to comment on the external examiner reports, and action plans are drawn up at programme level to ensure that these are completed in the following academic year. The College had begun to draw up a summary of actions for the past two years, and will discuss these at the newly established Higher Skills Quality Improvement and Standards Group to enable the College to develop CPD sessions for staff, ensuring the enhancement of provision. Responses to essential actions are sent to the university for it to ensure that the College has taken action.

2.74   The approach to external examiners is well developed. While responsibility rests substantially on the university partners, the College provides appropriate local address and examples of local reflection, intervention and action that would meet the Expectation.

2.75   Senior staff confirmed that academic staff and managers meet regularly with external examiners and that training and induction is provided. Academic staff are clear about their responsibilities in the external examiner arrangements, and the way in which they need to act to ensure compliance with College and partner requirements and to gain full benefit from the system. Team leaders have a clear responsibility to take forward actions from external examiner reports, and these reports feed into a variety of quality mechanisms including monitoring and appraisal. Staff were able to provide examples of actions undertaken and improvements made as a result of external examiner activity.

2.76   Students are aware of external examiner activity and some had met their examiners, though none had seen or heard mention of the formal external examiner report. The team took the view that further action on sharing with students would be a good tool for student engagement improvement, under the wider issues raised previously in relation to student engagement.

2.77   The arrangements for the appointment and use of external examiners are clear, as are the mechanisms for receiving and processing their reports. There is evidence of engagement with staff and managers and of the issues from reports being managed effectively in academic quality processes. The Expectation is met and the 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

2.78   The College does not have an overarching policy for monitoring and review of programmes; however, it follows the requirements of the partner universities' regulations. The College has followed UCLan's process for its Pearson provision. The College's monitoring starts in the Higher Education Course Review, where programme team leaders present the expected achievement rates, final retention rates and close off the previous action plan. Following this activity each course leader produces an annual monitoring report (AMR) for each course, with an associated action plan. These AMRs are submitted to the relevant university along with an institutional annual monitoring report. The performance of courses is further monitored through regular operational meetings between the curriculum managers and senior College management.

2.79   The Higher Skills Quality and Improvement Group has the remit for assuring the quality management and improvement of the College's higher skills provision. This Group is chaired by an Assistant Principal who represents the ELT. The College's annual quality cycle, together with the production of a programme annual report and associated action plan reviewed on a rolling basis by management, would enable it to meet the Expectation.

2.80   The team explored the effectiveness of the College's processes by examining its quality assurance policies and procedures and scrutinising College annual monitoring and external examiners' reports, as well as by discussing the processes during meetings with staff, students and employers.

2.81   The Quality Management Cycle defines the dates for an annual approach to monitoring and review of the College's provision, including the submission dates for AMRs. The course-level AMRs are detailed and reflective, addressing, among other matters, course-level student achievement, recent developments in delivery, quality and standards, information, and drawing on data from the College management information system. Student views are elicited in module evaluations, wider student satisfaction surveys and through student contributions at meetings with the course team. Section B5 considers further how students could contribute to the strategic approach of the College.

2.82   The College-level SAR, being informed by curriculum-area AMRs, predominantly discusses further education matters, and rarely addresses the higher education portfolio. The College has acknowledged that this is an area that needs development for its higher education provision. The review team **affirms** the development of an institutional higher education annual monitoring report to provide a consolidated overview of all the College's higher education provision.

2.83   The College holds monthly higher education management meetings, which cover student feedback, marketing and recruitment. The three business reviews of the curriculum, with the third focusing on higher education provision, typically covers the items covered in annual monitoring. The focus of the Higher Skills Quality and Improvement Group and the use of subgroups enables the College to review the effectiveness of its higher education provision. The College has included discussion of its higher education provision as a standard agenda item on its College Management Team meetings to support institutional deliberation.

2.84   Overall, there are processes in place for the routine monitoring and review of individual courses at programme and curriculum area level. Institutional systems to oversee these processes are effective. The team makes one affirmation regarding the actions in respect of the development of an institutional higher education annual monitoring report, to provide a consolidated overview of all the College's higher education provision. The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.85   The College operates procedures for academic appeals and complaints in line with the awarding bodies' requirements. The College has its own complaints policy and an appeal policy for Pearson provision. The Complaints procedure and associated forms are available in the electronic handbook and the College's website, and information is emailed directly to all students; students are also informed of the procedure as part of their College induction.

2.86   Students are encouraged in the first instance to raise any concerns with their tutor or Programme Team Leader, or through the student voice meetings that are conducted throughout the year. Where students wish to escalate a complaint through the formal procedure the College procedure must be exhausted before the students make use of the awarding body's procedure, and subsequently the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA). The College reports back to the awarding bodies on the number of complaints received every year. Staff who deal with complaints are from a different area of the College to ensure impartiality. All appeals are conducted in a timely manner.

2.87   The College monitors student complaints and overarching trends through the College Management Team and at the Higher Skills Quality Improvement and Standards Group. The Head of Student Experience retains oversight of the complaints procedure and analysis is undertaken on a monthly and annual basis to ensure that any recurring themes are actioned.

2.88   Students who wish to appeal are required to follow the awarding body procedure, as outlined in the Handbook and on the VLE. The College has created a procedure for students to appeal Pearson provision, in line with guidance from the OIA.

2.89   The College's complaints and appeals procedures align with the OIA's good practice framework. They allow students to raise a concern through formal channels and the College has a robust monitoring process for ensuring that issues raised through formal channels do not reoccur.

2.90   The team considered the procedures put in place by the College and the communication students receive regarding these procedures. During the review visit, the team explored student and staff understanding of the procedures and their approach to using formal procedures.

2.91   Students prefer to raise issues informally with staff as this enables swift action to be taken. However, students are aware of the formal procedures in place and staff provide accurate guidance to students regarding the procedures as required. The University has a robust monitoring process in place for considering the outcomes of complaints and appeals, and receives low numbers of both.

2.92   The team concludes that the Expectation is met and the risk associated with the Expectation is low. The College has robust processes in place to enable students to raise concerns formally and works with the awarding partners appropriately to ensure that students have access to the full range of regulations.

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

2.93   The College has a strategic commitment to work-related education and to providing opportunities that support it. Arrangements are in place to ensure that delivery of learning opportunities, including those supported by others, are implemented securely and managed effectively, and the College has engaged with both UCLan and the University of Derby to ensure that the agreements in place identify clear roles and responsibilities as to how learning opportunities are devolved.

2.94   The main area in which the College manages learning with others is in the provision of work-based experience. Handbooks are created for mentors that detail roles and responsibilities and what is expected from the placement provider. All handbooks are reviewed annually, and for the purpose of the current courses this was completed during the recent validations. Mentors are identified for each student within the curriculum areas. These mentors are selected as good practitioners within the area and for their effectiveness in the delivery of excellent curriculum. For all provision placement providers either have a one-to-one development meeting with the delivery team or attend a briefing, dependent on the availability of the staff.

2.95   Where the placement forms part of the assessment, this assessment is done in conjunction with the tutor of the programme. The College may seek to find placements internally as part of the programme, especially where candidates have not sourced alternative placements. For all placements a due diligence visit is completed.

2.96   The College has in place relevant processes, guidelines and monitoring material for the operation of learning opportunities provided by others, although there is no formal or consistent institutional approach. The current arrangements would, however, allow this Expectation to be met.

2.97   The team reviewed a range of College documentation related to the strategic purpose, provision, support and review of work placements. The team also met students and staff to test their understanding and operation of the learning and teaching arrangements and resources, their management, and the policies, processes and procedures that support them.

2.98   The team heard about the importance of work-based learning in relation to the College's need to respond to the local economy and employers and that employers are consciously being used to develop and support provision, including by helping to reflect the workplace in the College. Senior staff spoke of working with employers to support curriculum design and delivery and of the importance of employment skills in the Enterprise and Learning Strategy and to learning and teaching.

2.99   Academic staff whom the team met spoke about the support that the Enterprise Learning Strategy and Real World approach brought to their work, and were able to present substantial evidence of employment-related approaches at an operational level, including placement opportunities. There was some evidence that approaches and support varied across academic areas, although formal approaches are clear in Counselling and Nursery

Education provision, and staff were able to talk confidently of the management of placements in these areas.

2.100   Students whom the team met are unaware of the Real World approach, but do have the sense that College staff engage with the workplace. Student representatives feel that there is potential for them to be involved in supporting knowledge about placements, but that not much was being done with them in this area. Counselling students are clear about the placement arrangements for their course and indicated that they are responsible for finding placements, though support is available if they have difficulties. They confirmed that the arrangements for mentoring, assessment and support are as described and generally effective.

2.101   The team felt that strategic commitment to the provision of learning opportunities with others is clear and that, at their best, arrangements for management and support are well defined and effective, supported by guidance informed by partners and professional environments, and well regarded by external examiners and students. The team took the view that there is insufficient consistency in management, oversight and operation of placement opportunities across the College's higher education provision, particularly given the centrality of this work to the main strategic position. Institutional ownership, effective management and security of consistent implantation of approaches could be improved, and the management team indicated an understanding of this view, and spoke of a plan they aim to implement in two years to have an overarching approach, though they do not yet have an indication of how this would operate. To support this, the team **recommends** that the College designs and implements an effective approach to the management of placement learning opportunities to provide for strategic oversight and more consistent practice.

2.102   The Expectation is clearly met, though given the issues of oversight and consistency raised, the risk is moderate, hence the recommendation given by the team.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.103   In reaching its judgement about the quality of learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

2.104   One Expectation in this area is not met, with an associated moderate level of risk. This relates to student engagement, and a recommendation is made to engage students more strategically, in particular at the College level. The review team concludes that such an approach enables students to become partners in their educational experience. It would further support the College as it seeks to implement its strategies with specific impact on higher education provision, and would also support the College in enhancing student learning opportunities more generally.

2.105   All other Expectations in this area are met, with all except one having a low level of risk. A moderate risk is associated with the College's approach to managing higher education with others, and a recommendation in this area reflects the review team's conclusion that a more consistent approach to, and increased strategic oversight of, placement learning opportunities would improve students' experience of work-related learning.

2.106   The team affirms two areas of activity already taking place in the College. One relates to the improvements in information around admissions and followed from an acknowledgement by the College and students that this had not been operating effectively. The other affirmation relates to the development of an institutional annual monitoring report for all the College's higher education, which will provide the College with an improved overview of its higher education provision.

2.107   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 a number of sources of information for the public, including the Higher Level Skills Strategy and the Higher Skills Mini Guide, which replaces the Higher Education Prospectus. Under the partner university pages there are links to the university websites where information is available to the public on their policies, strategic plans, organisation and relevant data protection policies.

3.2   All corporate information is contained within a separate section about the College and gives the public information on the College strategic plan, mission and values. The College publishes its Data Protection Policy within this area of the website and this covers all provision, including higher education information and data.

3.3   Applicants can find out how to apply to different programmes on the website. All course information is included within the course leaflets, including details about costs, entry criteria, interview, target award, mode of study and assessment. The admissions criteria is located within each of the course leaflets, which detail whether interviews are required. The Admissions Policy is currently located on the How to Apply page.

3.4   The College makes the programme handbooks available to prospective students, which include detail on the modules that will be studied each year. Each handbook includes a copy of the Student Charter and the support available to students.

3.5   Open Days and advice events give prospective students the opportunity to visit the College to look at the facilities. In addition, there is also the opportunity to have a tour when being interviewed by the curriculum staff.

3.6   All marketing materials are submitted to the university partners for approval each year, along with the Annual Monitoring Reports, so that these can be checked for accuracy. A Marketing Subgroup has been set up from the Higher Skills Quality and Improvement group to develop the information provided regarding admissions and enrolment, including, for example, letters to applicants who have received offers to study for higher education programmes.

3.7   Key Information Sets and Unistats are prepared in liaison with the Marketing and MIS team and are contained on each relevant course page. Prospective students are informed of the awarding body partners on the website in a centralised location, as opposed to individually on each course webpage.

3.8   Students have access to VLE and programme handbooks, which set out essential information. Module information packs are also contained on MyCourse, which outline for each module the learning outcomes, the scheduled teaching activities, placements if appropriate, and reading lists for university provision. For Pearson provision, students are directed to the module specifications and tutors update the reading lists each year, which again are contained under each module on MyCourse.

3.9   During induction assessment details, rules and regulations are also discussed. Students provide feedback on induction and admission information using a student survey, held in October to monitor student understanding. The Student Charter and student handbook outline the available student engagement opportunities.

3.10   Contained within each course area on MyCourse are the academic rules and regulations and associated policies for the relevant awarding body. Any changes are communicated to students through weekly tutorials or weekly bulletins, or are signposted within enrolment. For students with special educational needs (SEN), publications are available in large print, Braille, or audio formats upon request, and are processed by the SEND team.

3.11   Awarding partners are responsible for the production of certificates and accompanying transcripts. The College displays students' results on the noticeboards in line with the academic rules following the assessment boards. For Pearson provision the College distributes certificates to the students once the upload of the grades online has taken place, following the recommendations of the assessment board.

3.12   The College has in place processes for monitoring and updating information on the website, in printed publications and on the VLE. Identified members of staff are responsible for the review and there is suitable oversight from College Committees.

3.13   The team considered the evidence that the College provided and considered the information available on the website and on the VLE. The team explored the accuracy of the information with students and staff, as well as checking the knowledge of the updating processes with appropriate staff.

3.14   Information on the College website is accurate and fit for purpose, with some minor omissions. Some students reported issues with the lack of information provided prior to commencing their programme, including the start date of the programme. The College has recognised the gap within the information provided to prospective students and the review team has affirmed the actions being taken by the College to improve information to applicants and prospective students about the admissions process, as fully explained under Expectation B2.

3.15   In relation to the publishing of assessment results, the team has seen evidence of a list being published on MyCourse giving students access to the progression and award decisions of other students, listed by name, on their cohort. Providing students with personal information about their peers is considered to be a potential breach of the *Data Protection Act* and could lead to student complaints. This is a process that the College has shown that it believes is appropriate, but it has confirmed that it will consider it at the next management meeting. The team **recommends** that the College takes action to ensure that information provided to students about assessment results is communicated appropriately.

3.16   The team concludes that the Expectation for information is met, as the College has robust monitoring processes. However, the level of risk is moderate as there are a small number of deficiencies within the information that the College provides. It is noted that the College is progressing action in relation to the inadequacies.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

3.17   In reaching its judgement about the quality of the information about learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

3.18   The Expectation in this area is met, with a moderate risk. The College processes in this area are, on the whole, effective. The increased level of risk is reflected in the recommendation made by the review team, which highlights the specific issue of the communication of assessment results, and the need for the College to take action to ensure that this information is appropriately provided to students.

3.19   The review team concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1 The College's Higher Skills Strategy outlines its first strategic aim as quality enhancement. For Higher Education this includes the promotion of staff scholarly activity and the impact of staff CPD, enhancement of learners' digital literacy, reviewing the modes of delivery, and strong stakeholder groups.

4.2 The College operates an annual institution-level quality assurance cycle, explored further under Expectation B8, in which each higher education course produces a reflective annual monitoring report (AMR). The performance of courses is further monitored through regular operational meetings between the curriculum managers and senior College management.

4.3 The Vice Principal Excellence and Learning has executive responsibility for academic aspects of the College operation and has oversight of enhancement. The Higher Skills Quality and Improvement Group has the remit for assuring the quality management and improvement of the College's higher skills provision, including the actions for enhancement. This Group is chaired by an Assistant Principal who represents the ELT. The Higher Skills Quality and Improvement Group has led to the development of subgroups to focus on key aspects for development within the College.

4.4 These institution-level arrangements would be sufficient to enable the College to take deliberate steps to enhance the quality of student learning opportunities. The review team explored the Expectation by considering the College's Strategic Plans, the annual reports of quality assurance processes, and minutes of committees and meetings that have a role in enhancement. The team also met senior and academic staff, and students and student representatives.

4.5 The College holds monthly higher education management meetings, which include student feedback of their experience on higher education provision. The three business reviews of the curriculum, with the third focusing on higher education provision, typically include the items covered in annual monitoring. The focus of the Higher Skills Quality and Improvement Group and the use of subgroups enables the College to review the effectiveness of its higher education provision.

4.6 In addition, the College has included discussion of its higher education provision as a standard agenda item on its College Management Team meetings to support institutional deliberation. This allows the senior management of the College to have oversight of the higher education provision.

4.7 In meeting with academic staff the review team found examples of sharing good practice, including 'gem sharing' workshops and the College observation of learning process. Staff were able to talk about the impact of real work environments, which is a key aspect of the Enterprise Strategy; however, students were unable to acknowledge the examples provided by staff during the team's meeting with them.

4.8 In preparation for this review, a higher education student had produced a written submission for the review team, which had also been shared with the College. The review team considered the student submission to have had limited input from the wider student

body and that the College had experienced difficulties in supporting the completion of this document. This was indicative of the lack of student engagement highlighted under Expectation B5 and extends to the enhancement of student learning opportunities.

4.9   The team judges that the College's processes for the management and quality assurance of its higher education courses provide appropriate frameworks for enhancement of the student learning experience. Good practice at course level is identified, and is shared in the College. At College level, there are some examples of discourse that lead to enhancement of learning opportunities, such as the introduction of Teaching, Learning and Assessment improvement posts and the introduction of a 19+ space. However, higher education-specific quality assurance and enhancement matters might usefully feature more regularly in meetings of CMT and Higher Skills Quality and Improvement Group, and the emerging plans to develop a higher education-specific SAR may make a more deliberate contribution at institutional level. Increased engagement with students would also provide a positive contribution to the enhancement of student learning opportunities. The team **recommends** that the College takes steps to systematically and effectively implement, monitor and evaluate its enhancement processes to support a higher education ethos.

4.10   The review team found evidence of the College's commitment to improving the experience of students but that the committees do not systematically review quality assurance and enhancement matters. While the recommendation will bolster current practice, existing processes do enable enhancement to take place, and the team judges that the Expectation is met, with an associated moderate risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.11   In reaching its judgement about the enhancement of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

4.12   The Expectation in this area is met, with a moderate risk. The College demonstrates commitment to improving the experience of students, although the review team concludes in a recommendation that improvements could be made to ensure that the College processes systematically review quality assurance and enhancement matters. This would support the College in developing an increased higher education ethos for the students studying on higher education programmes.

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

5   Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1   The Enterprising Learning Strategy outlines the College's mission to make its students 'THE most employable'. The College's approach to employability is to provide students with opportunities to engage in project work and to enable students to experience a real work environment. However, it is noted that the Strategy itself provides a vision as opposed to measurable targets for the College to achieve.

5.2   The College has instigated a number of projects to increase students' engagement with employers and with real working environments, both within the curriculum and through extracurricular opportunities. The majority of these engagements tend to be discipline-specific, although there is opportunity for cross-discipline working where appropriate.

5.3   The flagship iSTEM building, built last year by the company Kia, was constructed in tandem with construction and media students. The College has maintained a strong relationship with Kia, enabling students to visit a hospital building site during this current academic year.

5.4   The College also experiences a positive relationship with the local council crèches, with a scheme enabling students at all levels to get experience in a real work environment. The College has also created a number of real work environments based on employer needs, including a construction site.

5.5   All programmes include skills development modules that enable development of employability in a formalised way. The College encourages project-based learning and external examiners have mentioned the high quality projects that reflect real-world working because of the student and employer involvement in the assessment process. Performing arts students take part in commercial projects and shows in conjunction with professional staff and crew.

5.6   Employers contribute to the curriculum by providing guest lectures, developing the curriculum and evaluating student presentations. Employer engagement varies between programmes depending on the available links.

5.7   The College has a formal relationship with employers who manage student placements. Placements are agreed by the programme staff and employers are provided with differing levels of guidance depending on the nature of the placement and any regulatory requirements. For example, in the FdA CHYPS programme the placement coordinators provide an adult placement book to register hours and make expectations clearer. In other programmes a Critical Friend pack is provided.

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 30-33 of the Higher Education Review handbook.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

e-learning
See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

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

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

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

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

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

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.