Higher Education Review of Seevic College

May 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 Seevic College. The review took place from 4 to 6 May 2016 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Mrs Roshani Swift
- Miss Sarah Riches
- Mr Matthew Kearns (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Seevic 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 found on page 6 with numbered paragraphs starting on page 7.

In reviewing Seevic 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 Seevic College

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

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding body and other 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.

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at Seevic College.

- The high level of individualised support provided at all stages of students' engagement with the College, which enables students to develop their personal potential (Expectation B4).
- The effective arrangements to support the academic and professional development of students (Expectation B4).

Recommendations

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

By November 2016:

- strengthen the processes for the design, development and approval of Pearson programmes (Expectation B1)
- implement a cross-College development programme specifically for higher education staff (Expectations B3 and A1)
- review and develop processes for capturing, actioning and monitoring issues identified in Pearson external examiner reports (Expectation B7)
- develop and implement effective processes for the monitoring and review of Pearson provision (Expectation B8)
- develop a more strategic approach to the identification and dissemination of good practice to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities (Enhancement).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The steps being taken to establish the Higher Education Academic Board as a mechanism for developing consistent policies and procedures for higher education (Enhancement).

Theme: Student Employability

Seevic College has developed an employability strategy informed by the South East Local Enterprise Partnership themes and priorities. It monitors the implementation of the strategy through regular meetings with each curriculum area.

All programmes include work-based learning; in addition, work-based skills are embedded in their curriculum design and assessment. Students in the Early Years or Education sectors are supported by workplace mentors.

Higher National programmes include work-based learning units, or their equivalent, along with work placements. Students who met the review team consider the College prepares them well for work and progression to higher level qualification.

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

About Seevic College

Seevic College (the College) is a medium-sized further education college serving south Essex, with 2,500 full-time students aged 16 to 18. Until 2010 it was a sixth-form college and it retains a strong sixth-form profile, with a third of full-time students registered on A Level programmes.

The College's higher education programmes are a relatively small part of the 19+ student provision. The great majority of the College's provision for this sector is comprised of Access to HE, accounting, A Level and level 3 vocational programmes, and apprenticeships.

The College's strategic aims expressed in its Strategic Plan 2014-17 include the following key priorities:

- outstanding teaching and learning
- employable learners with outstanding outcomes
- a strong reputation for meeting local needs
- develop new ways of working to maintain financial stability
- develop and support our people
- promote a safe, tolerant and diverse community.

Higher education is included in the priority for local needs as one of five distinct College 'brands'.

Demographic change and increased competition has resulted in the number of full-time registered students aged 16 to18 at the College reducing from 3,200 in 2010-11 to 2,540 in 2014-15. This number is expected to remain constant until 2020, followed by an increase in numbers.

When the QAA Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review was conducted in 2011 the College had franchised provision with Anglia Ruskin University and the University of Hertfordshire, and no direct Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) numbers. In 2013 the College received HEFCE approval for direct recruitment and currently provides several Higher National Diplomas through Pearson. The relationship with the University of Hertfordshire has grown. The partnership with Anglia Ruskin University has concluded following a strategic realignment.

The majority of students (70 per cent) are enrolled on an Early Years Foundation Degree and BA level 6 (top-up) programmes with the University of Hertfordshire. At the time of the review visit the College provided three Pearson Higher National Certificate/Diploma (HNC/D) programmes:

- HND Sport and Exercise Science (year 2 only)
- HND Art and Design (years 1 and 2)
- HNC/D Business (years 1 and 2).

The provision of the HND in Sport and Exercise Science will cease at the end of 2015-16.

The College's most recent QAA review in November 2011 made six advisable recommendations:

- take steps to establish a system that describes and guarantees oversight of the entirety of its higher education provision, regardless of awarding partner, that would allow the evaluation and recording of the effectiveness of mechanisms used for sharing experiences and addressing issues
- implement practices, procedures and policies to provide mechanisms by which its higher education provision is managed at all levels within the College – these should include guidance documents and should also refer to where systems for higher education are encompassed by general College policies
- engage with its awarding partners to develop and ensure a meaningful use of the external examiner system in accordance with the *Code of Practice, Section 2: Collaborative Provision and Flexible and Distributed Learning (including e-learning)* and *Section 4: External Examining*
- develop its processes for ensuring that its higher education provision and its staff, including part-time and student support staff, are aware of the Academic Infrastructure and its relevance beyond the approval and validation processes of its awarding partners
- introduce a more formal process for evaluating staff development activities across the higher education provision and develop an overall staff development plan that includes activities that cover all relevant aspects, including the Academic Infrastructure
- take steps to ensure that it is able to demonstrate formally the means by which it assures itself and its awarding partners of the accuracy and completeness of its public information.

The College is taking steps to establish a system that describes and guarantees oversight of its higher education provision. In addition, a reporting management structure has been established, including a Higher Education Academic Board.

While there is an effective procedure for using external examiner reports in relation to the awarding body provision the review team found that processes for scrutinising equivalent Higher National awards are not yet sufficiently effective.

The review team also noted that awareness of how external reference points can be used to maintain academic standards has not featured in higher education staff development activities. Although systems for developing and supporting staff operate effectively at individual and teaching team level, the needs of higher education staff for bespoke development are not being met.

With regard to the final recommendation the review team found that the College operates clear and transparent processes to ensure the information it provides to all audiences is accessible, accurate and fit for purpose.

The review team is mindful that the nature of provision at the College has changed significantly since the November 2011 report, with the transition from partnerships with two universities to one university partner, and the introduction of a small number of Higher National awards with Pearson.

Explanation of the findings about Seevic 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 Seevic 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* (FHEQ) are met by:

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

1.1 The College delivers two degree programmes on behalf of the University of Hertfordshire and three Higher National programmes on behalf of Pearson. Pearson is responsible for the design of its Higher National programmes, ensuring that they take into account the FHEQ and other external reference points, including Subject Benchmark Statements. College staff and the University's link tutor work collaboratively to design the degree programmes in accordance with the University's requirements, which take into account the FHEQ, SEEC credit-level descriptors and QAA qualification descriptors. The Programme Development Team uses Subject Benchmark Statements and the University's statement of graduate attributes to inform the design of the degree programmes. The University's validation and revalidation processes ensure that the qualifications are correctly positioned on the FHEQ, and other external reference points are used to set academic standards. External examiners for the degree and Higher National programmes report annually on whether standards have been met.

1.2 The College's processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.3 The review team tested how the processes worked in practice by considering the University's Validation Handbook, documentation prepared by the College for

validation/revalidation, staff development activities and external examiner reports, and by talking to staff.

1.4   The University's report of the validation of the foundation and top-up BA (Hons) degrees confirms that the Programme Development Team made appropriate use of the FHEQ, SEEC level descriptors and relevant Subject Benchmark Statements to set standards for the new programmes. Differentiation of learning outcomes at levels 5 and 6 were considered explicitly at the event. The review team explored with staff how they use external reference points to maintain academic standards. Programme teams are responsible for keeping up to date with subject-related references, such as Subject Benchmark Statements. For Higher National programmes, the Quality Nominee and BTEC Coordinator together ensure that any changes in Pearson requirements are disseminated to teaching teams.

1.5   Awareness of how external reference points can be used to maintain academic standards has not featured in higher education staff development activities, even though the College was advised in 2011 by the QAA review team to 'develop its processes for ensuring that its higher education provision and its staff...are aware of the Academic Infrastructure and its relevance beyond the approval and validation processes of its awarding partners'. The absence of discrete College-based staff development for higher education staff, which could be used to raise awareness of how external reference points can be used to maintain academic standards and inform their practice, contributes to the recommendation under Expectation B3. Student handbooks and guides identify the level of the module or unit to be studied, and students demonstrated a good understanding of the difference in academic levels. External examiners confirm that academic standards are set and maintained appropriately.

1.6   Although there is scope for a more systematic approach to developing staff awareness of external reference points, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.7   There are a number of deliberative committees at the College that are responsible for the governance of higher education. The College's Standards Committee has overall responsibility for monitoring the standards of the provision – it reviews subject-based self-assessment reports (SARs) at an annual meeting with senior staff. The Academic Board, which comprises representatives from the Executive Leadership Team, curriculum teams, management information systems, finance, registry and marketing, is responsible for the approval of new programmes and amendments to current provision. Since the last QAA review the College has established a Higher Education Academic Board with a remit to promote higher education internally and externally, to develop a consistent approach to higher education policies and procedures, and to improve student engagement.

1.8   Programme committee meetings (PCMs) operate at programme level and are attended by members of the Executive Leadership Team, teaching staff, the library manager and student representatives. Examination and assessment boards are in place for the degree and Higher National programmes respectively. The University's academic frameworks and regulations apply to the degree programmes. The University of Hertfordshire Academic Regulations for Undergraduate and Taught Postgraduate Programmes are circulated in hard copy prior to the start of the academic year. The document incorporates the University policy and regulations, adherence to which is monitored by the University link tutor through attendance at examination boards and via the programme-level annual monitoring and evaluation report (AMER). For Higher National programmes the College works within the guidance contained in relevant Pearson publications. Pearson checks that the College is meeting its requirements through its annual quality review and development process, and reports from its external examiners. Key staff attend Pearson development events.

1.9   The College has in place academic frameworks and regulations that would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.10   The review team examined how the Expectation is met in practice by reading minutes of College committees and boards, Pearson reports, University AMERs, SARs relating to Higher National programmes, and student handbooks, and by meeting with staff and students.

1.11   The committees and boards established by the College fulfil their remits; minutes are kept and action points are followed up at subsequent meetings. However, both the Academic Board and Higher Education Academic Board have restricted terms of reference and neither committee has explicit responsibility for the quality assurance or enhancement of higher education provision, even though the College's action plan prepared in response to the QAA review in 2011 stated an intention to establish a Higher Education Standards Committee. PCMs are held three times a year for the degree programmes; there are two formal meetings and an informal meeting in the final term. The PCMs are an effective forum for staff and student representatives to report developments and raise issues, and for both the University and senior College staff to exercise oversight. The College has recently extended the PCM format to its Higher National programmes and, although only one round

of meetings had taken place at the time of the review, the records of meetings and the views of student representatives who met the review team provide evidence of the potential of these meetings to monitor, review and enhance the quality of programmes.

1.12   Responsibility for ensuring that Pearson requirements are met rests with the Quality Nominee, working with the BTEC Coordinator. The BTEC Quality Forum is a cross- College regular meeting of staff with responsibility for Pearson programmes, which is used to update staff and plan assessment and verification arrangements and visits by Pearson external examiners. The review team found that the College's implementation of Pearson requirements was variable. The College has not developed programme specifications as intended by Pearson, and although most of the expected information is contained in student programme handbooks, one handbook did not contain a complete programme structure.

1.13   In 2013-14 a Pearson external examiner noted that the College was using an out-of-date unit specification and made an essential recommendation that an assessment board be held as required by Pearson. Assessment boards are now held for all Higher National programmes. The College has not developed a discrete set of regulations for its assessment boards, although student-facing information is incorporated into student handbooks. Staff explained that they followed Pearson's requirements and sought to incorporate all required information into student handbooks rather than creating multiple documents. Students confirmed that they were aware of relevant assessment regulations and related procedures. The Pearson Quality Review and Development Report for 2014-15 reported that all quality processes were in place and effective.

1.14   The College has adequate academic frameworks and regulations in place to govern how academic credit and qualifications are awarded. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.15   The College maintains a definitive record of each programme and qualification it approves through definitive module documents (DMDs) and programme specifications for University of Hertfordshire programmes, and programme handbooks for Pearson programmes. These documents are made accessible to students through the virtual learning environment (VLE) and the University of Hertfordshire's 'Studynet'.

1.16   Programme specifications are required for the University's validated programmes delivered by the College, detailing educational aims, intended learning outcomes, modes of assessment and the location of each programme on the FHEQ. DMDs describe intended learning outcomes, modes of assessment and the credit value for each module.

1.17   The College's programme validation and revalidation process for the University of Hertfordshire's programmes considers programme specifications and DMDs to ensure they are accurate and functioning effectively as critical reference points for the delivery and review of a programme or module. The College is responsible for the writing of programme specifications and DMDs for validated programmes, while the University is responsible for their accuracy and ensuring they are appropriately maintained.

1.18   Programme handbooks for Pearson programmes are produced by programme teams detailing modes of assessment, intended learning outcomes and credit values taken from Pearson's specifications. The operation of these processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.19   The review team tested the effective operation of these processes by examining relevant documentary evidence, including programme specifications DMDs and programme handbooks. The review team also met senior and teaching staff responsible for the maintenance of academic standards, and a range of students.

1.20   The review team confirmed that these processes operate effectively and that programme specifications and programme handbooks act as critical reference points for the College's provision. The College seeks to incorporate all required information for Pearson programme specifications into programme handbooks rather than create multiple documents for students. Students confirmed the information contained within programme handbooks was adequate for their needs, although the review team noted one handbook contained an incomplete programme structure.

1.21   Minor changes to the University's programmes can only be made during the revalidation process, and minor changes to Pearson programmes are discussed by programme teams at the relevant PCM, which subsequently makes a decision. AMERs for University programmes confirm whether any minor changes have been made to programme specifications. If any minor change to a Pearson programme has implications pertaining to resources or staffing, it is escalated to the Academic Board.

1.22   Programme specifications, programme handbooks and DMDs function as adequate reference points for the delivery and monitoring of the College's programmes. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.23   The responsibilities of the University of Hertfordshire and the College for the foundation degree and the BA (Hons) top-up provision are identified within the franchise agreement between the two institutions and the responsibility checklist. They clearly state that the University has the overall responsibility for setting and maintaining the academic standards of its awards. The College collaborates with the University and applies University processes to ensure that the programmes delivered at the College meet threshold academic standards, and are in line with the University's own academic standards and regulations. The processes for approval of new programmes, revalidation and periodic review are included within the University's Validation Handbook and Periodic Review Handbook. The validation and revalidation processes and the design of programme specifications for both the foundation and the BA (Hons) top-up degrees requires engagement with external reference points, including the FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements and SEEC credit-level descriptors.

1.24   The College has an established history of engagement with Pearson for its further education programmes and sees the development of HNDs as an extension of such engagement. The Responsibilities Checklist identifies the respective responsibilities of the College and Pearson for the HNDs offered by the College. Pearson's programme development, approval, modification and periodic review processes ensure that the Higher National qualifications are located appropriately within the FHEQ and meet relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. The College has online approval from Pearson to deliver Higher National programmes. Internal systems have been implemented by the College for approval and ratification by the Academic Board.

1.25   The opportunity to engage with the University and Pearson processes for programme development, approval, modifications and reapprovals would allow the College to meet the Expectation.

1.26   The review team tested the processes for programme approval and review by examining documentation for both University and Pearson awards, and examined records of approval events and notes on approval decisions. The team also explored the level of engagement and understanding of College teams of the processes for approval and review within meetings with senior management, the University link tutor, College academic and support staff, and students.

1.27   The review of documentation confirmed that the processes for validation, revalidation and periodic review for both University and Pearson programmes are effective in ensuring that Programme Development Teams engage appropriately with threshold academic standards and awarding partners' academic frameworks and regulations. With regard to University provision meetings confirmed the strength of the collaborative engagement between the two institutions. With Pearson programmes, the documentation review and evidence from meetings confirmed that the design of Higher National programmes at the College aligns fully with Pearson academic frameworks, and Programme

Development Teams make effective use of the BTEC Centre Guide and programme specifications.

1.28   The College's awarding partners are responsible for ensuring that academic standards for programmes are appropriately set. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.29   The awarding partners are responsible for the award of credit and qualifications, and manage this through their respective quality assurance processes. The College follows the academic regulations of the University of Hertfordshire and Pearson to ensure that credit and qualifications are awarded only when learning outcomes are achieved. For University programmes the College applies the University guidelines on assessment, while for Pearson programmes the College applies the Pearson regulations on assessment and verification of standards within the BTEC Centre Guide for Assessment Levels 4-7, and the guidance within programme specifications.

1.30   The definitive information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected achievements for University programmes are detailed in the DMDs, which are agreed and approved at validations. During validation processes, programme specifications are produced to University guidelines, reflecting appropriate credit requirements, achievement of threshold academic standards and the University's academic standards.

1.31   For Pearson programmes the College ensures that appropriate credit and qualifications are awarded through its assessment processes and internal boards, and applies the guidelines within the UK Vocational Quality Assurance Handbook. The BTEC Quality Forum, chaired by the College's BTEC Coordinator Assistant Principal, supports the College-wide application of Pearson assessment policies and procedures.

1.32   Both awarding partners use external examiners to review the assessment processes and report on their effectiveness. The engagement with the awarding partner systems and the Colleges own processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.33   The review team tested the Expectation by examining the DMDs, validation minutes, Assessment Board minutes, and external examiner reports. The review team explored the level of staff and student engagement with the processes in meetings with senior managers, staff, students and the University link tutor.

1.34   For University provision the processes are effective, with assessments marked by College staff and moderated by University staff prior to scrutiny by the external examiner. For Pearson provision there is internal verification of marking by College staff. In all cases, external examiners submit annual reports that are considered via the annual monitoring and evaluation arrangements, which report on the effectiveness of the process and address recommendations via action plans. Academic staff and students demonstrated understanding of the significance of applying credit only on the achievement of appropriate learning outcomes.

1.35   The application of the awarding partners' regulations and processes, along with the College's focus on programme aims and learning outcomes, ensures that achievement of

learning outcomes is demonstrated through assessment. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.36   The responsibility for monitoring and review of programmes, and alignment with UK threshold standards and awarding partner standards, is the responsibility of the University of Hertfordshire and Pearson respectively. The College is responsible for qualification delivery, and maintenance of the academic standards of the awarding partners.

1.37   The awarding partners undertake periodic reviews to ensure that the College maintains threshold academic standards and each partner's academic standards. University programmes are reviewed and revalidated on a six-yearly basis. The College participates in the process by leading on programme changes, while the University is responsible for approving any proposed changes.

1.38   For Higher National programmes Pearson has overall responsibility for periodic review, and this is supported by College-specific processes for reviewing Pearson programmes in accordance with the College Quality Strategy, using SARs and Quality Improvement Plans (QIPs), which are overseen by the College's Higher Education Academic Board.

1.39   The process is further strengthened by annual reviews, which for the University includes the production of an AMER for each of its programmes. Pearson programmes are also reviewed annually leading to the production of an annual Quality Review and Development Report. In addition, the College produces internal quality SARs, QIPs and quality monitoring notes.

1.40   The arrangements of the awarding partners, together with the College's internal monitoring processes, would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.41   The review team examined awarding body periodic review documents and the College's policy documents, and sampled annual monitoring reports (AMRs) for both awarding partners. In meetings with senior and academic staff, including the University's link tutor, and students, the team explored how effectively the College engages with the review process.

1.42   In accordance with the requirements of the periodic review process, the Foundation Degree in Early Years was successfully revalidated by the University in 2014, along with the new validation for a BA (Hons) top-up programme in Education Studies and Early Years. The annual review and monitoring report for University programmes is effective in applying the University's policies and procedures for annual monitoring of collaborative partners. The review team further confirmed the effectiveness of this process within a meeting with the academic team and link tutor, and established the strength of the collaborative approach for the annual review of University programmes.

1.43   The review for Pearson programmes takes a whole-College approach, and the Higher National programmes are monitored alongside the College's further education awards. The self-assessment process, QIPs, and quality monitoring notes all support the

review and monitoring of all Pearson awards. This approach does not always enable the College to deliberate and evidence actions taken on priorities for Higher National programmes. This is also noted in the findings for Expectation B8 in this report.

1.44   The responsibility for academic standards rests with the awarding partners, and the College meets its responsibilities by engaging with the periodic and annual monitoring and review processes. The review 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

1.45   The University of Hertfordshire's Validation Handbook provides guidance on its expectations in relation to external involvement in the development and validation, or review, of programmes. Programme Development Teams are advised to consult with external stakeholders, including employers, during the design stage. The attendance of external experts as panel members at the validation/revalidation event is compulsory. The College's process for the approval of new Higher National programmes does not explicitly require external involvement. The University and Pearson appoint external examiners for the degree and Higher National programmes respectively.

1.46   A Pearson external examiner visits the College annually, meeting staff and students. The University expects at least one examination board a year to be held at a partner institution to provide an opportunity for the external examiner to visit the partner. External examiners receive samples of students' work and provide advice on whether academic standards are set, delivered and achieved through their annual reports. Any actions arising from external examiner reports are addressed by programme teams through the AMER for degree programmes, and SARs and associated QIPs for Higher Nationals. Actions plans are monitored at quality meetings and PCMs.

1.47   The College's arrangements for using external advice when setting and maintaining academic standards would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.48   The review team tested the effectiveness of the College's processes by considering the College's internal processes for the approval of Higher National programmes, and reports of meetings with external stakeholders for the validation/revalidation of Early Years degree programmes, and by talking to staff and a representative group of employers.

1.49   The use of external independent advice in setting and maintaining academic standards is embedded in the University processes for the development, approval, monitoring and review of programmes delivered by partners. The Early Years Programme Development Team consulted with employers and alumni employed in the sector when developing its foundation degree and BA (Hons) top-up programmes in 2014. The validation panel included an external academic member. External examiner reports for the degree programmes are received in the College and the University, and are considered thoroughly and responded to effectively.

1.50   The arrangements for consulting employers and other stakeholders when developing and designing Higher National programmes is relatively informal. The College has a good relationship with the South East Local Enterprise Partnership and the Essex Skills Board and through these links has identified priority sectors for the development of higher level programmes. Teaching staff meet employers when visiting students on placement and many are dual practitioners. The selection of specific optional units is often

guided by progression opportunities to local higher education providers. External examiners are in place for all Higher National programmes.

1.51   The external examiners for the Business and Art and Design Higher National programmes have indicated their satisfaction with the College's management of academic standards, with no essential recommendations being made in the last two years. In 2013-14 the external examiner for Sport and Exercise Science noted three essential actions: to hold an assessment board; to implement the use of formative assessment; and to map students' work for one unit against the current rather than an earlier unit specification. All action points had been addressed by the time of the external examiner's next report in 2014-15. The effectiveness of the College's systems for considering external examiners' reports is discussed under Expectation B7.

1.52   The College makes appropriate use of external and independent expertise in respect of its programmes. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

1.54   All seven Expectations in this judgement area are met, with a low level of risk. The review team makes one cross-referenced recommendation in Expectation A1 to a substantive recommendation in Expectation B3. This is concerned with the implementation of a cross-College development programme specifically for higher education staff.

1.55   There are no affirmations or features of good practice.

1.56   The review team notes with regard to Expectation A1 that there is scope for a more systematic approach to developing staff awareness of external reference points; this finding is developed in Expectation B3.

1.57   The College has adequate academic frameworks and regulations in place to govern how academic credit and qualifications are awarded, although weaknesses are evident in the manner in which the College has implemented Pearson requirements.

1.58   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 awarding partners have responsibility for the design, development and approval of the respective programmes offered by the College. In relation to the University of Hertfordshire, the College works within the processes set out in the University Validation Handbook. Appropriate and considered use is made of external reference points and the College works collaboratively with the University link tutor on programme design, development and approval. The College team also engages with stakeholder groups, including employers, to gather their views on the curriculum development. In addition, students are included as members of the validation panels. In the design and development of the Foundation Degree in Early Years and the BA in Education Studies and Early Years, for example, College staff were fully engaged in the design of the programme, although formal approval was from the University.

2.2   For Pearson programmes the College Quality Nominee has responsibility for ensuring that Higher National programmes are aligned to Pearson policies and procedures for design and approval. Course teams have the discretion to select optional units, and to design the teaching, learning and assessment strategies for Pearson programmes. The process currently involves the engagement of course teams, programme area managers, curriculum area managers, the Executive Leadership Team and the College Academic Board. The awarding partners' policies and procedures, in addition to aligned processes applied within the College, would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.3   The review team examined the documents relating to programme approval, including the University Validation Handbook and validation reports, and other relevant University documents. For Pearson programmes, the team reviewed documents relating to the internal approval process. The team also explored the effectiveness of the approval processes in meetings with academic staff, including the link tutor, business support staff, and students.

2.4   For University awards, the University has oversight and control of the validation process, and from the evidence examined for the foundation degree and BA (Hons) top-up programmes this is effective in ensuring the quality of the approved programmes.

2.5   However, for Pearson awards, the review team found that the systems warranted greater transparency, consistency and clarity, which would evidence a greater degree of deliberation in the internal programme approval processes. The review team **recommends** that, by November 2016, the College strengthen the processes for the design, development and approval of Pearson programmes.

2.6   The College's engagement with the systems and processes of its awarding partners ensures effective design, development, and approval of programmes. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is moderate, due to the

need to clarify the locus of responsibility for Pearson programme approval within the College's internal processes.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

2.7   The College applies transparent and fair recruitment and admission policies, which enable the selection of students who can achieve the intended learning outcomes of their chosen programme. The College operates a centralised admissions system, and all prospective students apply directly to the College through application forms available on the College website and in print. The College's admissions process is clearly documented within its Higher Education Admissions and Enrolment Policy.

2.8   The admissions process commences when a prospective student completes an online or print application form, after which they are invited to an admissions interview with a member of the programme team. In addition, the College has successfully migrated its admissions process to UCAS this academic year (2015-16).

2.9   The interview ensures that candidates possess the necessary aptitude to successfully complete their chosen programme and explore how it aligns with their career aspirations.

2.10   The College's Information and Guidance Policy enables prospective students to access appropriate information and guidance from the College concerning their application, their chosen programme and wider College services. The Deputy Principal for Curriculum and Quality maintains oversight over the Information and Guidance Policy process. Prospective students are informed of an admissions decision at the end of their interview and provided with feedback by the programme team, which has ultimate responsibility for the admissions decision. An offer letter is subsequently sent to successful prospective students within three weeks.

2.11   Should a prospective student wish to appeal an admissions decision this must be made in writing to the Deputy Principal for Curriculum and Quality within seven working days of the admissions decision.

2.12   All students receive an induction at programme level when they enrol at the College, which fully explains their programme's content and relevant academic regulations, and offers support regarding academic study skills.

2.13   The Vice Principal (Systems) and the Registrar maintain oversight over the admissions and enrolment process, while individual programme teams are responsible for induction arrangements, working with the Student Services Team. The operation of these admissions and enrolment processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.14   The review team tested the effectiveness of these processes by scrutinising a range of documentary evidence, including the College's Higher Education Admissions and Enrolment Policy, Information and Guidance Policy, and the guidance and training given to College staff conducting admissions interviews. The team also met senior management staff responsible for the admissions and induction process, professional support staff, programme teams responsible for admission decisions, and a range of students.

2.15   The review team confirmed the effective operation of the College's admissions and enrolment processes. Students find the admissions process highly helpful and supportive in enabling them to reach a decision regarding their chosen programme and providing them with relevant information about the College. Programme staff conducting interviews receive extensive training from the College's Information and Guidance Policy Team, enabling them to provide a supportive environment for prospective students and offer individualised information and guidance concerning a programme's content, intended learning objectives and wider College services. This ensures the interview process is fair, transparent and highly supportive to prospective students. Subject-specific information, tailored to individual student needs, is available from relevant teaching staff, and generic information is available from the three student advisers based in Student Services. Prospective students regularly access these services at open days, interview evenings and through the College's website. The individualised support students receive throughout the admissions and enrolment process supports the good practice identified within Expectation B4 regarding the personal support provided by staff throughout students engagement with the College.

2.16   The College actively encourages and supports prospective students to disclose any learning disabilities or additional support needs, and is supportive of early disclosure throughout the admissions and enrolment process. Those who declare a disability in their admissions application can meet a member of the Learning Support Team to discuss their application, and receive individual support prior to their admissions interview and throughout the enrolment process. Prospective students with additional support needs can have a member of the Learning Support Team attend their admissions interview with the programme team member. Any specific needs for prospective students are readily deployed and with appropriate support arrangements.

2.17   Prospective students complete a feedback form regarding their experience of the admissions interview, and this information is used by the College to enhance its admissions processes.

2.18   The College applies recruitment and admissions processes that are effective, fair and transparent, enabling the selection of students who are able to successfully complete their programme. These processes are highly supportive of prospective students and ensure the provision of guidance and information, which enables them to make a fully informed decision. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.19   The Deputy Principal for Curriculum and Quality oversees the delivery of all programmes and is responsible for the monitoring and review of learning opportunities and teaching practices. They are assisted by the Assistant Principal for Quality Improvement. The College's approach to learning and teaching is set out in its whole-College Learning and Teaching Strategy, and the approach to quality assurance in the Quality Strategy. Lesson observations take place annually and are linked to the appraisal of staff. The Learning Development Policy sets out the structure for the development and monitoring of high quality teaching and learning, and includes specific guidance for the observation of higher education staff. Those undertaking lesson observations have higher education specialist knowledge and understanding. The outcome of observations and learning walks feed into the individual and team teaching and learning priorities for development.

2.20   Staff are supported to enhance their qualifications including obtaining doctoral and master's qualifications. There is a programme of in-house staff development and higher education staff have access to University of Hertfordshire or Pearson staff development events as appropriate. A Teaching and Learning Development Manager provides support to individuals and curriculum areas to develop their practice, and a Training and Development Support Adviser supports staff development and ensures their access to professional development opportunities.

2.21   The College uses an electronic system to monitor students' progress. Higher National students participate in weekly timetabled tutorial sessions, while degree students take part in small group workshops and individual tutorials, which are embedded into the delivery of each module. A Higher Education Academic Support Tutor provides additional support to degree students before or after teaching sessions or by email.

2.22   Students have access to a Learning and Information Centre at the College, which provides drop-in access to computers and laptops. Higher education students have increased borrowing rights and staff can request that some texts are reserved. Degree students use Studynet, the University's VLE, while Higher National students use the College's own VLE. Students have access to specialist facilities including a sports science laboratory, a refurbished art department and dedicated studio for Art and Design students. Laptops are available in classrooms and in the student room.

2.23   Students have opportunities to provide feedback on learning and teaching through the end-of-module/unit questionnaire, the National Student Survey and focus groups, and in meetings with the University link tutor or the Pearson external examiner.

2.24   The College's policies and processes for learning and teaching would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.25   The review team examined how the College met the Expectation in practice by considering College strategies and policies related to teaching and learning, reviewing minutes of meetings, external examiner reports, AMRs, SARs and associated action plans,

staff development plans, and material available via the VLE, and in meetings with staff and students.

2.26   The College does not have a specific strategy for the development of effective learning and teaching for its higher education provision, and the terms of reference of the Higher Education Academic Board do not explicitly encompass learning and teaching. The quality of learning opportunities is monitored and reviewed primarily through the mechanism of regular quality monitoring meetings conducted by senior staff with each curriculum area. A standard template, which includes prompts relating to learning outcomes and teaching and learning, is used to guide discussions and record action points. The effectiveness of the higher education review process is diluted by the inclusion of all levels of vocational provision within a curriculum area and the informal method of recording discussions and actions.

2.27   Intended learning objectives and outcomes are made clear to students in programme and module handbooks. Students confirm that they experience a variety of teaching methods and they are expected to become more independent as they progress. The review team noted that on one Higher National programme, level 4 and 5 modules are delivered concurrently in the first semester of the first year of the course. Although students are briefed thoroughly about the differences between level 4 and 5 outcomes, the review team was concerned that the consequences for student achievement of delivering level 5 units so early in the programme were not fully explored during the approval process.

2.28   The College revised its system of lesson observation in 2014-15 to place greater emphasis on the student experience and student engagement. Although the College continues to use Ofsted grading criteria for its observation of higher education staff, it has attempted to incorporate the UK Professional Standards Framework and uses staff with specific higher education knowledge and experience to undertake the observations. The University link tutor also observes staff teaching on the Early Years degree programmes. The outcomes of lesson observations, learning walks, teaching and learning development weeks, and feedback from external examiners are captured in individual and team teaching and learning priorities for development. An example of a recent team development activity is all staff teaching on the Early Years degree programmes applying for and obtaining Higher Education Academy recognition, with one member of the team achieving Senior Fellow status.

2.29   Staff who met the review team confirmed that they had good access to external staff development opportunities, including attending events hosted by the University and Pearson, and subject-related conferences, and that they are supported to enhance their qualifications. The review team found that the College's systems for developing and supporting staff operate effectively at individual and teaching team level, but that the needs of higher education staff for bespoke development are not being met by current structures and processes. There is an absence of mechanisms whereby good practice in one curriculum area can be shared with other members of the higher education community or common issues addressed. The team also notes under Expectation A1 that staff demonstrated limited awareness of how external reference points can be used to maintain academic standards. The College's action plan in response to the QAA review in 2011 included an intention to hold an annual Higher Education Development Conference – no evidence was provided of such a conference taking place. The review team **recommends** that, by November 2016, the College implement a cross-College development programme specifically for higher education staff.

2.30   The College has taken steps to raise the status of higher education students within the wider College community. Actions include the provision of a higher education room equipped with laptops, reserved texts in the library and privileged borrowing rights. Students

confirm that the physical learning environment is suitable for their needs, although some of the equipment required updating. New students are assisted to navigate the University's VLE and the College's VLE, both of which are useful resources.

2.31   Students have a number of opportunities to provide feedback on teaching, learning and resources, including to the University link tutor, whose reports are included in the AMER; to the Pearson external examiner; and via end-of-module/unit surveys, focus groups and the National Student Survey. Students report that staff proactively seek their views on preferred teaching methods, and that the College is responsive to feedback.

2.32   The College has adequate systems in place to review and monitor students' learning opportunities and teaching practices at programme and curriculum area level. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low. However, a more holistic approach to the identification and sharing of good practice across the range of higher provision would enable the College to enhance its provision.

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

2.33   The development of students' academic, personal and professional potential is a key priority for the College. The College encourages the early disclosure of specific learning needs, and for students who declare a need a meeting is arranged with a member of the Learning Support Team to discuss their application, offer appropriate guidance, and put in place any additional support arrangements. The Higher Education Student Adviser assists students with applications for the Disabled Students' Allowance. New students receive an induction to the College, and students progressing from the foundation degree to the BA (Hons) top-up programme are supported with the transition to higher level study. The Learning Support Team works with programme teams to support students, which may include the use of assistive technologies. Degree students benefit from the support provided by the Higher Education Academic Support Tutor, who supports individuals or small groups to develop their academic skills. Higher education students have access to the College's wellbeing and counselling services.

2.34   The College works with employers to provide opportunities for students' professional development. All Early Years degree students work in the Early Years sector and are supported in their placement by a workplace mentor. Work-based learning units or their equivalent are incorporated into Higher National programmes. Students have access to the Matrix-accredited Careers Service. Careers advisers provide information, advice and guidance, either on an individual or group basis, for CV building, interviews or applications for further study. The College has developed a statement on personal tutoring that applies to its higher education provision; personal tutors are supported by Student Services.

2.35   The College's arrangements for developing students' academic, personal and professional development would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.36   The review team assessed how the College enables students' development and achievement in practice by considering College policies and procedures, and by meeting with current and former students, academic and professional support staff, and employer representatives.

2.37   Students commended their experience of the College's application, admission and induction processes. They had an opportunity to attend an open evening and all were interviewed. The information, advice and guidance provided at these events, combined with material available on the website, enabled them to make informed decisions about their choice of higher education institution, programme and progression routes. Students with specific learning needs are supported effectively by the Learning Support Team through the application and admission process, ensuring that financial and academic support is put in place on a timely basis for the start of the programme.

2.38   While on programmes students have access to a range of College support services, including wellbeing, counselling, careers and personal tutors. Degree students can also access the University of Hertfordshire's services. Support services are monitored and reviewed through the production of a SAR and QIP, which explicitly address how the services are meeting the needs of higher education students. The high level of individualised support provided at all stages of students' engagement with the College, which enables students to develop their personal potential, is **good practice**.

2.39   The College's arrangements to support the academic and professional development of students are good. Degree students have access to an Academic Support Tutor, who provides support to individuals and small groups before, during and after taught sessions and by email. Early Years students spoke positively about how they had been supported to develop their academic practice, and the introduction of 'patchwork' assessment to ease the transition to higher level assessment requirements.

2.40   The College's Employability Strategy provides a framework for supporting the professional development of students. The Employability Skills Framework, which identifies the skills valued by employers, is displayed prominently throughout the College. Progression opportunities are considered as part of the design of programmes. For example, the selection of optional units on the HND in Art and Design was influenced by the opportunity to top up to a degree at a local higher education provider. The Careers Service provides support on applying for work or further study, compiling CVs and interview practice. Work-based learning, placements or equivalent experiences are built into all higher education programmes. A centralised work experience unit has been set up to provide consistent support for the delivery of high quality work experience. Implementation of the Employability Strategy is monitored through quality monitoring meetings.

2.41   Students have registered high levels of satisfaction with the academic support they receive in national surveys, and the College was commended by the University for the quality of student support, and the informal and formal learning support provided at the validation of the Early Years degree programmes in 2014. The effective arrangements to support the academic and professional development of students is **good practice**.

2.42   The College provides high quality and effective services to support the academic, personal and professional development of students. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B5: Student Engagement*

Findings

2.43   The College uses a range of mechanisms to engage students as partners in the quality assurance and enhancement of their learning opportunities, and these processes are articulated within its Learner Involvement Strategy. The College employs an effective student representation system for this purpose, and this and other student engagement opportunities are communicated to students through programme handbooks and the VLE.

2.44   Two course representatives are appointed from each programme and attend PCMs, which take place twice formally and once informally per academic year. Course representatives produce a student report, which is considered at PCM level and informs the College's annual monitoring processes. The Higher Education Executive Representative attends all PCMs to report any trends upwards to the Higher Education Academic Board. Student handbooks clearly outline the roles of course representatives and the Higher Education Executive Representative, and signpost appropriate training available from the Student Services Team.

2.45   The College collects and considers student feedback using module feedback questionnaires for University students and end-of-semester questionnaires for students on Pearson programmes. This feedback is reported to curriculum area managers. The College has a range of methods for collecting student feedback, such as focus groups, and analyses the results produced to identify issues or trends. These student engagement processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.46   The review team tested the effectiveness of these processes by examining a range of documentary evidence, including the College's Learner Involvement Strategy, PCM minutes, and module feedback and end-of-semester questionnaires. The review team also met students, teaching staff and senior managers.

2.47   The review team confirmed the effective operation of the College's student engagement processes. PCMs effectively respond to concerns raised through course representatives and consistently inform students of the actions taken in response to their feedback. PCM minutes are circulated to students by the Higher Education Executive Representative. Course representatives are supported by programme teams to participate effectively in PCMs for the assurance and enhancement of their learning opportunities.

2.48   The College regularly uses 'drop-in' events with the Higher Education Student Adviser to collect feedback from students, and students find these meetings helpful to provide their views on the quality of their learning opportunities. The Higher Education Executive Representative is effective and proactive in gaining student views and plays a key role in the College's student representation structure.

2.49   The College has successfully developed an ethos of open and friendly communication with its student body, which is valued by both students and staff, and enables the effective operation of its student engagement processes.

2.50   The College takes deliberate steps to effectively engage all students in the assurance and enhancement of their learning opportunities. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.51   The College's awarding partners have policies, regulations and processes to set and maintain standards for each award of credit or a qualification, to ensure the assessment processes are equitable, valid and reliable, and ensure the achievement of the intended learning outcomes.

2.52   For University of Hertfordshire programmes the process for assessment is in the Collaborative Partnerships Handbook and the Responsibilities Checklist. The setting of assessment, and moderation of the University programmes, is a shared responsibility, with the College being responsible for first marking and providing feedback. The process for external moderation of assessment and student work involves the link tutor and the external examiners.

2.53   Assessment processes for Pearson programmes, including those for marking and internal moderation, follow the requirements within the BTEC Centre Guide for Assessment. The College has the responsibility for setting assessments, first marking and moderation, and giving feedback under the provisions of the Responsibilities Checklist. The College assessment policy supports this process for Pearson programmes. Assignment briefs are produced by the College and internally verified prior to being issued to students. This process is checked and monitored internally by the BTEC Coordinator and externally by the Pearson external verifier as part of the quality processes.

2.54   The College's programme area manager has responsibility for managing claims for recognition of prior learning for Pearson programmes in line with Pearson's policy (2015). For University programmes advice is sought from the link tutor and University processes applied. All information on assessment requirements and criteria for the College's higher education programmes are made available within student and programme handbooks.

2.55   Assessment boards for University programmes are organised and managed by the University, and require attendance of the College programme leader and relevant staff teams. The College conducts its own assessment boards for Pearson programmes.

2.56   The assessment policies and procedures of the awarding partners, and the College's own systems, would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.57   The review team considered the assessment policy and procedural documentation of the awarding partners and the College's processes for assessment, minutes of assessment boards, and external examiner's comments on the assessment processes. The team also explored the effectiveness of the process in meetings with senior management, academic staff and students.

2.58   The College engages with its awarding partners to ensure that assessment is effective in supporting student achievement of learning outcomes. The College's procedures support those of Pearson and meet their assessment requirements.

2.59   Students were aware of good academic practice and expressed great satisfaction with the assessment arrangements, and explained how they supported their personal, academic and professional development. Students and staff confirmed that assessment facilitated the linking of theory to practice and developed student employability skills. The College survey reported in the student submission to this report also noted a high level of satisfaction with the assessment procedures.

2.60   The College has appropriate assessment processes, including those covering recognition of prior learning, and staff and students engage effectively with them. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External Examining*

Findings

2.61   External examiners for the Early Years degree programmes are appointed by the University in accordance with their policy and procedures. The role of the external examiner is explained to students via their programme handbook, which contains a link to their reports. External examiners attend University examination boards, at least one of which annually should be held at the partner college. The responsibility for responding to the external examiner's annual report is set out in the Collaborative Partnerships Handbook. The relevant University school is responsible for ensuring that the College receives and considers the report. The reports are considered by staff and student representatives at PCMs. The University link tutor helps the programme team to develop actions in response, which are incorporated in AMERs. The formal response to the external examiner is provided by the Dean of the relevant University school.

2.62   External examiners for Higher National programmes are appointed by Pearson. Higher National programme handbooks do not provide an explanation of the role of the external examiner. Pearson external examiners visit centres annually but are not required to attend assessment boards. Their reports are received by the Quality Nominee and passed to the programme area manager for distribution to the programme team for action. The reports are considered at PCMs, with any recommendations identified in SARs and actions in the QIP.

2.63   The College's arrangements for the consideration of external examiner reports would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.64   The review team tested the effectiveness of the arrangements by reading external examiner reports, minutes of meetings and AMERs, SARs and QIPs, and by meeting with staff and students.

2.65   The processes for considering and acting upon the external examiner's reports for the degree programme operate effectively. The AMER includes a review of positive comments and any recommendations, and the action plan explicitly requires programme teams to identify how they intend to address issues arising from the report. External examiner reports are discussed at PCMs, where student representatives are in attendance. The external examiner confirms they have received a formal response to their report and that any concerns raised in earlier reports have been addressed. External examiners for Higher National programmes also report consistently that their recommendations and comments are acted upon by the College. However, the review team noted that key points raised by the external examiners are not always captured fully in SARs and QIPs. The SAR, which is designed primarily to meet the requirements of the College's further education provision, encompasses all levels of provision in a curriculum area. The template does not require curriculum area managers to explicitly address Higher National external examiner reports, nor are external examiner reports included in the list of appendices. Consequently, matters raised by external examiners are not captured precisely in the SAR, and actions in response recorded in the QIP and monitored effectively at quality monitoring meetings.

2.66   For example, in 2014-15 the Business external examiner noted concern about the structure of the programme, which involved students studying four and a half units in the first semester. Although the College provided evidence that it had addressed this concern, this matter was not recorded as an issue in the relevant SAR or in the QIP. The Higher

Education Academic Board does not currently receive external examiner reports and is therefore unable to build on good practice or address systemic weaknesses. The review team found that College processes for scrutinising Higher National reports are not fully effective. The review team **recommends** that by November 2016 the College review and develop processes for capturing, actioning and monitoring issues identified in Pearson external examiner reports. The terms of reference for Higher National PCMs include consideration of external examiner reports, which will provide student representatives with access to the reports. The reports are not currently made available routinely to Higher National students.

2.67   The College makes appropriate use of external examiner reports. The responses to the reports of the external examiner for the degree programme are robust and well documented. Although the processes for Higher National programmes are weaker and less transparent, resulting in a recommendation in respect of Pearson programmes, there is evidence that reports are acted upon in practice. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Expectation (B8): Higher education providers, in discharging their responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, operate effective, regular and systematic processes for monitoring and for review of programmes.

Quality Code, *Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review*

Findings

2.68   As noted under Expectation A3.3 the College delivers programmes on behalf of its awarding partners, who have the overall responsibility for the setting of standards. The College applies the University of Hertfordshire and Pearson's policies and procedures for monitoring, reviewing and maintaining the standards of respective higher education programmes provided at the College.

2.69   For University programmes, annual monitoring includes module review by the College tutor in conjunction with the student module feedback. This informs the AMER processes, which also examine and monitor actions from external examiner and link tutor reports. The AMER also includes an analysis of data of student success rates, and is reviewed at PCMs.

2.70   For Pearson programmes the College receives an annual Quality Review and Development Report, and this is supported by the College's own internal processes. Programme area managers and programme teams are responsible for reviewing Pearson programmes, and for preparing an annual SAR and QIPs. Since September 2015 the College has aligned its processes for review of all higher programmes.

2.71   The review team met senior staff, course leaders, teaching staff, support staff and students, and reviewed College and awarding partner programme monitoring and review documents. In meetings with the Principal and senior staff, the review team explored how the College maintains oversight of higher education provision, and in meetings with staff, support staff and students particular emphasis was given to understanding how individual programmes were reviewed.

2.72   In relation to University provision the review team ascertained that the collaborative engagement between the University and the College ensured maintenance of standards and the enhancement of learning opportunities.

2.73   For Pearson programmes the meetings with senior staff, and academic and support staff, confirmed that Higher National programmes are monitored annually using internal processes that relate to the whole of the College's Pearson provision. The review team considered that this approach limits the opportunity for the College to locate and deliberate on the specific priorities for Higher National programmes. The review team **recommends** that, by November 2016, the College develop and implement effective processes for the monitoring and review of Pearson provision.

2.74   The College fulfils its responsibilities for reviewing and monitoring the maintenance of its higher education provision. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is moderate, due to a requirement to strengthen the processes for the review of its Higher National programmes.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

Findings

2.75　　The College uses a range of mechanisms for effectively and transparently handling complaints and academic appeals. These processes are clearly articulated within the College's Compliments and Complaints Policy and Procedure, and made accessible to students through programme handbooks and the VLE.

2.76　　The College recognises that many complaints are resolved informally and outlines a clear process for responding to informal complaints within its Compliments and Complaints Policy and Procedure. When an informal complaint is made to a member of staff, the staff member notifies the relevant programme area manager of the nature of the informal complaint and any action taken, and this is subsequently recorded by the Executive Support Team.

2.77　　A formal complaint is sent to the Principal, who acknowledges receipt of it within five working days and passes it to the relevant senior manager for investigation. This investigation is completed within 10 working days of the complaint being received, and the student is informed of the outcome by the Principal within 15 working days. If unsatisfied with the outcome the student has the right to an appeal hearing with the Principal, who will make a final decision and inform the student of the outcome within five working days of the hearing being held. The College has never received a formal complaint in relation to its higher education provision.

2.78　　The Deputy Principal for Curriculum and Quality monitors complaints to identify outcomes and trends, and submits a summary of all complaints made to the College's Board of Governors on an annual basis.

2.79　　For appeals to assessment decisions students can raise informal concerns with their subject tutor and request that their work be reassessed if they feel that it has not been assessed properly, or if additional factors should have been considered. To make a formal appeal a student must complete an assessment appeal form and submit it to the Exams Office, and the student will be notified of the outcome in 15 working days. These complaints and appeals procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.80　　The review team tested the effectiveness of the procedures by examining a selection of documentary evidence, including the College's Compliments and Complaints Policy and Procedure; the summary report of all complaints reported to the Board of Governors; and programme handbooks. The review team also met a range of students, and senior and professional support staff responsible for the College's complaints and appeals procedures.

2.81　　The review team confirmed the effective operation of the College's complaints and appeals procedures. The Student Services Team, working with the Higher Education Student Adviser, offers support and guidance to students making a complaint, and students are additionally supported by their programme team. Students confirmed that any complaints made are dealt with in a fair and timely fashion, and recognised that many complaints are responded to effectively outside the College's formal procedures.

2.82   The College's complaints and appeals procedures are accessible to students via the VLE and programme handbooks, and are clearly explained to them at their induction.

2.83   The College's Complaints Policy clearly states that students can embark upon the complaints process of the awarding body or organisation once they have exhausted the College's internal procedures. Students also have the right to appeal to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.

2.84   The College's complaints and appeals processes ensure complaints and appeals are managed in a way that is fair, accessible and timely, and these processes are clearly communicated to students. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.85   Students on the Early Years degree programmes are all engaged in the Early Years and Education sectors, either in paid employment or in a voluntary capacity. They must complete 150 hours of work-related activity each year as part of their course and are supported by workplace mentors. The role and responsibilities of a mentor are set out in the Workplace Mentor Handbook and are encapsulated in a tripartite agreement between the mentor, mentee and the tutor. Mentors are supported by College staff through regular meetings at the College and by tutor visits to the workplace. Students on Higher National programmes undertake work-based learning or professional practice units as part of their programme. If a student undertakes a work placement as part of their programme a work experience agreement is concluded with the employer.

2.86   The College's arrangements for work-based learning would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.87   The review team explored the College's arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with others by reading handbooks and other guidance for students and mentors, and by meeting staff, students and a representative group of employers.

2.88   The College has recently established a work experience unit to centralise the management of work placements across the College. Although the primary responsibility for sourcing placements for higher education students rests with the students themselves, the unit maintains a database of employers offering placement opportunities and undertakes all due diligence checks in relation to matters such as health and safety and insurance. The College has achieved the Fair Train Kitemark Bronze Award for its development and management of work experience. Employers and mentors for the Early Years degree programmes confirmed that they were well supported by the College, and were clear about their roles and who they could contact in the event of any difficulties with the placement. Students commented positively about the opportunities for placement and work-related experience, such as Sport students working with a local professional football club and Art and Design students participating in exhibitions at local galleries.

2.89   The College's arrangements for delivering learning opportunities are secure and managed effectively. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Findings

2.90   The College does not provide research degrees, therefore this Expectation does not apply.

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

2.92   There are 10 applicable Expectations in this judgement area: all are met, eight with low risk and two (Expectations B1 and B8) with moderate risk.

2.93   The review team makes four recommendations in this area, which relate to the Expectations for programme, design, development and approval (B1); learning and teaching (B3); external examining (B7); and programme monitoring and review (B8).

2.94   The review team identifies two features of good practice in relation to Expectation B4.

2.95   The first recommendation in this area relates to programme, design, development and approval (Expectation B1) and is concerned with the systems for Pearson awards. Therefore, the College should strengthen the processes for the design, development and approval of Pearson programmes by November 2016.

2.96   The review team's second recommendation is concerned with learning and teaching (Expectation B3). It relates to the needs of higher education staff for bespoke development, with a recommendation that the College implement a cross-College development programme specifically for higher education staff by November 2016.

2.97   A further recommendation is made with regard to external examining (Expectation B7). It is also concerned with Pearson programmes and the processes for scrutinising this provision. The College should review and develop processes for capturing, actioning and monitoring issues identified in Pearson external examiner reports by November 2016.

2.98   The final recommendation in this area also relates to Pearson provision and is related to programme monitoring and review (Expectation B8). The review team found that the approach of the College limits the opportunity to locate and deliberate on the specific priorities for Higher National programmes, and recommends that the College develop and implement effective processes for the monitoring and review of the Pearson provision by November 2016.

2.99   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 recognises the importance of producing accurate, valid and fit-for-purpose information for all audiences, including information for prospective and current students about its provision, mission and its quality assurance procedures. The College's Information and Approval Policy clearly articulates the approval process for different types of information, and the Marketing and Public Relations Manager is responsible for ensuring information about the College's higher education provision is accurate and fit for purpose.

3.2   The College provides information to prospective students through its website, which contains detailed programme information, as well as material distributed through open days and careers fairs. Information for publicity materials, including the College website, is provided by programme teams and checked by the Marketing and Public Relations Manager, while programme teams retain responsibility for ensuring the information they produce is accurate and fit for purpose.

3.3   The College maintains a definitive record of each programme and qualification they deliver through DMDs, programme handbooks and programme specifications.

3.4   There are clear rules in place regarding the use of the University of Hertfordshire and College logos on publicity materials, as articulated in the University's Collaborative Partnerships Handbook and the Memorandum of Agreement. The information pertaining to the University's programmes clearly identifies it as the College's awarding body.

3.5   The Marketing and Public Relations Manager provides a monthly update to the Higher Education Academic Board regarding the information and marketing the College provides.

3.6   The design of the processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

3.7   The review team tested the operation of these processes by examining the College's Information and Approval Policy, and a range of print and electronic information provided for students and other audiences. The review team also met senior and professional support staff responsible for the management of information, and a range of students.

3.8   The review team confirmed that these processes function effectively. The College provides accurate and accessible information on its application, admissions and enrolment process to prospective students through a range of mechanisms, including at their admissions interview, and students find this especially helpful when deciding their choice of programme. Students receive clear and accurate information concerning their programme and the wider support services available to them throughout their time at the College.

3.9   Information relating to programme content clearly communicates the structure and learning objectives of the programme, and programme teams inform the Marketing and

Public Relations Manager of any minor changes made within a reasonable timescale to ensure accuracy.

3.10   For University programmes the College ensures the information it provides is consistent with University regulations, and the University retains oversight over such information through a yearly audit.

3.11   The College operates clear and transparent processes to ensure the information it provides to all audiences is accessible, accurate and fit for purpose. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

3.12   In reaching its judgements 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.

3.13   The one Expectation in this judgement area is met with a low level of risk.

3.14   There are no recommendations, affirmations or features of good practice.

3.15   The College operates clear and transparent processes about its provision, mission and quality assurance. It recognises the importance of accurate, valid and fit-for-purpose information for audiences that include prospective and current students, stakeholders and the public.

3.16   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 established in March 2016 a Higher Education Academic Board to provide greater focus on higher education priorities, including the monitoring and review of programmes, standards and enhancement of the College's higher education processes. In addition, the College is aligning its processes for monitoring and reviewing all higher education programmes.

4.2 The College gathers student views and feedback through the Executive Higher Education Student Representative and student representation at programme level. The College's Learning Development Policy enables the collection of feedback through student representatives, surveys, class visits, focus groups and walkabouts. These all inform quality improvement.

4.3 The College has designated the post of Head of Higher Education to lead higher education provision. It has also recently appointed to key posts, including a Teaching and Learning Development Manager and a Marketing and Public Relations Manager to support the College's higher education priorities. In addition, the Director of Commercial Development provides support for the delivery of work-based learning and has successfully achieved the Fair Train Kitemark Bronze Award.

4.4 The review team considered the College's approach to enhancement of student learning opportunities by examining documentation including the College Strategic Plan, quality cycle reports, minutes of meetings and external examiner reports. The review team also discussed enhancement in meetings with the Principal, senior and teaching staff, professional and support staff, and students.

4.5 College initiatives to improve the experience of higher education students have had positive impacts. Curriculum teams and students have worked together to achieve continuous improvement of the student experience, and the effectiveness of these arrangements was apparent in the student submission to this report, and in meetings with the Principal, senior and teaching staff, professional and support staff, and students. Specific recent developments in higher education include the implementation of a distinct logo and lanyard for higher education students and designated space and improved facilities.

4.6 Students' engagement with the programme approval processes is positive and includes panel membership of the recent validation of the Foundation Degree Early Years and BA (Hons) Education Studies and Early Years (top-up) programmes of the University of Hertfordshire. In addition, the review team saw evidence of a proactive approach to develop more cohesion in the management of higher education.

4.7 The College has worked with students and other stakeholders to inform improvements in the student learning experience, and obtains student views through the work undertaken by the Executive Student Representative (including the production of a termly bulletin), programme representatives, and the Higher Education Student Adviser.

4.8 The review team regards the development of the Higher Education Academic Board as a clear demonstration of the College's commitment to enhance the higher education

experience of students. The review team **affirms** the steps being taken to establish the Higher Education Academic Board as a mechanism for developing consistent policies and procedures for higher education.

4.9   The review team considers that the initiatives introduced by the College provide the platform for the further enhancement of the student experience and the potential to further develop the College's strategy for enhancement. The review team **recommends** that, by November 2016, the College develop a more strategic approach to the identification and dissemination of good practice to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities.

4.10   The proactive initiatives introduced by the College have led to improvements in students' higher education experience. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is moderate, due to a need to develop a more strategic approach.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.11   In reaching its judgements 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 one Expectation in this judgement area is met, with a moderate level of risk.

4.13   There is one recommendation and an affirmation.

4.14   The review team regards the development of the Higher Education Academic Board as a positive endorsement of the College's commitment to an enhanced higher education experience for its learners, and affirms the steps being taken to establish the Higher Education Academic Board as a mechanism for developing consistent policies and procedures for higher education.

4.15   This initiative, along with others, provides a platform for both further enhancement of the student experience and the development of the College's strategy for enhancement. The team therefore recommends that the College develop a more strategic approach to the identification and dissemination of good practice to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities by November 2016.

4.16   While a number of initiatives introduced by the College have led to improvements in students' higher education experience, the review team found that the level of risk in this judgement area is moderate because of the need to develop a more strategic approach to enhancement.

4.17   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 College seeks to place student employability at the centre of its higher education programmes. It has developed an Employability Strategy, which addresses South East Local Enterprise Partnership themes and priorities. All of the College's higher education programmes include work-based learning, and work-based skills are embedded in curriculum design and assessment. The Employability Skills Framework is displayed throughout the College reminding students of the attributes valued by employers. The College monitors the implementation of the Employability Strategy through regular quality monitoring meetings with each curriculum area.

5.2   The College worked with local employers on the design of its Early Years degree programmes. Students are employed in the Early Years or Education sectors, either on a voluntary or paid basis; they are required to complete 150 hours of work-based learning at each level of their programme. They are supported by workplace mentors, some of whom are graduates of the College.

5.3   Higher National programmes include work-based learning units or their equivalent, and employability and entrepreneurship skills are developed through work placements, art exhibitions, and shows and volunteering. Students believe that their programmes are preparing them well for the world of work and for progression to higher level qualification. The Careers Service provides advice and guidance, either on a group or individual basis.

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 29-32 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.