Higher Education Review of Swindon College

February 2014

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Swindon College. The review took place from 26 to 28 February 2014 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Amanda Dowd
- Dr Clive Marsland
- Jamie Clark (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Swindon 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 threshold academic standards
  - the quality of student learning opportunities
  - the information provided about higher education provision
  - the enhancement of student learning opportunities
- provides a commentary on the selected theme
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the provider is taking or plans to take.

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 7.

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

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

The QAA website gives more information about QAA and its mission.[3] A dedicated page of the website 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/qualitycode.
[2] Higher Education Review themes: www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/higher-education-review-themes.aspx.
[3] QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus.
[4] Higher Education Review web pages: www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/higher-education-review.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Swindon College

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

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

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following **good practice** at Swindon College.

- The direct engagement of external examiners with students and staff which contributes to the effectiveness of external examining (Expectations A5, B7).
- The strong support for student progression into higher education and through all higher education levels (Expectation B3).
- The comprehensive dyslexia screening programme implemented during induction (Expectation B4).
- The proactive mutual relationships with its higher education awarding bodies and awarding organisation which help ensure that their requirements are well understood and appropriately adapted and implemented (Expectation B10, Enhancement).
- The strategic commitment to the employability of its students, underpinned by the comprehensive links it has developed with a range of local employers (Enhancement).

Recommendations

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

By the beginning of the 2014-15 academic year:

- review in partnership with their student body how independent representation is promoted so higher education students can engage effectively in educational enhancement and quality assurance at all levels of the College's higher education deliberative structures (Expectation B5)
- clarify where the responsibility for the deliberative oversight of quality and standards lies (Expectation B8).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The actions being taken to improve the training and support provided to all higher education student representatives (Expectation B5).
- The implementation of a specific timeline for the approval of all published information (Expectation C).

Theme: Student Employability

In consultation with student representatives Swindon College (the College) selected the theme Student Employability.

The College is very conscious of the local employment situation and seeks to adapt and match its provision to the local need. According to students and employers, it does this successfully.

The College annually reviews programmes to ensure they remain relevant to the local and regional employment needs. This is facilitated (particularly in the Pearson provision) by allowing the units within a course to be changed or adapted to suit sponsoring employer requirements. Students, when asked, believed that their courses were relevant to their current and future employment.

Employers are consulted in programme review and development, either directly or through the relevant professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) involvement in the Engineering and Sports Therapy programmes. The strategic commitment to the employability of its students, underpinned by the comprehensive links it has developed with a range of local employers, has been identified by the review team as **good practice**.

Employers assist in finding appropriate, prestigious space for the end-of-year exhibition for the arts courses.

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

About Swindon College

Swindon College is a medium-sized general further education college, operating from one site near the town centre. Courses range in level from pre-entry to postgraduate level. At the time of the Higher Education Review the College had approximately 10,000 students enrolled, 526 of which were studying on higher education programmes.

The College's mission is to 'be ambitious for all our learners, inspiring and supporting them to achieve qualifications and skills for employment or further study. Outstanding teaching and learning is at the heart of what we do'. The College's provision is mainly of a vocational nature, taking into account local skills and employer needs, and has been successful in developing a strong apprenticeship offer.

The College has seen a major change in the arrangements it has with its degree-awarding bodies Oxford Brookes University and the University of Bath. At the time of the last QAA review (Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review 2009), the most significant part of the College's franchised provision was with the University of Bath. This position is now reversed with 58 per cent of the College's higher education students on franchised programmes with Oxford Brookes University, and provision with the University of Bath significantly declining to 4.6 per cent as several programmes have been taught out and replaced with Oxford Brookes programmes, with two at the time of the Higher Education Review still teaching out. The University of Bath withdrew a significant number of college partners in the last two years, and has opted to change existing franchised arrangements to a licensed model for the remaining partners. The College has decided to preserve only one programme area with the University of Bath, Sports Therapy as a licensed foundation degree.

The College wishes to continue to consolidate and strengthen its provision with Oxford Brookes University, to identify any new areas for development, and to collaborate to establish a Higher Education Centre. The College is in the initial stages of establishing a partnership with another higher education institution. This will allow development of higher education in particular curriculum areas where the College has strong further education provision but which are not the specialism of Oxford Brookes University. The development of a University Technical College in Swindon also provides the College with an opportunity to consider progression routes from this 14-19 provision into higher-level qualifications.

The previous QAA review was in 2009 and made a number of recommendations. An action plan addressing the recommendations was made available to the Higher Education Review team and the College has acknowledged and built upon those actions addressing the recommendations.

The College now produces documentation for employers. Some of the employers seen by the Higher Education Review team had not seen the documentation, but others had, and they knew their responsibilities associated with their roles.

The College now has an effective management information system - the 'Learner Course Profile' - which provides data that can be viewed at detailed levels for operational matters and at high level for strategic issues. This is used by senior and programme teams.

Terms of reference for higher education-specific committees (now titled HE Action Group and HE Management and Strategy Group) have specific and distinct roles and responsibilities.

Staff involved with higher education are allowed five to 15 days per year to undertake continuing professional development and scholarly activity. The Higher Education Review team met with staff who had undertaken further study.

The College has recently moved to an updated virtual learning environment which is enthusiastically supported by a Learning Technologies coordinator. Usage of the system is monitored.

A new Higher Education Centre specifically for higher education students has been established in the College. In addition, effective support for transition from further education to higher education is provided.

The College's links with local employers are strong, as demonstrated through the Student Employability theme.

A process for producing and approving publicity material is available. However, there is no specific timeline for this as it is in development and therefore this recommendation has only been partially achieved.

Explanation of the findings about Swindon 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.

1 Judgement: Maintenance of threshold academic standards

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

Quality Code, *Chapter A1: The national level*

Findings

1.1 The College delivers higher education provision at levels 4 to 7 of the FHEQ through different partnership arrangements (directly funded, franchised and licensed). The difference between these different arrangements is clearly articulated. The degree-awarding bodies (University of Bath and Oxford Brookes University) and the awarding organisation (Pearson) are responsible for assuring that the provision is delivered at the correct level to align with the FHEQ. The review team saw evidence of this through examination of the documentation provided.

1.2 The awarding bodies ensure that the content and delivery are appropriate for qualifications delivered by the College when the arrangement with the College is established and agreed. The review team reviewed the information about the content and delivery of the qualifications delivered by the College which they agreed was encapsulated in programme specifications and handbooks that are disseminated to staff and students associated with the individual courses.

1.3 The programme specifications provided to the review team and the external examiner reports for the University of Bath, Oxford Brookes University and the Pearson external examiner report indicated to the review team that the courses offered are allocated to the appropriate level.

1.4 The responsibility for adhering to Expectation A1 is that of the awarding bodies and awarding organisation, as confirmed in the evidence and in meetings with awarding body and awarding organisation representatives. From the documentary evidence provided and through the meetings with staff, the review team concludes that the College's responsibility for this Expectation is met.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.5   The design of higher education programmes offered by the College is the responsibility of the awarding bodies and awarding organisation; the College has no requirement to contribute.

1.6   The review team considered the programme specifications provided, which indicated the relevant benchmarks had been adopted and PSRB requirements had been taken into account where relevant.

1.7   As confirmed by the documentary evidence provided and through the meetings with staff, the review team concludes that the College's responsibility for this Expectation is met.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter A3: The programme level*

Findings

1.8   The awarding body or organisation is responsible for the initial design of the higher education programmes offered by the College. The awarding body or organisation also has responsibility for satisfying itself that the College will deliver the programme in accordance with the awarding body or organisation requirements. These arrangements were considered by the review team and are encapsulated in the agreements signed by the College and the relevant awarding body or organisation at institution and programme level. The College demonstrated to the review team that it clearly indicates its own roles, and those of the appropriate awarding body or organisation, on course publicity about the relevant levels of the programmes in accordance with the FHEQ.

1.9   The awarding bodies draw up the programme specifications which the College then disseminates to students through the course handbooks. The course handbooks are approved by the awarding body before being issued to students.

1.10   On the basis of the documentation provided and meetings with staff, the review team concludes that the College's responsibility for this Expectation is met.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter A4: Approval and review*

Findings

1.11   The College demonstrated to the review team that there is a clear articulation of the respective responsibilities between the College and its awarding bodies. The relevant awarding body is responsible for carrying out initial approval for new programmes, oversight of the College's annual review reports and subsequent periodic review. The College is responsible for ensuring that the programmes are delivered in accordance with the specifications and for providing annual review reports.

1.12   The College conducts regular course reviews at different points in the year to ensure the quality and enhancement of provision. This is known in the College as an HE Programme Review and allows for constant appraisal and development of the curriculum.

1.13   The awarding bodies undertake annual and periodic reviews of their programmes. The College also demonstrated to the review team that periodic review takes account of a wide range of stakeholders, including current and previous students and PSRBs where relevant.

1.14   Further consideration of the College's effective procedures to routinely monitor and periodically review programmes can be found in the section on Expectation B8.

1.15   The College has greater autonomy with the Pearson programmes, but adopts the procedures used with the other awarding bodies upon which to model the review processes for their directly funded programmes.

1.16   On the basis of the documentation provided and meetings with staff, the review team concludes that the College's responsibility for this Expectation is met.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter A5: Externality*

Findings

1.17   From the evidence provided, the review team were able to see that several of the programmes offered by the College are accredited or recognised by relevant PSRBs, specifically IMechE accredits the foundation degree and BSc in Engineering Systems and the Society of Sports Therapists accredits the Sports Therapy programmes. The HNC and HND in Construction and Civil Engineering are recognised by relevant professional bodies (though not formally accredited). The Society of Sports Therapists was involved in the original design of the Sports Therapy programme and continues to provide advice.

1.18   The College demonstrated to the review team that independent and external participation in the management of academic standards also involves employers that can be included in the process of observation of teaching within the College. Senior staff and governors conduct regular 'learning walks' and employers are welcome to join these walks.

1.19   In addition to the PSRB contribution, the College involves the external examiners in developmental work by inviting them to visit the College outside of Exam Board meetings to meet with the students and provide informal feedback and suggestions to the staff.
The review team considers the direct engagement of external examiners with students and staff, which contributes to the effectiveness of external examining, to be **good practice**.

1.20   On the basis of the documentation provided and meetings with staff and employers, the review team concludes that the College's responsibility for this Expectation is met.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.21   The College has rigorous, robust and relevant procedures for assessment, which are themselves linked to a learning outcomes-based approach to programme development and review and to the College's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy. The team considers the intended learning outcomes to be clearly articulated to students in the programme handbooks at programme and course level. The learning outcomes are indicated in the assessment briefs and are tested by appropriate assessment strategies. The College demonstrated to the review team that it follows both internal and external arrangements for ensuring validity of assessment; external examiners express satisfaction that the grades awarded are appropriate for the standard of work submitted and the learning outcomes.

1.22   The review team considers that the design, approval and monitoring processes are robust and carefully monitored, assessment processes are secure, and understanding of academic frameworks is sound. The review team therefore concludes that the College's responsibility for this Expectation is met.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Maintenance of threshold academic standards: Summary of findings

1.23   The College responsibilities relating to the Expectations detailed in *Part A: Setting and maintaining academic standards* of the Quality Code have all been met.

1.24   The review team considers the direct engagement of external examiners with students and staff, which contributes to the effectiveness of external examining, to be **good practice**.

1.25   On the basis of the documentation provided and meetings with staff and students, the review team made the judgement that the maintenance of threshold academic standards at the College **meets UK expectations**.

2   Judgement: Quality of learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1   The review team considered the evidence provided that demonstrated that programme specifications are produced for all programmes, and for higher education-franchised and licensed provision are written by awarding bodies. Appropriate benchmarks are taken into account and the review team saw evidence of appropriate and active consideration of required accreditation actions. Pre-validation approval procedures are robust. Programme development meetings are held as part of the formal process of validation.

2.2   The review team saw evidence that due diligence is undertaken by the awarding bodies and is comprehensive in its depth and range of enquiry. Validation events, organised by the relevant awarding bodies with appropriate College input, are robust, though it might be useful for the awarding bodies and the College to consider together the trigger points for numbers of conditions at such events when determining a need for a rescheduled event. Minor and major modifications are the responsibility of the awarding body and are appropriately implemented using the respective awarding bodies' procedures.

2.3   The College demonstrated to the review team that where a provision does not already exist in the awarding body (for example, a top-up version of a degree to take students from foundation degree to honours degree), the College works with the relevant awarding body to develop a new course to meet a local need. The College has a curriculum planning process for directly funded provision. This has historically been further education focused but is likely to take higher education more fully into account in the future.

2.4   On the basis of the documentation provided and meetings with staff and employers, the review team concludes that this Expectation is met.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B2: Admissions*

Findings

2.5   The College website has a clear link on the homepage which directs prospective students to further relevant information about the different application processes depending on the level of study desired. There is no general admissions policy published on the College website. However, the review team considers that the College's admissions policy is clear and well written. The policy sets out the various expectations required for different programmes and awarding bodies. The College has a general admissions policy which has an annexe for directly funded higher education courses (Pearson) but operates three separate admissions procedures for entry to its courses. The one that is used is dependent on the awarding body of the award. For example, the Oxford Brookes Admissions Policy is followed for entry to any courses which are franchised from Oxford Brookes.

2.6   The higher education admissions process is administered by two specialist higher education admissions staff.

2.7   The College produces an 'HE What Next?' guide which is available both internally and from the College website. The guide provides detailed information about the application process and is written in a clear and student-friendly manner.

2.8   Students that the review team met with were clear that the information provided about the programmes they wished to join was helpful.

2.9   The College annually reviews the higher education admissions policy through the College's UCAS group which consists of representatives from Admissions, School Liaison, Advice and Guidance, Marketing, the Higher Education Finance Team and the Higher Education Manager.

2.10   The College admissions policy sets out specific procedures for accreditation of prior learning/accreditation of prior experiential learning. It was noted by the review team that the College's accreditation of prior learning procedures need to take account of potential direct entry and advanced credit standing as higher education provision grows, which was accepted during the support staff meeting. The College stated that they had not yet experienced this requirement.

2.11   The College has clear policies and procedures used to admit students and the review team concludes that this Expectation is met.

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

2.12   The College has four 'learning coaches', two of whom are specialists in higher education who work across the College supporting higher education teaching staff. College staff were supportive of their contribution and stated that support is always available if required.

2.13   The College has a formal observation process for its teaching staff. It also operates an open-door drop-in policy which allows any member of staff to enter the classroom and observe a lesson if the indicator on the door is set to green. Staff stated that this allows them to develop their own practice as they are always able to observe their peers in a non-formal setting. There are four observation windows of two weeks each throughout the year. Governors and senior staff regularly conduct what are referred to as informal 'learning walks'.

2.14   Peer observation forms the backbone of the College's teaching development. Staff are routinely formally and informally assessed by their peers and managers throughout the year.

2.15   The review team saw evidence of staff development days and further study opportunities. Historically, the College has also supported these members of staff financially by covering the cost of course fees. The College openly recognises the importance of scholarly activity and the review team met with several members of staff who have taken up this opportunity. Scholarly activity undertaken by staff is recorded centrally with areas of good practice highlighted to peers at staff development days.

2.16   The College makes deliberate use of the 'college lesson planner'. The planners are used across the higher education provision to help ensure that lessons are always targeted towards the expected learning outcomes of the module being taught.

2.17   The College engages its students in their own peer review throughout their course of study. Mahara e-portfolio personal development planning is implemented across the higher education provision.

2.18   The College has developed 'level inductions' for all students. These are designed to prepare learners for the transition to the next level of their educational experience. These inductions take place in the summer before the new academic year and are designed to prepare students for the different expectations of the course/level of study within the FHEQ; for example, level 3 to 4 (that is, further education into higher education). Students were very enthusiastic about the value and benefit of this process and the review team considers the strong support for student progression into higher education and through higher education levels to be **good practice**.

2.19   The College offers a study skills programme to new and existing learners. This has been particularly beneficial to mature students who have been out of formal learning for

some time. Website support for study skills is comprehensive and useful. Reviewers saw evidence of a proactive approach to study skills transmission within the College.

2.20   The College acknowledges the importance of autonomy and independence of higher education learners within a robust framework of support.

2.21   On the basis of the documentation provided and meetings with staff and students, the review team concludes that this Expectation is met.

Expectation: **Met**
Level of risk: **Low**

Expectation (B4): Higher education providers have in place, monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources that enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.

Quality Code, *Chapter B4: Enabling student development and achievement*

Findings

2.22   The College demonstrated to the review team that it makes good use of student data to ensure that all staff have access to relevant information about their learners. This is held centrally in the College's 'learner course profile' record and allows staff to track everything from attendance and attainment to extra learner needs and support arrangements.

2.23   The College has a thorough induction programme which covers all aspects of a learner's pastoral and academic requirements. Students stated to the review team that they found their induction process helpful and informative. The College is proactive in seeking out the opinions of students who have gone through induction so that they can enhance the delivery for the next cohort.

2.24   The College has an Additional Learning Support team in place to support students with learning difficulties. The self-evaluation document states that students are screened on arrival at the College, either at interview or induction, to assess whether they have any special learning needs. The review team confirmed this when meeting the member of the Additional Learning Support team who is dedicated to higher education students. The review team consideres that the comprehensive dyslexia screening programme implemented during induction is **good practice**.

2.25   The College publishes clear assessment guidance in the course and module handbooks which enables students to understand the requirements for attaining the grades they desire. Students in several of the videos submitted to the review team as part of the student submission stated that their tutors were always very helpful when it came to explaining the requirements of the modules. Feedback given to students is tailored to the individual. The College feedback turnaround time is three weeks.

2.26   Employability skills are a key factor for the College as it delivers many courses with local business partners. The aim for the College is to get its students a job at the end of their study. Employers have the opportunity to feed back to the College through feedback from employer observations. Many of the College's staff are still practising professionals in their chosen fields. As a result, students have invaluable access to people with current sector engagement within their chosen subject area. This helps to advance the learners' understanding and educational experience.

2.27   Activities to promote student development activities are coordinated by the Curriculum Area Manager. Students that the review team met stated that they find out a lot about opportunities available and further course and support information via the College virtual learning environment pages.

2.28   The development of the Higher Education Centre is a particularly positive step for the College. The College will need to be mindful that as its provision expands, it may need to revisit the resourcing needs to allow for the growth. This was acknowledged by the senior staff in the final meeting and the review team were assured that any expansion would take into account the wider resourcing needs of the increased provision.

2.29   The College has strong links with its awarding bodies and also with various external partners, with whom it places many of its students. The review team considers that building

these positive relationships helps to develop students' academic, personal and professional potential.

2.30　　On the basis of the documentation provided and meetings with students and staff, the review team concludes that this Expectation is met.

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

2.31 The College conducts an induction survey and final-year students are encouraged to complete the National Student Survey (NSS). NSS results are discussed at Director of Curriculum Meetings and 'task and finish' groups. The College recognised that it has some difficulties in acquiring detailed course information relevant to the College's provision from their awarding bodies' complete NSS data sets.

2.32 Staff/student liaison committees (SSLCs) are held at least three times during the academic year for all courses. Actions from SSLCs are carried forward for action by Programme Committee and Programme Review.

2.33 The student submission video clips make mention of course focus groups. Students are positive about the input and feedback they receive from these. The College produces 'You Said, We Did' posters, which are displayed around the College in response to any actions identified at SSLCs or programme meetings. Students stated in several video submissions that they are usually kept well informed about any developments and issues that had been discussed at SSLCs or course focus groups. The primary method of dissemination of this feedback is through the students' College email.

2.34 Students are invited to attend key programme-level committees. The Programme Review Guidelines refer to the incorporation of 'Learner Views' under point 6. It lists Induction Survey, SSLC/Focus Groups, and Unit/Module Reviews as sources for student feedback.

2.35 The College provides all courses with the opportunity to elect a student representative. There is no formal election procedure but rather an ad hoc ballot of the cohort which is overseen by course leaders. The review team learned from questioning the students and staff that the majority of positions are filled.

2.36 Student representatives receive a briefing from their course leader about their role and the associated responsibilities. The review team did not find evidence of a consistent and standardised approach to training for higher education student representatives. The College acknowledged that more needs to be done to improve the support and training available for its student representatives and therefore the review team **affirms** the actions being taken to improve the training and support provided to all higher education student representatives.

2.37 The College has appointed a Student Voice Coordinator. This individual is selected by application from the College's student body. The position is remunerated and line-managed by the College. The holder forms part of the Student Engagement Team. The post holder is appointed after an interview process conducted by College staff, and so is not elected by the student body. Responsibilities set out in the job description include to:

- take on the role as the lead student governor
- act as the primary representative of all students
- work with the President of the Student Council
- provide informal line management to the Council and ensure their effective working.

2.38   The review team consideres that the title 'Student Voice' could potentially be misleading given that the holder is not elected by the student population to be their student voice. The 'Student Voice' coordinator is the chair of the Student Council. The review team has concerns over the potential conflicting pressures on the post holder between representing student interests without being elected by the relevant constituency but instead being an appointed member of College staff.

2.39   The review team did not find evidence that the terms of reference and membership of the Student Council are clear or widely understood by the student body. This has the potential to hinder autonomous higher education student representation outside of the course-level SSLC and programme review processes.

2.40   The College has two student governor positions. According to the terms of reference for the College's governing body, these students are appointed by ballot of the student body. However, the College was unable to provide the review team with evidence that this process had been followed for the current membership and students did not support the College's claim apart from the current Student Voice post holder. None of the students met by the review team had heard of the student governor position until the review visit meeting. The 'Student Voice' is designated as the lead student governor despite not being elected, and this is a further area of concern.

2.41   The review team was unable to find evidence of systematic and deliberate steps to engage students above course level, for example within the College's senior higher education deliberative structures. The review team **recommends** that by the beginning of the 2014-15 academic year, the College reviews in partnership with their student body how independent representation is promoted so higher education students can engage effectively in educational enhancement and quality assurance at all levels of the College's higher education deliberative structures.

2.42   The review team explored in depth how the College engages with students in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. The review team consideres that the College does have a reasonably well established course-level student representation system in place and therefore concluded that the Expectation was met but with a moderate risk of not being met in the future without implementing the above recommendation.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

Findings

2.43   The review team consideres that the College has rigorous, robust and relevant procedures for assessment, which are themselves linked to a learning outcomes-based approach to programme development and review and to the College's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy. Summative and formative assessment practices are varied, student centred and match the student-focused lesson plans used across the College. Assessment grids are detailed and formative feedback is a routine feature of College practice, although the review team found that the use of typed feedback varies across programmes of study. Assessment briefs are clear, enabling, comprehensive in focus and make reference to those learning outcomes being tested. Accreditation of prior learning procedures are those of the relevant awarding body and are implemented securely, with appropriate certification for accreditation of prior certified experiential learning and experiential portfolio evidence assessed by qualified academic staff for accreditation of prior experiential learning.

2.44   The review team considers that the College has thorough processes surrounding assessment including moderation, double marking, appropriate use of anonymous and blind marking and the use of learning outcomes, which are embedded at all stages of assessment. Learning outcomes are communicated and discussed clearly and often with students, both in class and in written form, for example on assessment briefs. The College could usefully strengthen the links between assessment practice and its Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy.

2.45   Grading criteria are provided by the awarding body and forms of assessment are agreed with the assessor, moderator and awarding body before a module commences, as well as approved by the relevant external examiner. Assessors and moderators hold standardisation meetings prior to module delivery and assessment is appropriately staggered through the year wherever possible. Students and staff confirmed that work is returned to students in a timely fashion.

2.46   The Academic Registrar has responsibility for consideration of mitigating circumstances, weak student performance and academic integrity, and the review team considered that these processes are well understood and clearly implemented in line with appropriate awarding body expectations.

2.47   Academic staff are appropriately trained in assessment practices and new staff are mentored in assessment; the College does not allow staff to assess work without training and mentoring. Awarding bodies have provided training in staff development which includes innovation in assessment. Staff understanding of student needs and issues surrounding assessment practice was secure.

2.48   On the basis of the documentation provided and meetings with students and staff, the review team concludes that this Expectation is met.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External examining*

Findings

2.49   Procedures in relation to the nomination, appointment, mentoring and support of external examiners differ according to the respective awarding bodies. The review team consideres that the various requirements are being met, including contractual compliance with awarding body requirements, the facility for the College to nominate but the awarding body to appoint in all cases, and evidence of external examiner support, training and mentoring. External examiners regularly meet students and staff in addition to their formal examination board responsibilities for appropriately managed developmental opportunities which are beneficial to students.

2.50   The review team considers this direct engagement of external examiners with students and staff which contributes to the effectiveness of external examining across the College to be **good practice**.

2.51   External examiners moderate work following internal marking and internal moderation. Their reports are sent to the relevant awarding body, which in turn shares them with the College and reports are made available to student representatives by means of the virtual learning environment. Responses to external examiners are made by an appropriate senior member of the College, and checked and approved by the relevant awarding body at a senior level. External examiners are used to approve all assessment briefs, and are consulted by the awarding bodies on modifications to courses.

2.52   On the basis of the documentation provided and meetings with students and staff, the review team concludes that this Expectation is met.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.53   The overall management of higher education academic provision is shared between the College and the relevant awarding body for franchised provision.

2.54   Various internal and awarding body mechanisms support the monitoring of higher education provision within the College. These include consideration of outcomes of student surveys, employer observation of classes, systematic observation of teaching at every level, team meeting consideration of academic issues and oversight by the Higher Education Development Group of overarching higher education themes. The review team considered that the developmental activity such as 'learning walks' contributes to a continuous focus on developmental monitoring within the College.

2.55   There is a process both of annual monitoring and continuous/staged monitoring at three points during the academic year. The College is also required to report its monitoring and higher education action planning annually to the relevant awarding body. The College undertakes a holistic periodic review, managed by the appropriate awarding body which is cross-programme and developmental in nature. Periodic review takes account of a wide range of stakeholders, including current and previous students and PSRBs where relevant. Outcomes from student satisfaction surveys are considered at periodic review and periodic review themes are considered by the Academic Quality and Standards Committee. Programme withdrawal arrangements are ultimately the responsibility of the awarding body and appropriate arrangements are in place to ensure that the interests of students on any withdrawn programmes are met.

2.56   The review team was informed that the Quality and Standards Committee is a committee of the Governing Body, the latter therefore having ultimate responsibility for academic quality and standards within the College; this appears to impose responsibility for academic quality on a body whose members are not appointed with that function in mind. Governors who serve on that committee are not expected to have any specific competencies about academic quality, and with mainly governor membership of the committee, the team consideres that the responsibility for discussion about the oversight of academic quality issues should be clarified.

2.57   The review team therefore recommends that by the beginning of the 2014-15 academic year the College clarifies where the responsibility for the deliberative oversight of quality and standards lies.

2.58   On the basis of the documentation provided and meetings with students and staff, the review team concludes that this Expectation is met.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B9: Academic complaints and student appeals*

Findings

2.59   The College has a differentiated complaints and appeals process, with complaints an internal process and appeals ultimately the responsibility of the awarding body, although there is a College stage in the process. The College implements a tailored complaints process for higher education which does have an ultimate right of referral to the relevant awarding body. Relevant College procedures are exhausted before University mechanisms are triggered. Stated appeals and complaints procedures are in accord with relevant partner agreements. The review team consideres that the College complaints procedures are clear and well understood by students and staff.

2.60   Support for complainants is provided by the relevant awarding body Students' Union and/or the College Higher Education Development Unit, as well as by the College's Academic Registrar. The review team considers that the awarding body appeals procedures are well understood within the College.

2.61   On the basis of the documentation provided and meetings with students and staff, the review team concludes that this Expectation is met.

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

2.62   The College does not have degree awarding powers, therefore its higher education provision is ultimately the responsibility of its awarding bodies, although the College is responsible for managing and implementing their procedures. The review team saw clear evidence of effective management of differing awarding body requirements. Higher education provision in the College is delivered through various arrangements - directly funded, licensed or franchised with the awarding bodies and awarding organisation. The College has clearly defined relationships with its awarding bodies and awarding organisation, with one in the ascendant and one having declined to just one partner programme in recent years. The College demonstrated to the review team that clear and comprehensive written agreements, which reflect appropriate due diligence arrangements and approval procedures for new programmes of study, are in place for courses offered with the University awarding bodies.

2.63   College staff felt supported by their awarding body partners, and the review team read and heard appropriate evidence of significant developmental engagement between awarding bodies and the College, for example in staff development. The review team consideres the proactive mutual relationships with its higher education awarding bodies and awarding organisation, which help ensure that their requirements are well understood and appropriately adapted and implemented, to be **good practice**.

2.64   On the basis of the documentation provided and meetings with students and staff, the review team concludes that this Expectation is met.

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*

2.65　　The College does not offer research degrees and this Expectation is therefore not applicable.

Quality of learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.66   The College responsibilities relating to the UK Expectations about the quality of learning opportunities as detailed in *Part B: Assuring and enhancing academic quality* of the Quality Code have all been met.

2.67   The review team **recommends** that, by the beginning of the 2014-15 academic year, the College reviews in partnership with their student body how independent representation is promoted so higher education students can engage effectively in educational enhancement and quality assurance at all levels of the College's higher education deliberative structures.

2.68   The review team **affirms** the actions being taken to improve the training and support provided to all higher education student representatives.

2.69   The review team **recommends** that, by the beginning of the 2014-15 academic year, the College clarifies where the responsibility for the deliberative oversight of quality and standards lies.

2.70   The review team considers the strong support for student progression into higher education and through higher education levels to be **good practice**.

2.71   The review team considers the comprehensive dyslexia screening programme implemented during induction to be **good practice**.

2.72   The review team considers the direct engagement of external examiners with students and staff, which contributes to the effectiveness of external examining, to be **good practice**.

2.73   The review team considers the proactive mutual relationships with its higher education awarding bodies and awarding organisation, which help ensure that their requirements are well understood and appropriately adapted and implemented, to be **good practice**.

2.74   On the basis of the documentation provided and meetings with staff and students, the review team makes the judgement that the quality of student learning opportunities at the College **meets UK expectations**.

3 Judgement: Information about higher education provision

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

Quality Code, *Part C: Information about higher education provision*

Findings

3.1 The College places an appropriate emphasis on the accessibility and trustworthy nature of its public information that is fit-for-purpose. It is clear to the review team where the strategic oversight for the quality and veracity of information lies and that there are established processes to update and monitor information.

3.2 The College website is the main source of information for students and other stakeholders, though key documents such as the prospectus and handbooks are also available in hardcopy. Promotional information is reviewed annually by the Higher Education Manager and Marketing Manager; tutors and programme leaders are consulted and regularly combine to check key course information.

3.3 Promotional material relating to partnership courses is approved by the partner organisation before publication. Key Information Set data is produced through collaboration between the Higher Education Manager, Higher Education Marketing Officer and College Information Technology support units. Applicants are provided with a 'What's next?' guide, and current students are provided with programme handbooks and a student guide. All these materials are also available electronically by means of the virtual learning environment.

3.4 The College uses Learner Course Profiling to check management information data on its cohorts of students. This is regularly updated and used at a senior level for the purposes of strategic oversight. There is an annual College review of all strategic information.

3.5 The awarding bodies and awarding organisation check all information produced in their name including handbooks and the website. Students confirmed the accuracy of information they received and strategic oversight of high-level information, for example the prospectus is maintained by regular Director-level reports to the Vice-Principal (Academic). The review team **affirms** the College's work towards the implementation of a specific timeline for the approval of all published information.

3.6 On the basis of the documentation provided and meetings with students and staff, the review team concludes that this Expectation is met.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Information about higher education provision: Summary of findings

3.7   The College's responsibilities relating to the UK Expectations about information about higher education provision as detailed in *Part C: Information about higher education provision* of the Quality Code have been met.

3.8   The review team **affirms** the College's work towards the implementation of a specific timeline for the approval of all published information.

3.9   On the basis of the documentation provided and meetings with staff and students, the review team makes the judgement that information about learning opportunities produced by the College **meets UK expectations**.

4   Judgement: Enhancement of learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1   The College does not have a formal enhancement strategy document. However, the review team considered that clear and deliberate enhancement activity is taking place at the College.

4.2   The College has recently developed a dedicated Higher Education Centre which is solely for the use of its higher education students. It provides students with spaces to study and socialise away from the College's further education students. Students and staff stated that the introduction of the Higher Education Centre has given them a more distinct higher education identity within the College.

4.3   By putting all students through the basic additional learning support screening during their induction, the College is able to identify those who have not already declared an additional learning support need, and can ensure that appropriate support is in place for the duration of the student's enrolment. As detailed in the section on Expectation B3, the review team considers the strong support for student progression into higher education and through higher education levels to be **good practice**.

4.4   The College actively tries to engage its alumni by tracking their progress with the help of an external data collection company. They also invite alumni back to the College to deliver talks to current students in an attempt to inspire them.

4.5   The College rolled out a new, improved virtual learning environment in September 2013 with the intention of enabling students to access all required course and College information through one maintained and regularly updated online portal. Students met by the review team verified that they found the new virtual learning environment to be of great use while studying and commented that their tutors always post lecture notes and relevant course materials on the course's page.

4.6   The College intends to conduct a maturity audit to assess the progress and impact of the new virtual learning environment. The intention described to the review team is that this will form part of the College's annual review of its learning resources, providing them with an opportunity to enhance the product being delivered to the student end user.

4.7   Students met by the review team were consistently complimentary about the level of support available to them throughout their study and several stated that close links with tutors along with smaller class sizes was a key factor in their decision to study at the College.

4.8   The College actively supports staff to engage in higher-level study and provided the review team with examples of staff who had completed their master's qualification through the College. The review team met a member of staff whose course costs had been paid by the College. The extent to which this can continue as the College grows is unclear. Staff who had received support for further study in the past were overwhelmingly positive about the College's support for their additional learning and believed that the College recognised the value that would be added to the learning environment.

4.9   Staff involved with higher education delivery receive up to five days per academic year for scholarly activity or continuing professional development.

4.10   The College conducts an HE Programme Review at three points during the year to help feed into its annual monitoring process. This enables the College to constantly assess and develop the learning environment.

4.11   The College's peer review process helps to enhance the College's learning environment. The 'learning walks' system the College operates provides staff with constant opportunities to observe and learn from their peers. Staff were passionate about the value of this process.

4.12   The College has developed strong links with local employers. As a result, students have the opportunity to work on a 'live brief' as part of their programme of study which in turn helps provide them with a 'real-world' context to their studies and also goes some way to preparing them for the wider world of work. The College's overall commitment to the employability of its students was reinforced to the review team by all staff throughout the review visit. The review team therefore considers that the strategic commitment to the employability of its students, underpinned by the comprehensive links it has developed with a range of local employers, is **good practice***.*

4.13   The College reinforces its partner agendas within the College, with one key example being the Oxford Brookes Graduate Attributes programme. The College has integrated this into its higher education ethos and employability agenda. As discussed in the section on Expectation B10, the review team considers the proactive mutual relationships with its higher education awarding bodies, which help ensure that their requirements are well understood and appropriately adapted and implemented, to be **good practice**.

4.14   On the basis of the documentation provided and meetings with students and staff, the review team concludes that this Expectation is met.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Enhancement of learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.15   The College's responsibilities relating to the UK Expectation about the enhancement of learning opportunities have been met.

4.16   The review team considers the strong support for student progression into higher education and through higher education levels to be **good practice**.

4.17   The review team considers the proactive mutual relationships with its higher education awarding bodies, which help ensure that their requirements are well understood and appropriately adapted and implemented, to be **good practice**.

4.18   A further feature of enhancement good practice is the strategic commitment to the employability of its students, underpinned by the comprehensive links it has developed with a range of local employers*.*

4.19   On the basis of the documentation provided and meetings with staff and students, the review team makes the judgement that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the College **meets UK expectations**.

5   Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1   Several courses offered by the College have a work-based learning or placement element to prepare the students for the workplace and allow them the opportunity of working in their chosen career area. Students who are in employment are encouraged to bring their own experiences into the classroom and share with others. Employers and students report that the support provided by the College for these learners is good.

5.2   The College has a member of staff who provides careers advice to all students (including higher education) and there is a member of the National Careers Service who holds a weekly careers surgery. However, as a large proportion of the students enrolled with the College's higher education provision are part-time, the College's employability agenda is as much about enhancing the students' career opportunities as finding them employment. Comparison with Destination of Leavers from Higher Education data is therefore not significantly relevant, though it is collated and presented to the Senior Management Team. To complement this the College uses surveys and tutor links to gather intended destination data, with follow-ups, although it recognises that its system for monitoring the career progression of students who were in employment at the start of and during their study needs improving. The curriculum areas also provide careers support and advice to their learners, specific to the discipline.

5.3   All modules associated with the Oxford Brookes programmes are required to explicitly incorporate 'graduate attributes' in an integrated manner. The College has extended this requirement to other courses wherever possible, and also incorporates employer-relevant assignment briefs into the assessment strategy.

5.4   The College annually reviews programmes to ensure they remain relevant to the local and regional employment needs. This is facilitated (particularly in the Pearson provision) by allowing the units within a course to be changed or adapted to suit sponsoring employer requirements.

5.5   The students, when asked, believed that their courses were relevant to their current and future employment.

5.6   Some of the provision (especially HNC/HND Photography and Fashion and Textiles) is delivered by part-time staff who also run their own businesses; some of the staff teaching in the area of 'Early Years' are also working in the field part-time. The College also preferentially employs staff who have relevant work experience. This allows the staff to bring to their teaching currently relevant experience which enhances the students' understanding of the workplace.

5.7   Employers observe teaching, either formally including providing written feedback on their observations, or informally by participating in the College's 'learning walks'. Guest speakers are invited to contribute to the curriculum and share the skills that are in demand in the workplace. College alumni are invited to return to share their experiences post-graduation. Industrial visits are also arranged by the College to local companies so that students may experience the elements of their study in the workplace.

5.8   The College provides industrial-standard equipment in the relevant subject areas; sometimes the equipment is more leading edge than may be found in the small design businesses in which students are placed during their study or gain employment upon graduation.

5.9   Employers are consulted on programme review and development, either directly or through the relevant PSRB involvement in the Engineering and Sports Therapy programmes. As detailed in the section on Enhancement, this is **good practice**.

5.10   Employers assist in finding appropriate, prestigious space for the end-of-year exhibition for the arts courses.

5.11   In conclusion, the College is very conscious of the local employment situation and seeks to adapt and match its provision to the local need. According to students and employers, it does this successfully.

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 27 to 29 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/assuringstandardsandquality.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

e-learning
See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

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

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

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

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

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