Higher Education Review of Lancaster and Morecambe College

October 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 Lancaster and Morecambe College. The review took place from 20 to 22 October 2014 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Steve Evans
- Mrs Maz Stewart
- Miss Sarah Ingram (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review the QAA review team:

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

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

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

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

The QAA website gives more information about QAA and its mission.[3] A dedicated section explains the method for Higher Education Review[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=106.
[3] QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus.
[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 Lancaster and Morecambe College

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at Lancaster and Morecambe College.

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

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following **good practice** at Lancaster and Morecambe College.

- The academic and pastoral support that enhances the learning experience and achievement for all students (Expectations B4 and B3).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to Lancaster and Morecambe College.

By March 2015:

- formally agree, and communicate to students, an academic appeals process that aligns with the awarding body's/organisation's appeals policy (Expectation B9)
- provide all placement providers with written guidance to support their role in managing the learning experience of work-based students (Expectation B10)
- ensure that programme information given to prospective students consistently identifies the awarding organisation (Expectations C and B2).

By May 2015:

- ensure appropriate external involvement in the review of self-assessment reports (Expectations A3.4 and B8)
- provide information to applicants on the process for complaints and appeals against an admission decision (Expectation B2)
- ensure students have the opportunity to engage more fully in its quality assurance and decision-making processes, including effective student representation across all programmes and oversight of relevant information such as external examiner reports (Expectations B5 and B7)
- institute formal terms of reference for Higher National academic boards (Expectation B6)
- institute mechanisms for using informal complaints to inform its quality processes (Expectation B9).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The steps taken to standardise module evaluations (Expectations B8 and A3.3).

Theme: Student Employability

Employability is a key feature of programmes at the College to endow students with the necessary skills and competencies to meet the needs of the workplace. It is promoted by a range of activities through support for individual students and employability modules which are embedded in all College programmes, either as work experience or the broader development of employment skills. In addition, students are expected to take part in real-work environments at the College, for example a cattery and a nursery. These initiatives and other activities provide a rich and varied choice of employment-related learning and enrichment opportunities which reflect the College's commitment to providing the best opportunities for its students and its excellent contacts with local industry. While there does not appear to be any formal evaluation of the effectiveness of the employability initiatives, the review team found that they are well regarded by students.

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

About Lancaster and Morecambe College

Lancaster and Morecambe College (the College) is a medium-sized college with a main campus located in Lancaster and a community learning centre in Morecambe town centre. As well as serving the city of Lancaster and the seaside resort of Morecambe, the catchment of the College extends to the largely rural areas of North Lancashire, South Cumbria and the western edge of North Yorkshire. At the time of the review visit there were 146 higher education students, both full-time and part-time. The College offers teacher education programmes validated by the University of Central Lancashire, and 13 Pearson BTEC Higher National programmes. The College is committed to providing a broad-based curriculum to serve a wide community and to meet the needs of employers locally, regionally and nationally. The College has close relationships with the University of Cumbria, the University of Central Lancashire and Blackburn College with regard to providing top-up routes for BTEC Higher National students.

The College mission is to 'provide Lancaster and Morecambe and surrounding communities with an outstanding student experience fulfilling academic, personal and employment goals'. There is an overall College strategic plan which sets out the College's vision to be 'a beacon of vocational excellence leading to higher education and to employment'; and a Higher Education and Professional Studies Strategy (2014-16), revised to take account of the closure of two foundation degree programmes in 2012 and the introduction of Higher National programmes. The strategic priorities for the College include expanding the portfolio of Higher National diplomas and professional qualifications, and maximising internal progression.

The College has made significant investment in physical resources including new and upgraded facilities for sports coaching, a new learning centre (the Hexagon) and an independent study area for higher education students.

Strategic responsibility for higher education lies with the Corporation while the delivery of strategic objectives lies with the Higher Education Management Group. The key managers in relation to higher education are the Director of Curriculum, the Head of Faculty with Responsibility for Higher Education, and the Director of Quality and Support Services.

The College received a positive outcome in its QAA Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review in 2010 with a number of features of good practice and three desirable recommendations. The review team found evidence that the College has sustained some of these features, for instance the processes for identifying and making accessible learning resources, although with changes in the College's provision and associated restructuring of its committees, some of the features are no longer so applicable.

In relation to the desirable recommendations the review team noted that the College has addressed one of the recommendations in full (including higher education with the quality improvement plans) and plans are in place to take forward the process of differentiating higher education within teaching observations. Progress in the third area, standardising the presentation of progression data, appears limited.

Explanation of the findings about Lancaster and Morecambe 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 the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and other awarding organisations

Expectation (A1): In order to secure threshold academic standards, degree-awarding bodies:

a) ensure that the requirements of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* are met by:

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

1.1 The College acknowledges that it has a role to play in maintaining academic standards despite the awarding powers being held by the relevant awarding body and awarding organisation.

1.2 The Pearson-approved BTEC Higher National programmes are designed at national level in collaboration with employers, professional bodies and the Sector Skills Councils to ensure that the mandatory units for each qualification meet the skills requirements of the sector. These are nationally devised and accredited structures including core curriculum content. Core units are therefore prescribed by the awarding body and the College's input into programme design is limited to the incorporation of optional or specialist modules to meet local needs.

1.3 There is comprehensive guidance from the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) through the Academic Quality Assurance manual dealing with the requirements of validation and review.

1.4 During the delivery of the programmes there are opportunities for the College to ensure the maintenance of academic standards through the overall management of the

higher education awards and the use made of external examiners. For the former, there is a clearly defined management structure from course tutors and programme managers at course level, through to the Higher Education Management Group, with close oversight by the Senior Management Team. This is supplemented by Faculty Reviews and Quality Review Weeks.

1.5   The review team investigated these processes by considering the examples of guidance from the University awarding body dealing with the requirements of validation and review. This provides clear evidence of reference to alignment of outcomes to the FHEQ descriptors at the appropriate level and due alignment with QAA's guidance of qualification characteristics. This is also reflected in module handbooks for the Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) programme where reference is made to the programme specification, levels and credits.

1.6   Relevant College staff have access to the partner University guidance on programme approval and programme specifications and are therefore familiar with QAA requirements in this respect. Adherence to the requirements is ensured through the initial validation process and subsequent annual and periodic reviews.

1.7   Similarly, the programme approval process for Pearson awards requires that the learning outcomes align with the external reference points including FHEQ. Indeed, course approval panels must be satisfied of alignment with QAA requirements. The level and nature of each higher education programme of study are then incorporated into the programme documentation published on the virtual learning environment (VLE) and in the course handbooks.

1.8   The review team also held meetings with the Principal, along with groups of senior and academic staff where a clear and consistent understanding of and familiarity with the processes was confirmed.

1.9   The processes contributing to the overall maintenance of academic standards are well embedded and understood by relevant staff. They comply with the requirements of the different awarding bodies and no concerns are raised in the evidence reviewed. Overall, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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

1.10   The academic frameworks and regulations governing the award of the higher education qualifications delivered by the College are those of its awarding body and awarding organisation, namely UCLan for the PGCE and Pearson for the Higher National programmes.

1.11   The College is aware of the requirements of Academic Quality Assurance from UCLan through the latter's Quality Assurance Manual and Partnership Handbook. The requirements for Pearson are nationally recognised and published by the awarding organisation.

1.12   The review team investigated these processes by considering a range of evidence. Within the College, the external frameworks and regulations are overseen within the academic governance arrangements for higher education provision through the HE Management Group and HE Strategy. The quality assurance documentation used by the College to support delivery of Higher National programmes is articulated within the Quality Improvement Strategy and includes Quality Review Weeks where a particular programme area is scrutinised with a holistic approach to the student journey. Here, an audit trail of samples of assessed student work is used to ensure compliance with awarding body requirements.

1.13   External examiners play an important role in the process through the verification of assignment briefs and marks, meetings with students and annual reports. External examiner reports are received centrally and scrutinised by the Higher Education Administrator who notifies programme teams of relevant issues from which course-level action plans are prepared. The College also relies on the oversight of credits and levels by the relevant awarding body.

1.14   The processes to ensure compliance with the academic frameworks and regulations of the relevant awarding body are understood by relevant staff and work effectively. Overall the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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   It is the responsibility of UCLan and Pearson to keep definitive records of the programmes they have developed and validated. It is the College's responsibility to manage the quality assurance of the programmes it delivers on behalf of UCLan and Pearson to ensure academic standards of programme delivery and assessment practices meet the Quality Code, and specifically the FHEQ level descriptors.

1.16   In designing and validating higher education programmes, both UCLan and Pearson ensure account has been taken of relevant Subject Benchmark Statements, and the requirements of professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs) where appropriate. The design of the PGCE programmes prepared by UCLan complies with the academic framework and the University's academic regulations, including periodic review. The programmes validated by Pearson have been created using standard module options, sometimes in conjunction with employers and students, and are monitored annually for viability, quality assurance and resource provision.

1.17   It is the College's responsibility to comply with UCLan's annual monitoring, external examining and internal/external moderation activity to provide evidence that it is compliant with the University's academic standards for programme management, delivery and assessment. The College attends UCLan's Partnership Forum, Module Assessment Board and Link Tutor Meetings.

1.18   The process used by Pearson to approve programmes is a course approval panel which checks learning outcomes and relates to external reference points including Subject Benchmark Statements and the Quality Code. Checks are made that assessments and resources are appropriate at validation events. Pearson monitors compliance to academic standards through the annual external monitoring of its programmes, and through the College's internal annual programme monitoring procedures.

1.19   Overall the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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

1.20   The College complies with its awarding body and awarding organisation programme approval policies and procedures, and has a robust internal course approval process for its higher education programme to ensure that all new programmes meet the College's strategic aims and employer and student needs.

1.21   Both UCLan and Pearson retain validation responsibility for ensuring compliance with the FHEQ level descriptors and relevant subject and professional benchmarks; and identifying module content, associated learning outcomes and assessment strategies for the courses delivered on their behalf by the College. UCLan carries out a cycle of periodic review for the networked PGCE programme delivered on its behalf. The College regards the annual self-assessment report as an annual periodic review of its Pearson Higher National provision.

1.22   To test the effectiveness of the College's internal approval processes, the team read minutes of course approval meetings and hold discussions with senior, teaching and support staff, as well as with student representatives.

1.23   The College has an effective and robust internal approvals process for higher education programmes that takes into account relevant Quality Code Expectations. The Higher Education Course Approval Form provides the opportunity for the College senior managers to consider all aspects of the proposed new programme of study, for example staffing, module selection, mode of study, (course) duration, awarding organisation, resources, and market analysis. In addition, the approval process considers student views, employer skill needs and student progression opportunities. The selection of programme modules is considered in line with student progression opportunities to degree top-ups or professional training, for example the HND in Health and Social Care selected modules in consultation with the University of Cumbria to provide students with a possible progression route to a Midwifery programme at the University.

1.24   UCLan retains responsibility for (re)validating the PGCE programme delivered on its behalf by the consortium of colleges of which Lancaster and Morecambe College is a member. UCLan retains responsibility for ensuring academic standards are correctly implemented across all consortium colleges through external examining, annual monitoring and partnership meetings. A course liaison tutor is appointed by the University to liaise and support the College delivery team. The University provides a comprehensive range of academic and assessment policies, guidance documents and programme delivery/ assessment forms to the College, in addition to partnership meetings, to ensure the course team are fully compliant with University academic standards and procedures.

1.25   Pearson retain responsibility for the (re)validation of the Higher National programmes delivered at the College. The College applies to Pearson for approval to deliver a Higher National programme, and once approval has been given the external examiner report acts as an annual Pearson approval mechanism for the continuing delivery of the Higher National programme in the next academic year. The College effectively implements

Pearson quality assurance policies and procedures, and assessment/internal verification regulations.

1.26   The College senior management assures itself through its robust internal review processes that new higher education programmes to be delivered at the College are delivered via a partnership with an appropriate awarding body or organisation, and new programmes are resourced with experienced teaching staff, have access to physical and electronic course learning resources, and meet employment sector and student needs.

1.27   The review team considers the processes the College follows on behalf of its awarding body, awarding organisation and its own approach to the course approval process and (periodic) review to be reliable and fit for purpose. The Expectation is therefore met, and the 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

1.28   The College has rigorous procedures in place to ensure that it complies with the assessment regulatory frameworks of its awarding body and awarding organisation, as set out in programme specifications and assessment guidance documentation.

1.29   UCLan and Pearson confirm module learning outcomes and associated assessment strategies during (re)validation, ensuring that they meet the requirements of the Quality Code and any related professional body benchmarks. UCLan retains responsibility for the preparation of learning outcomes-related assessment activity for the PGCE programme delivered on its behalf. The College is responsible for writing and internally verifying assessment briefs for the Higher National programmes it delivers. Pearson supports student assignment writing activity by providing assessment guidance in its module booklets. Pearson external examiners have commented positively on module assessment activity and assignment briefs in their annual external examiner reports.

1.30   The review team reviewed programme specifications, module booklets containing assignment briefs, UCLan assignment briefs, programme handbooks, minutes of Assessment and Academic Boards, and assessment-related policies, procedures and documentation. The team also met staff and students.

1.31   UCLan has a comprehensive Assessment Handbook 2013-14 which details the University's assessment policies, principles and regulations and is a valuable resource for the PGCE College teaching team. Although the College does not have a discreet Higher Education Assessment Policy for its Higher National programmes, there is a generic Assessment Policy which incorporates Pearson guidance for both further and higher education programmes delivered at the College which is fit for purpose. The College has a comprehensive range of policies and protocols in place to support programme management and delivery, for example the Quality Improvement Strategy, Lesson Observation Policy, and Teaching and Learning Strategy. Teaching staff are aware of their assessment responsibilities for the programmes they deliver. Assessment activities are clearly set out in module handbooks which provide students with module content, learning outcomes, assessment schedules, assessment activity and a scheme of work for module delivery.

1.32   Teaching staff understand the role of the Quality Code in ensuring that assessment meets the required FHEQ academic standard. Each programme uses a range of assessment activities, and many of these are designed to support the development of employment-related skills. Course teams design assessment activities to develop students' knowledge and practical skills to enhance students' employability opportunities. There is currently limited employer participation in the design of Pearson Higher National assessment activities. The proposed Higher National in Engineering currently being developed in partnership with EDF and BAE will include a high proportion of employer-led assessment

activities. Student placement activities are not formally assessed, but the employer reported that outcomes of their placement learning opportunities feed into a College placement or work experience assignment grade.

1.33   The College makes effective use of external examiners to scrutinise programme assignment briefs and approve assessment results. External verifier reports are positive and confirm that the assessment processes across the range of Higher National programmes are robust. The College effectively reviews external examiner and verifier reports, and progress in meeting any specified recommendations, at senior manager and programme level.

1.34   The College has robust procedures in place to ensure that assessment activity is structured and transparent, and the assessment activity enables students to meet the module learning outcomes. External examiner reports confirm the College is meeting its awarding body and awarding organisation academic standards. College teaching staff are taking responsibility for ensuring that the relevant sections of the Quality Code are being met during the assessment process. Therefore the review team concludes that the Expectation is met, and the 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

1.35   The College and UCLan have clear procedures in place via partnership agreements for teacher education programme validation, periodic review and annual monitoring. UCLan carries out a periodic review of the teacher education programmes on a six-year cycle. Higher National programmes are developed and (re)validated by Pearson, and their external examiner reports serve as an annual re-approval for programme delivery in the following academic year. The College regards its annual self-assessment process as serving as an annual periodic review. The College has effective and robust internal annual self-assessment procedures for its higher education provision to ensure alignment with UK threshold academic standards, student achievement and student satisfaction.

1.36   The review team considered a range of programme-level self-assessment and quality improvement plan documentation, as well as the cross-College self-assessment and quality improvement plan. The team clarified with senior managers, teaching and support staff the management structures in place to support the self-assessment process and the implementation and monitoring of self-improvement plans.

1.37   Oversight of higher education programme development and the maintenance of academic standards is a function of the College's Corporation. The Higher Education Management Working Group has operational responsibility for ensuring effective course management, maintenance of academic standards, resources provision and managing partnership relationships.

1.38   On completion of module delivery and assessment, students are requested to complete module evaluations. Comments made in the module evaluations feed into the programme annual self-assessment report. The College acknowledges that there has been variation in the design and content of module evaluations across its Higher National programmes and has completed a review of existing module evaluations to design a document that can be effectively used across all the Higher National programmes. The new module evaluation form is now live, and the review team **affirms** the work of the College in standardising module evaluation documentation. UCLan's PGCE programme uses module evaluation documentation designed by the University to be used by the consortium delivering its PGCE programme.

1.39   Self-assessment reports and their associated quality improvement plans are reviewed at senior and middle management level during termly Faculty Performance Reviews. Individual programme-level self-assessment reports and associated quality improvement plans feed into the higher education self-assessment report and higher education quality improvement plan. The newly introduced termly Quality Review Weeks provide an additional layer of managerial review of programme self-assessment, improvement plan progress and programme performance.

1.40   The College's self-assessment documentation is detailed, comprehensive and 'SMART', using a wide range of information to evaluate programme management, quality

assurance, delivery and compliance with academic standards. Sources of information include, for example, student feedback from module evaluations and cross-College questionnaires; external examiner reports; and retention, achievement and attendance data. The College engages employers and other stakeholders in the self-assessment process. The College-level self-assessment report is publicly available, but students do not have access to programme-level self-assessment reports.

1.41   UCLan annual monitoring procedures provide comprehensive guidance to the College on the preparation of the annual monitoring report for the teacher education programmes. The College-based course leader completes the annual monitoring documentation and submits it to the University. The report is then reviewed by the University and any identified actions formulated into an action plan. The Director of Quality and Student Services is responsible to UCLan for monitoring progress in resolving any identified actions.

1.42   The review team concludes that the College makes effective use of its own internal self-assessment processes and UCLan annual monitoring process to ensure that the higher education programmes being delivered at the College meet the UK threshold academic standards and awarding body and awarding organisation academic regulations. The College has effective annual internal self-assessment and continuous within-year review procedures in place to monitor programme management, quality assurance and delivery. The College is taking effective steps to standardise module evaluation documentation which feeds into the self-assessment process. The team concludes that the Expectation is met, and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.43   The College makes use of a wide range of independent and external expertise to manage its academic standards. External and independent experts from the higher education and relevant industry sectors are routinely used in the validation processes for qualifications awarded by UCLan. In addition, the College consults with University liaison representatives in the preparation, development and running of these programmes.

1.44   The College works with Pearson and City & Guilds, who provide external benchmarks and specifications which govern the higher education programmes offered by the College leading to these awards. These external benchmarks and standards are devised at national level in collaboration with employers, professional bodies and the Sector Skills Councils. No employers are currently involved formally in the approval process although the College accepts that such input could be incorporated in future years. All course proposals, however, must demonstrate evidence of employer need and support.

1.45   Thereafter, during programme delivery, external examiners, industry partners and programme advisers all offer ongoing external perspective and input. In addition, employers contribute to the review of student performance on placement via the Employment Review Reports. The Higher Education Management Group reviews all external examiner reports to ensure College compliance with external recommendations.

1.46   The College-wide scrutiny of self-assessment reports is peer-led and involves constructive challenge meetings with other departments along with members of the Senior Management Team (SMT) and Governor representatives. This provides at least some level of 'externality' albeit from colleagues within or connected to the College. An external quality consultant is used alongside the SMT and the Corporation of the College to review the whole-College self-assessment report. The review team concluded that while there is much use of independent scrutiny and external participation in the management of threshold academic standards, the process of maintaining standards could be enhanced by the involvement of external input in the annual monitoring process, particularly the self-assessment reports. The team therefore **recommends** that, by May 2015, the College ensures there is appropriate external involvement in the review of self-assessment reports.

1.47   Apart from the recommendation to strengthen the external input to the annual programme monitoring process, the review team concludes that the College's use of independent and external expertise is nevertheless valid and reliable and that the Expectation is met with a low level of risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

1.48   In reaching its judgement regarding academic standards, the review team considered its findings against the criteria outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All Expectations relating to the maintenance of threshold academic standards are met and the associated level of risk is low in all instances.

1.49   The College's main responsibilities for maintaining threshold academic standards are to adhere to the policies and processes set by its degree-awarding partner, the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan), and the awarding organisation, Pearson. The review team found that the College understands and manages its responsibilities effectively and has robust procedures in place which are implemented securely. Furthermore, the College has a comprehensive range of policies and protocols in place to support programme management and delivery, and makes effective use of its own internal processes to monitor and review the standards of its higher education provision.

1.50   The review team made one recommendation in relation to Expectation 3.4; the use of external and independent expertise at key stages in maintaining academic standards. The recommendation relates to making use of independent and external expertise in the College's internal annual monitoring process.

1.51   Furthermore, in relation to Expectation A3.3, the review team noted that the College was taking action to address variations in the design and content of programme module evaluations and the team affirmed the work of the College in standardising module evaluation documentation.

1.52   Overall, the review team concludes that the maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards offered at the College on behalf of its awarding bodies and organisation **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 and Approval*

Findings

2.1   All new higher education programmes must align with the College's strategic planning processes covering 'fit' with strategic objectives, viability in sustaining recruitment, marketability and business case, student feedback and student internal progression, expertise of staff and the availability of other resources.

2.2   The College has a robust and thorough internal programme approvals process. Following internal programme approval, the College complies with the programme approval processes of its awarding body and awarding organisation. The College currently delivers programmes on behalf of UCLan and Pearson.

2.3   The programmes delivered by the College are the standard offer of UCLan and Pearson. The College, in consultation with local employers, the student body, and analysis of labour market intelligence, identifies a skills gap or other higher education need prior to initiating the new programme procedures. In planning new programmes, the College explores progression opportunities at local universities to ensure students have progression opportunities to full degree status. Following informal discussions at programme and middle manager level, a formal New Course Approval application is prepared and considered by senior managers at an Approvals Board. The College is currently piloting student engagement in its internal Approvals Boards. Pearson Higher National programme curriculum design is the responsibility of course teams who proceed with the detailed design of materials, the programme timetable and allocation of hours (subject to the approval of the Director of Curriculum) following programme approval. All documentation is then subject to the standard College quality assurance processes, including a handbook audit.

2.4   The review team met College managerial and teaching staff who participated in the UCLan (re)validation of their PGCE programme, and also examined associated (re)validation documentation. The team also discussed the College's internal approvals protocols during meetings with staff. Particular attention was paid to the College's increasing engagement with students and local employers in the course approval and design process.

2.5   Both the awarding body and the awarding organisation the College works with retain responsibility for the development and (re)validation of the courses delivered by the College on their behalf. The UCLan Quality Assurance Manual provides clear guidelines to prospective partners of the required approval processes prior to delivering a UCLan programme. The module structure and programme delivery of the UCLan teacher education programme are in line with the University's management of programme delivery for all colleges within its PGCE programme consortium.

2.6   On receiving approval from Pearson to deliver a Higher National programme, the College is free to add a range of optional modules to the Pearson-designated programme core modules to design a Higher National programme which meets the needs of the College, employers and other stakeholders, and local universities to ensure that students have a

range of top-up progression opportunities. Selection of optional modules is prescribed in accordance with Pearson regulations for programme delivery, and teaching teams follow the College's rationale as part of the selection process. The College is proactively increasing employer engagement in the design of its Higher National programmes, for example the Higher National in Engineering programme currently in development is being developed in conjunction with EDF and BAE, to ensure that the new programme meets their employment skills needs.

2.7   The review team finds that the College's internal approvals procedures effectively address a range of issues, including Subject Benchmark Statements, the setting and maintaining of academic standards, the availability of resources to support learning, including the use of external e-learning resources through agreements with the Universities of Lancaster and Cumbria, programme sustainability, staffing expertise, student expectations, and employer and employment skills needs. The team therefore concludes that the College's thorough and comprehensive approach to the design of programmes, together with robust approval processes, ensure that the Expectation is met, and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission*

Findings

2.8   The College has a strategic approach to the admission of students on higher education provision, based on potential student demand, employer need and a gap analysis of the current provision within the geographic area. The College continues to monitor provision based on these criteria and hopes to see some limited growth in the next few years. The College currently adheres to an Admissions Policy that covers both further education and higher education provision, but is currently drafting a higher education-specific Admissions Policy to ensure equity and transparency. Oversight of the admissions process is provided by the Director of Student Learning Services.

2.9   The College is compliant with UCLan's Admissions Policy for the teacher education programmes. The College's internal, generic Admissions Policy guides the procedures used by individual Higher National course teams in recruiting full and part-time students. Training is available for staff regarding the Admissions Policy and all staff with responsibility for interviewing students have to attend compulsory training regarding the interview process and decision making.

2.10   Applicants are provided with course information sheets which clearly outline admissions criteria. These are available on the website, by request and at interview. Admissions criteria are specified by awarding bodies in their partnership handbooks and the College directly uses this information to ensure accuracy. While the course sheets clearly articulate the title of the programme, only the courses validated by UCLan provide information regarding the awarding body on the course sheets or the prospectus (see findings under Expectation C).

2.11   All prospective students are given the opportunity to visit the College and are interviewed if they apply for a programme. During the admissions process, information is available and provided to students regarding careers and pathways to higher learning; this information can lead students to pursue other programmes at the College and to formulate clearly defined goals during their study. The review team confirmed that admission decisions are made as per the Admissions Policy and that students are satisfied with the admissions process.

2.12   Applicants are able to access Advice and Guidance staff in Student & Learning Services to understand the support that would be available. During the interview process, learning support needs may be discussed to ensure all students are provided with appropriate support and directed to the College services where necessary.

2.13   Within the Admissions Policy and the draft Higher Education Admissions Policy there is no reference to the options available to applicants if they are unhappy with the admissions decision or the process. This lack of information may cause applicants to believe that there is no appeals or complaints process available to them. The review team therefore **recommends** that, by May 2015, the College provides information to applicants on the process for complaints and appeals against an admission decision.

2.14   The College samples student opinion on their experience of the admission process and monitors and reviews its processes every year. The sample survey does not cover all higher education courses at the College but the feedback received is largely positive, particularly relating to interviews, enrolment and induction.

2.15   Students are positive about the information received at course level at the start of their courses. There is some consistency between programmes regarding induction and all students are provided with an induction to the VLE and the library service.

2.16   The review team concludes that the College meets the Expectation and that, while the College lacks a complaints and appeals procedure for the recruitment, selection and admission of students, this represents a low level of risk.

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

2.17   The College has an overarching Teaching and Learning Strategy with a mission to innovate and develop outstanding teaching and learning across all areas. Key performance indicators (KPIs) identified in the strategy are used to ensure that the quality of learning opportunities is continuously improved and progress is monitored through reports to the Senior Management Team. These KPIs include the programme self-assessment grade, ratings of teaching and learning, and student performance in assessments. Reference is also made to statistical analysis of data being used to initiate appropriate action.

2.18   The student submission, while generally positive on the quality of teaching, drew attention to suggested areas of improvement including better support for students' skills, greater variety of teaching and assessment methods, and enhanced resources for higher education students.

2.19   The review team conducted its investigation of this area by examining the College's Teaching and Learning Strategy, the Strategic Plan 2013-14 and the HR Strategy. The team also reviewed examples of staff development events, examples of student handbooks and the induction arrangements for students. Meetings were also held with staff and students and many examples of good teaching practice were noted in the meeting with students.

2.20   The CVs of staff teaching on higher education programmes are made available to the relevant awarding body and require approval for the teacher education programmes where the award is made by UCLan. All staff are required to possess a teaching qualification (or to work towards one) and to engage in continuing professional development (CPD) and evaluation of their practice. As part of the evaluation of teaching practice, the College has identified a need for the development of a consistent approach to gathering student feedback on their learning experience.

2.21   New higher education staff are usefully provided with a mentor. Staff are also able to attend CPD events at partner universities, for example the Partnership Development Days and the North West Regional Forum. The latter provides a platform for sharing good practice where policy developments and challenges can be discussed.

2.22   Student views feed into the general monitoring of the quality of teaching via the student survey, course meetings and their class representatives. The observation of teaching is effective and the outcomes of this process are used to inform professional development needs and future strategies. However, much of the focus on the improvement of teaching practice is generic and does not specifically relate to the individual demands of higher education programmes. The review team did note that from 2014 the College plans to include higher education teaching as a separate category within the teaching observation scheme and to conduct a formal schedule of higher education observations.

2.23   One of the key priorities is to develop more higher education-focused professional development activities. As well as the development of the teaching observation scheme, the review team noted that the CPD schedule produced for 2014-15 includes a number of

sessions of interest to higher education practitioners. A Higher Education Tutor Group has been established whereby tutors meet monthly to discuss issues and share best practice. Some higher education-specific CPD sessions have been incorporated into these meetings. This forum is informal in nature and well regarded by staff although proceedings are not currently minuted. Other staff development activities include visits to other colleges (and universities in the case of higher education staff) and secondments to industry to ensure that staff remain abreast of the latest developments in their vocational fields.

2.24   The College seeks to provide a high-quality physical learning environment for all of its students, including those pursuing higher education programmes. Music students have been housed in purpose-built accommodation since September 2012 and the new Hexagon learning centre opened in September 2013, providing accommodation for student services. An independent study area for higher education students was introduced in September 2014 as an immediate response to student feedback and to develop further the higher education culture at the College. Students have wireless access throughout the College premises along with open-access IT rooms, study areas and catering facilities.

2.25   Students are provided with relevant information on the available learning opportunities and support in a number of ways. During induction, the commitment required from students and the College's expectations of them are made clear, along with the support available in meeting individual needs. This is supplemented by course handbooks and timetables to make students aware of the input required of them. A range of information is also available on the College's virtual learning environment (VLE) including all lecture material and tasks to be completed between classes. The VLE is also used routinely as a tool to communicate course-related information to students.

2.26   The College is keen to assist its students in the transition to becoming independent learners and provides workshops to assist in the enhancement of study skills. A key aspect of this is the opportunity to reflect upon and learn from regular feedback. This is supplemented by a formal meeting each term with their tutor. Students reported variation in the timeliness of feedback across programmes which was an issue that the College acknowledged and had worked to address during 2013-14.

2.27   The review team also found that the learning opportunities available and the College's expectations of students are made clear through the comprehensive induction arrangements and student handbooks. There is also a focus on the development of analytical, creative and critical thinking skills through a number of initiatives including the HND Analytical Thinking Unit, HND Business Strategy Unit and the Research Project Module Booklet. Despite the observations in the student submission, the students the team met were generally happy with the resources, quality of teaching and level of support provided for them.

2.28   Overall, the review team concludes that the College has a strategic and embedded approach where staff and students work together to review and enhance learning opportunities and teaching practice. The support provided to assist students' transition to higher education and the more general academic support provided by tutors contributes to the feature of good practice identified by the team under Expectation B4. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement*

Findings

2.29   The College takes a strategic approach to enabling student development and achievement and places a high priority on the provision of an outstanding experience for its students through a high level of generic provision supplemented by targeted support for particular students where needed. All aspects of the student experience provided by different service areas are planned, resourced, monitored and evaluated. A number of data sources are used in the review process including student performance and progress in meeting the objectives in the strategic plan of the particular service area.

2.30   The review team conducted its investigation of this area by examining the College's Strategic Plan 2013-14, the Accommodation Strategy and Accommodation update, along with the Higher Education Strategy. The team also reviewed examples of higher education student handbooks and the induction arrangements for students. Meetings were also held with the Principal, groups of academic and support staff, and students.

2.31   Student performance and views form important elements of the evaluation process. The College collects student views through internal surveys, course and student representative meetings and higher education focus groups. The student submission refers to the following aspects as areas for improvement: module guides, the higher education quiet study space, the need for more library research resources, improved standards of marking and feedback, and better support for higher education study skills.

2.32   Comprehensive information on the learning opportunities and support available is provided in the course handbooks and is also available through the VLE. Particular assessment requirements and formats are also published in the module or unit descriptors. The College recognises that the student representative bodies play a role in enabling students to develop peer support networks and also the culture of becoming an independent learner.

2.33   A range of opportunities are provided by the College to enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional progression. These include a formal tutorial at least once a term where students meet individually with a tutor to review their performance and explore strategies for further improvement. This is supplemented by a wide range of opportunities to develop their professional progression through working with local communities as a volunteer, active engagement with the Students' Union and gaining employability skills through participation in the real-work environments of the College enterprises provided onsite.

2.34   The College is aware of the particular needs of students with disabilities, and indeed its obligations to this group. Learning Support and Equality & Diversity staff work in partnership with individual students to identify any specific requirements which in turn leads to the necessary reasonable adjustments being made. These are reviewed at regular intervals. The College also adopts the concept of 'inclusive design' to ensure that learning opportunities are accessible to all students as far as possible.

2.35   Student transition to higher education is facilitated by open days and individual interviews where prospective students can discuss any potential barriers to learning with tutors and support staff. The review team notes that the College needs to monitor student

transition carefully given that the retention data suggests deterioration when student numbers increase.

2.36   Careers guidance is provided by the College Careers, Information, Advice and Guidance Team, supplemented by course managers who have experience within and subject knowledge of the relevant industry. All support staff possess NVQ Level 4 information, advice and guidance qualifications and the College holds the MATRIX standard for this provision. Students often seek career advice from their tutors who are practitioners and have good links to industry. The student services team are well qualified and equipped for their roles.

2.37   The review team found that a clear structure for allocation of resources exists across the College. Resources are identified at the validation stage. Each year resource allocations are made through College processes. Any in-year requirements can be requested from team budgets, or directly through the Senior Management Team.

2.38   The College has increased the range of learning resources available to higher education students through the use of external agreements with the University of Cumbria and the University of Lancaster to allow students access to relevant e-journals and e-texts on the University websites.

2.39   Following a review of the evidence, the review team found students are generally happy with the support available to them and are aware of how to access extra support from learning centre staff. The combination of the College-wide ethos to place the student learning experience at the heart of the provision; the comprehensive academic and pastoral support available - both generic and specific to particular learning needs; and the wide range of opportunities to engage in work-related and employability activities is **good practice**. This greatly enhances the learning experience and achievement for all students.

2.40   In summary, the College has a good range of opportunities and resources in place to enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential and good practice is identified in this area. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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

2.41   The College provides students with opportunities to engage in a variety of activities regarding their educational experience. There is an active Students' Union, a class representative structure and end-of-year surveys, and the College is developing further opportunities for student engagement.

2.42   There are elected class representatives in the majority of higher education programmes; however, the students on the part-time educational programmes are not asked to be part of the class representative system. The explanation for this position for teacher education students was that they were in College only for a short time, making attendance at course committees difficult. As a consequence, these students rely on their course tutor to take forward their views. The review team noted that UCLan informs students in their handbooks that they can expect to receive a copy of the minutes for Student-Staff Liaison and Course Review meetings. Therefore it was unclear how the voice of these students would be heard as part of this process. This finding contributes to the team's overall recommendation on the engagement with students in the College's quality assurance processes.

2.43   For the Pearson programmes class representatives are elected and engage with College-level priorities at Student Council, attended by the College Principal and Students' Union Officers. Training for representatives is provided at the well-attended annual Student Conference. At programme level, class representatives are also required to meet with faculty managers and are provided with opportunities within class tutorials to request and disseminate information to and from their peers. The representatives are comfortable engaging with course-level and senior staff and have created change within their programmes, including the creation of module booklets, ensuring students are provided with information relating to assessment and the content of the programme from the beginning of the academic year.

2.44   There are other opportunities for students to formally engage in the quality assurance of their programme. Students are provided with ad hoc opportunities to be part of student focus groups and the review team saw evidence that these are used to help to create change within the College. Students are also asked to complete end-of-year surveys. A standard module evaluation form is currently being developed for inclusion in all higher education programmes from November 2014.

2.45   While students are not routinely involved in the College's programme validation process, a pilot has recently taken place where a student was involved in a further education validation panel. The College hopes to expand this practice to its higher education provision.

2.46   While there are opportunities for students to be involved in quality assurance of their programme, the review team found that there is limited information sharing between students and staff. For instance, students do not currently have access to external examiner reports or the course self-assessment report and currently there appears to be limited dialogue with the student body regarding the benefit of having sight of these documents.

2.47   Student engagement is monitored at an informal level within the College. The student voice is important to staff at all levels but there appear to be limited

opportunities to monitor the effectiveness of student engagement at a formal level. This is partly due to the reliance on the close relationship that is maintained between staff and students.

2.48   In conclusion, the review team recommends that, by May 2015, the College ensures students have the opportunity to engage more fully in its quality assurance and decision-making processes, including effective student representation across all programmes and oversight of relevant information such as external examiner reports. Nevertheless, the team found evidence that the student voice makes a difference and that across the majority of its provision the course representation system works well. Overall, the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.49   The College has robust assessment and internal moderation/verification procedures in place which are supported by College and UCLan policies, procedures and assessment regulations. This ensures that assessment meets academic threshold standards and specified module learning outcomes through a varied range of academic and practical assessment activities. The guidelines to staff and students on assessment practice and the requirements and process of seeking extensions are clear and thorough. Students are supported in achieving assessment activities through access to a range of hard copy and online texts and journals and where appropriate, practical resources. Students value the support they receive through formative assessment of assignment scripts. External examiner reports confirm assessment activity enables students to achieve module learning outcomes and assessment evidence is accurately graded.

2.50   The review team tested the College's approach to assessment by reviewing assessment-related policies, procedures and assessment documentation, including module booklets containing assignment briefs; evidence of Pearson assignment brief internal verification; and assessed, graded and internally verified student assignments. In addition, the team discussed assessment activity with teaching and support staff, and students.

2.51   UCLan provides clear and detailed guidance to the course team delivering its teacher education programmes through its Assessment Handbook - 2013-14, Academic Quality Assurance Manual 2013-14 and module handbooks. In addition, the University's Partnership Forums provide an opportunity for consortium teams to discuss issues relating to programme delivery, assessment activity and other issues of mutual concern. The College is responsible for the initial assessment of student assignment scripts and practical teaching activities. Second marking and moderation involves a combination of internal College and external consortium activity, and is conducted in accordance with the awarding body guidelines. The vast majority of PGCE students are satisfied with the clarity of assessment, helpfulness of constructive feedback and the timeliness of summative feedback. College PGCE teaching staff feel well supported by UCLan through liaison with the University's PGCE Programme Director and teaching team, and the opportunities provided to meet with other consortium members. UCLan provides support to placement/work experience mentors through face-to-face meetings once or twice a year, and mentors are visited by a College team member to provide ongoing support. The review team noted that the latest external examiner report makes positive comments on the standards of programme assessment strategies and outcomes.

2.52   Recognition of prior learning (RPL) is offered on all programmes in accordance with the awarding organisation and awarding body guidelines. Currently only the UCLan programme is using RPL to support student progression on programmes. Portfolio evidence is used to inform the decision and is available for scrutiny by the awarding organisation.

2.53   The College's generic Assessment Policy incorporates the rigorous quality assurance strategies used by Pearson to quality assure Higher National programme delivery. Programme handbooks contain comprehensive assessment and avoidance of

academic malpractice guidance. Module handbooks prepared for all Higher National programmes contain a module overview, learning outcomes, assignment briefs, a list of resource texts/journals, and the module scheme of work. Assignment brief and summative assessment internal verification processes are rigorously applied by programme teams. Internal verification feedback is constructive and supportive. There is limited employer engagement in the design of assessment activity. External examiner reports confirm the appropriateness of assessment activity and the accuracy of grade awards.

2.54   The College has addressed the assessment issues identified by students, a limited number of whom expressed dissatisfaction with clarity of assessment activity, lack of formative assessment support, timeliness of assignment feedback and access to grades. Formative assessment regulations and assignment assessment and return of work timetables (two-week assessment period) have now been standardised across all Higher National programmes. However, students reported that the quality and amount of feedback is variable across tutors and programmes. The module booklets and assignment briefs provide evidence that a range of assessment activities are used by the Higher National programmes. However, the College is planning to further enhance the range of assessment activities to maintain student engagement in assessment activity. The College designs assessment activities to develop knowledge and practical skills to enhance the employability of students by ensuring assessment activities are relevant to the workplace.

2.55   UCLan provides clear guidelines on the timing and management of Assessment Boards, and there are regular meetings between the University and the College to discuss programme management and student progress. Not all College Higher National programmes hold academic boards to confirm student achievement and on-course progression, despite being requested to by individual external examiners. The College does not have documented terms of reference for its Higher National academic boards, therefore the review team **recommends** that, by May 2015, the College institutes formal terms of reference for Higher National academic boards.

2.56   The College placement procedures are supported by the Work Experience and Placement Policy and Procedures. The College is diligent in ensuring that the higher education students are able to achieve module learning outcomes while on placement through pre-placement discussions between the College, student and placement provider. It has a range of effective procedures in place to monitor student performance while they are undertaking placement activities. Placement providers complete College reports on student placement performance which are used by College tutors to support the award of a module grade. Placement providers are not formally involved in the module assessment process.

2.57   The HND Exercise Health and Injury Prevention uses a Negotiated Learning Agreement which is completed by the student in consultation with the placement provider and College tutor. The Agreement ensures there is a written record of how the student and the placement provider will work together to ensure that the student is able to meet the Work Placement module learning outcomes. However, the College does not provide placement providers with any formal handbook or other written guidance to ensure that placement objectives, procedures, monitoring and work experience/placement assessment activities are consistently explained to all placement providers (see findings under Expectation B10).

2.58   The review team considers that the College's arrangements for ensuring that students have appropriate opportunities to demonstrate the achievement of both academic and practical learning outcomes through a range of assessment activities meet the Expectation, and that the 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

2.59   The College acknowledges that external examiners are at the heart of the assessment process. They are formally appointed by the awarding body and therefore entirely independent of the College.

2.60   All draft assessment papers are approved by externals in advance of the assessment and samples of assessed work reviewed following internal marking. Apart from the formal aspects of their work, external examiners also advise on the academic standards of the awards, review College resources, meet with staff and students and can assist in sharing good practice.

2.61   External examiner reports are sent to the awarding body and also shared with the College. They are managed through the Higher Education Administrator who reviews reports with the Head of Faculty and Director of Quality and Support Services. An action plan is then agreed at programme level and progress measured through regular reviews during the year. As well as commenting on the rigour of the assessment process and standards achieved by students, they also meet with students, offer views on the management of academic standards and the currency of the curriculum, and highlight any concerns. External examiner reports then form an integral part of the annual course monitoring process.

2.62   The review team was provided with evidence of a range of external examiner reports across higher education programmes delivered by the College together with evidence of the internal process of scrutiny, and the approval and implementation of action plans. The team also met course leaders and staff from the Quality and Support Services team who are responsible for liaison with external examiners.

2.63   The external examiner reports seen by the review team confirm the validity, reliability and integrity of the examination processes and that the external examiners are provided with appropriate access and responses by the College. While students are aware of external examiners and their role, they do not appear to be aware of how to access the published external examiner reports on their programme (see findings for Expectation B5).

2.64   The review team confirms that the College makes appropriate and careful use of external examiners to maintain the standards of awards and as part of the broader processes relating to quality assurance and enhancement. The uses made by the College of external examiners are consistent with the requirements of the Quality Code and therefore the Expectation is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.65   The Senior Management Team and the Higher Education Management Group are responsible for monitoring the College's internal annual self-assessment and risk-coded quality improvement plan processes. The College is diligent in implementing its termly cycle of quality assurance and programme delivery monitoring via Faculty Performance Reviews and the newly instigated Quality Review Weeks.

2.66   The review team tested the robustness and effectiveness of the College's continuous cycle of programme review and action planning by looking at programme self-assessment reports, the Higher Education self-assessment report, the College self-assessment report and the higher education quality improvement plan. The Higher Education Improvement Plan also incorporates any recommendations or actions identified in external examiner reports. Additional evidence viewed by the review team included external examiner reports, student feedback via cross-College questionnaire analysis and module evaluations. The team also discussed programme review with senior, teaching and support staff and students.

2.67   The College complies with UCLan's guidelines and arrangements for the annual monitoring and review of its PGCE programme. This includes a formal meeting between the University and the College, and preparation of the annual monitoring report and quality improvement plan. The College's self-assessment forms part of the University's own annual monitoring report for the PGCE programme. The Director of Quality and Support Services reports to the University on the progress made to resolve actions on the Quality Improvement Plan for the College-based PGCE programme.

2.68   Learner-centred course self-assessment reports and quality improvement plans are completed for all higher education programmes and provide programmes with the opportunity for detailed reflection on all aspects of course management, delivery and quality assurance. All sections of the report and the quality improvement plan are referenced to the relevant sections of the Quality Code. The quality improvement plans are 'SMART' and enable remedial action to be implemented by the course team. The programme-level self-assessment quality improvement plans feed into the risk-coded Continuous Improvement in the Management of Quality of Higher Education plan, which is monitored and reviewed at senior management level.

2.69   Module evaluations are an important element of the within-year monitoring of programme delivery and student satisfaction. Up until the current year each higher education programme at the College has used its own version of a module evaluation form. The College acknowledged that this lack of standardisation resulted in anomalies in the nature of information being incorporated into the self-assessment reports, and to standardise the content of student feedback the College has devised new module evaluations which are now being used to gather student feedback on all higher education modules (see findings under Expectation 3.3).

2.70   There is no employer engagement or student engagement in the preparation of self-assessment reports. Students are being involved in the validation of self-assessment reports for the first time this academic year, and it is proposed to include students in the self-

assessment process at the end of the current academic year. The review team found that there is no external representation on the self-assessment validation panels (see findings under Expectation 3.4). The College posts the cross-College Self-Assessment Report on the VLE but not the programme-level self-assessment reports.

2.71   The review team finds that the College has robust procedures in place for the annual and within-year monitoring of its higher education provision. The procedures implemented by the College for its continuous cycle of programme review draw on a comprehensive range of data and evidence and allow for timely action planning. In conclusion, the team considers that the Expectation is met, and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.72   The College has generic Appeals and Complaints Policies. All students initially follow the College's procedures for complaints and appeals and only follow the complaint and assessment appeals of their awarding body/organisation when the College's procedures have been exhausted.

2.73   The Complaints Procedure is available on the website and in student handbooks. Student handbooks from awarding bodies confirm that the College manages complaints initially but that they can subsequently be raised with the awarding body.

2.74   In all circumstances the College attempts to deal with complaints informally and encourages students to bring issues directly to the staff involved and through the class representative if it is a cohort issue. Occasionally programme mentors help students articulate their concerns to course staff which is a helpful mechanism, although students need to be provided with clear information that confirms that advice from programme mentors is not independent of the College. Informal complaints are recorded on the student's Individual Learning Plan but are not logged centrally. Due to the small numbers of staff involved, the College considered that any recurring issues would be picked up at College level. However, it was unclear to the review team how the College could ensure consistency in dealing with issues raised and how the College could learn from any trends and recurring issues. As a consequence, the review team **recommends** that, by May 2015, the College institutes mechanisms for using informal complaints to inform its quality processes.

2.75   All formal academic appeals are managed by the validating University. The appeals procedures are suitably communicated to students in handbooks with the grounds and timelines for making an appeal.

2.76   The College has an Appeals Policy and Procedure outlined in the student handbook which permits students to question the academic judgement of the marker and request for work to be re-marked. It was unclear to the review team how this procedure was aligned to the policies of the College's awarding body/organisation and whether students understood the relationship between the two sets of procedures. The team therefore **recommends** that, by March 2015, the College formally agrees, and communicates to students, an academic appeals process that aligns with the awarding body's/organisation's appeals policy.

2.77   No formal complaints or appeals have been raised by higher education students within the last three years and this appears to be largely because issues are resolved at an informal level. The close relationship between staff and students, however, could be a potential barrier to students accessing the formal procedures. Where complaints have arisen within the College, there appear to be suitable processes to manage them and trends are monitored. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and that, although there are two recommendations in this area, 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

2.78   The College understands that its responsibility within Expectation B10 is limited to the management of learning opportunities with organisations other than the relevant awarding body. The College has an agreement with UCLan clearly detailing the responsibilities of the College relating to the delivery and management of the PGCE programme.

2.79   A number of College programmes also include work-based learning modules as part of the curriculum and this is seen as a welcome link to industry and the development of students' employability skills. The College has in place clear policies and procedures designed to manage learning opportunities provided to students in collaboration with employers, and these modules and the placement arrangements are supported by the Work Experience and Placement Policy and Procedures. There are also vetting procedures for placement providers to ensure that students are safe while on placement.

2.80   The review team examined a range of documentary evidence, identified below, demonstrating how the College manages interactions with the placement providers to support the learning of students. The team also raised questions at meetings with staff and students on the processes and experience of organising and participating in learning opportunities outside the College.

2.81   The review team found that pre-placement discussions between the College, individual students and placement providers take place to ensure that the higher education students can achieve the anticipated learning outcomes. Placement providers are not formally involved in module assessment although they do complete reports on student progress and activity during the placement which are used to support the award of the module grade. In one area, the HND in Exercise, Health and Injury Prevention, a Negotiated Learning Agreement is used to clarify the expectations during the placement and to ensure that the student is able to meet the learning outcomes.

2.82   The College does not supply external organisations that provide placements for higher education students with any formal handbook or other written guidance to ensure that the placement objectives, procedures, monitoring arrangements and arrangements for any assessment activities are consistently understood by all stakeholders. As a consequence, the review team **recommends** that, by March 2015, the College provides all placement providers with written guidance to support their role in managing the learning experience of work-based students (see findings under Expectation B6).

2.83   The review team concludes that the College manages its collaborations with external organisations effectively and consistently and meets the Expectation. While the College does not currently provide placement providers with formal guidance on their role in managing the learning experience of work-based learning students, the team considers the level of risk to be 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

2.84   The College offers no postgraduate provision, therefore this Expectation is not applicable.

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.85   In reaching its judgement on the quality of learning opportunities, the review team considered its findings against the criteria outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All Expectations relating to the quality of learning opportunities are met and the associated risks under each Expectation are considered to be low.

2.86   The review team found good practice in the area of academic and pastoral support. Other factors that contributed to the positive judgement include the College's approach to programme design, the physical learning and real-work environments, the College's links with employers and the development of students' employability skills.

2.87   The review team identified six recommendations in the areas of admissions, student engagement, academic appeals, assessment and work placements. In all cases the recommendations pose a low risk to the Expectation and relate to minor omissions or a need to amend or update details in documentation without the need for major structural, operational or procedural change.

2.88   Although the review team has identified a number of areas for improvement under the quality of student learning opportunities, the team is satisfied that overall the College's management of this area **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 Although the College does not have a formal information policy, protocol or procedure to support staff in ensuring that the information the College publishes about itself is accurate and current, there are clear mechanisms in place to ensure that any published material is correct and reviewed regularly. Information published by the College on the UCLan teacher education programmes has to be approved by the University prior to publication.

3.2 The review team examined a wide range of documents and media including the College website, the Higher Education Prospectus, the College Hub, and information for prospective and current students including course information sheets, induction material, student/course handbooks, and module handbooks. The team also raised questions at meetings with staff on the process of checking and ensuring the accuracy of information and meetings with students on their experience of information that is provided to them.

3.3 The information provided by the College regarding programmes is accurate though at times lacks detail; applicants are informed that 'regular' and 'extensive' home study will be required, without an indication of the expected hours of independent study. The awarding bodies are advertised to students during their induction; however, only the programmes awarded by UCLan have clear branding and information about the body. It would be unclear to prospective students who were not already studying at the College that the Higher National programmes are awarded by Pearson until the point of their induction. The review team therefore **recommends** that, by March 2015, the College ensures that programme information given to prospective students consistently identifies the awarding organisation.

3.4 The College publishes a range of information about the higher education programmes it offers on the College's website, and in the Higher Education Prospectus, which is available on the website. Responsibility for ensuring all marketing material is correct, current and signed off, whether hard copy or electronic, is jointly held by the Head of Faculty and the Marketing Manager. The course material is confirmed by the Course Director with the Marketing Manager to ensure accuracy.

3.5 The College Hub is a potentially powerful learning aid allowing students to access learning materials from any off-site location. The College undertakes routine analysis of the quality of the content posted on the College Hub and provides training for staff to ensure that the content and quality of material is suitable.

3.6 The review team finds that information for current students is fit for purpose, trustworthy and accessible. The team concludes that the Expectation is met and that the level of risk associated with the single recommendation in this area is low overall.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

3.7   In reaching its judgement on the quality of the information produced by the College about learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The Expectation in this area is met and the risk is considered low.

3.8   The review team found that information for students is generally accurate and accessible, and that there are effective mechanisms in place for ensuring its accuracy. Students were positive about all aspects of the information they receive in the course of their studies.

3.9   The review team made one recommendation under this Expectation. The team found that the College does not clearly identify the awarding organisation in information provided to prospective students on its Higher National programmes. The team therefore recommends that the College ensures that programme information given to prospective students consistently identifies the awarding organisation.

3.10   Overall, the review team concludes that the quality of information provided by the College about its provision **meets** UK expectations.

4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1   The College's approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities is through its Strategic Plan 2013-14. College Governors, supported by the Senior Management Team, retain strategic responsibility for the enhancement of the students' learning opportunities. The College has defined its interpretation of the term 'enhancement' as the 'deliberate and systematic process of institutional self-reflection and change that leads to improvement in student learning opportunities' and perceives enhancement to be a function of the management of quality assurance activities.

4.2   The review team tested the College's strategic and operational approach to taking deliberate steps to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities through a review of the management structure, minutes of relevant meetings, the student submission and students' engagement in quality assurance. The team also met the Principal, senior managers, teaching and support staff, and students to understand the College's strategic and operational approach to enhancement.

4.3   There is a strong and clearly defined management structure for higher education quality assurance and programme delivery contained within the overall College management structure. Enhancement is implemented through the effective management of higher education quality assurance processes whose function is to ensure there is a culture of continual improvement in the management, delivery and assessment of the College's higher education provision. The Senior Management Team retains close oversight of the College's higher education provision. There are designated senior and middle management personnel with designated responsibility for aspects of higher education. The College has recently created the new post of Director of Quality and Student Services, to support the further development of cross-College and higher education quality assurance procedures. The Director of Quality and Student Services supports the Higher Education Management Group and curriculum areas with higher education quality assurance issues. Cross-College strategic and operational oversight of the higher education curriculum is managed by the Director of Curriculum and the Head of Faculty for Sport, Care, Art, Media and Public Services who is the College lead for higher education programmes and its nominee for liaising with the College's higher education awarding body and awarding organisation.

4.4   The College's internal higher education quality assurance procedures are supported by an effective range of committees which permit a two-way flow of information between senior managers and teaching staff. There is a regular cycle of programme-level team meetings which focus on programme-level management, quality assurance and delivery. The Higher Education Support Group is a self-supporting forum for all higher education tutors. Group meetings are highly valued by higher education tutors and act as a mechanism for tutors to share good practice and discuss issues of mutual concern, although until this academic year, the Group have not kept any formal records. The current academic year will see the introduction of formal record-keeping of the Group's meeting activities. The Higher Education Management Group is the lead Committee for higher education and is responsible for overseeing the implementation of strategic, managerial and operational programme delivery and the quality assurance of higher education programmes to maximise the student learning experience. The Group filters the dissemination of information from the Governors

and Senior Managers to programme teams, and from programme-level meetings to senior manager meetings.

4.5	Additional programme monitoring takes place through the Faculty Performance Reviews and Curriculum Review Meetings which consider ongoing operational issues relating to programme management and delivery. The newly initiated termly Quality Review Weeks provide a platform for reviewing the quality of programme delivery and student experience.

4.6	The College makes good use of its annual self-assessment process to reflect on the student learning experience. Programme teams receive annual self-assessment updating training. The self-assessment process enables programme teams and curriculum managers to consider feedback from the College's class representatives, the student voice for example, module evaluations, the Learner Conference, and external examiners. Any issues or recommendations arising feed into risk-coded quality improvement plans which are subject to a cycle of review. To provide consistency in the evaluation of the module learning experience, the College has completed the review and standardisation of module booklets and module evaluation forms. These are now in use across all Pearson higher education programmes. The students reported that they found the module handbooks informative and helpful.

4.7	Further examples of the College's responses to student requests have resulted in the reorganisation of College facilities to provide higher education students with a quiet learning area and access to refreshment facilities. To ensure students have access to a wide range of learning resources, the College entered into formal agreements with the University of Cumbria and the University of Lancaster to enable College students on compatible programmes to have access to the Universities' e-learning resources. The use of the e-learning resources is very highly valued by College students.

4.8	All programmes have effective employer links, and some are very successful at providing students with a range of employment-related knowledge and/or practical skills. For example, the Public Services programme uses relevant employers/professional personnel/visits to, for example, area constabularies, fire service and local NHS facilities, to enhance students' knowledge and experience of career opportunities in the public services sector. All Public Services students are actively engaged in voluntary work-based activities. The role of employers and other stakeholders in enhancing the student learning experience includes the use of external speakers, external visits and work experience/ placement experiences. The use of overseas placements, for example in the USA, Slovakia and Bulgaria, provides students with a highly valued learning experience. Students also receive an information, advice and guidance presentation and employment skills training, for example CV writing and interview skills.

4.9	The College's strategic approach to enhancing students' learning opportunities has resulted in a College-wide culture of self-reflection which ensures that senior and middle managers and teaching and support staff are continuously aware of the need to develop and enhance students' learning opportunities through contextualised classroom/workshop learning; placement and work-based learning; and the provision of high-quality learning resources. Overall, the review team concludes that the College takes deliberate steps to enhance and develop the quality of the students' learning opportunities and therefore the Expectation is met with a low level of risk.

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

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.10   The College has a strategic approach to enhancing students' learning opportunities which has resulted in a College-wide culture of self-reflection and commitment to develop and enhance the student learning experience. Senior and middle managers and teaching and support staff have a continual awareness of the need to develop and enhance students' learning opportunities. This was evidenced through contextualised classroom/workshop learning; placement and work-based learning; and the provision of high-quality learning resources.

4.11   Enhancement is implemented through the effective management of higher education quality assurance processes including a clearly defined management structure, an effective structure of committees, the annual self-assessment process and associated quality improvement plans, within-year programme monitoring arrangements, and the College's responsiveness to student requests and feedback.

4.12   Overall, 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 Employability is a key feature of programmes at the College and the underpinning purpose of higher education is to enhance students' prospects in the workplace. Many staff are recruited for their industrial experience and there are good links with a variety of local employers. Indeed, staff are required to maintain their 'industrial currency' by undertaking short placements in industry every three years.

5.2 Employability is promoted by a range of activities. At College level, the overall strategy is to provide a 'clear line of sight to work' and the ethos is exclusively dedicated to producing students with the necessary skills and competencies to meet the needs of the workplace. The Careers Service provides assistance and support for individual career consultations and students can receive tailored and individual support. Workshops are also offered across a wide range of personal development and employability skills. These include CV writing, interview skills, mock interviews and general career planning.

5.3 At programme level, employability modules are embedded in all College programmes, and comprise work experience-type modules and modules covering more generic skills. Examples of the former include the Work-based Experience Unit in year two of the HND Public Services where students undertake a placement with a minimum of 60 hours and reviews of the work undertaken form part of the final report for assessment. Participating students also receive a reference following completion of the placement. In the HND Health and Social Care students obtain their own placements prior to the start of the programme and submit a reflective account of the real-life experiences encountered. Placement providers also report on the student's attendance, punctuality, attitude, interest and motivation.

5.4 In other subject disciplines, students are encouraged to volunteer for projects - for example in HND Sports Management, coaching placements are available at schools, and occasionally at European Sports camps. Elsewhere, within the Creative Arts, employability modules include participation in community music projects and the provision of live sound for small venues. HND Business students can engage in a business strategy exercise based on case study material supplied by a local employer. Students are invited to prepare a strategy for the company and feedback is given by the Board of Directors.

5.5 Away from the workplace, a number of the employability modules are focused on the broader development of employment skills. For example, some modules seek to develop the students' awareness of their own responsibilities and performance, the further development of interpersonal skills, working in teams and developing strategies for problem-solving.

5.6 In addition to the formal employability modules, students are expected to participate in the real-work environments at the College. These are on-campus business enterprises including hair and beauty salons, a restaurant, a cattery, a nursery, recording studios and a sport and fitness centre, where students undertaking relevant courses enjoy real-work experience.

5.7 Students also benefit from ongoing links with industry contacts throughout their programmes. This can involve 'industry days' where master classes are delivered by specialists and employability fairs attended by employers and industry partners.

5.8 A number of students have benefited from the Europass Scheme where mini-placements are offered abroad. Participating students gain a Europass Certificate.

As a result of these initiatives, Health and Social Care students have spent three weeks in Madrid on placement, Sports Management students have attended sports camps in Slovakia, and Animal Welfare students have spent time at a veterinary clinic in Crete and a zoo in Holland.

5.9   All of the above initiatives and activities provide a rich and varied choice of employment-related learning and enrichment opportunities. They are a testament to the commitment of the College to provide the best possible opportunities for its students and arise as a result of the excellent links with local industry. While there does not appear to be any formal evaluation of the effectiveness of the employability initiatives through the annual student survey or elsewhere, they are clearly well regarded by students.

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/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* (FHEQIS).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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