



# Trends in good practice from Higher Education Review 2013-16

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## **Executive summary**

In order to understand the lessons learned over the three years of HER, this report focuses on practice that made a positive contribution to the maintenance of academic standards and the quality of learning and teaching. For that reason, collective references to alternative providers, FECs and HEIs are representative of organisations in which reviewers identified good practice - they do not relate to all providers or types of providers in the sector.

Across the sector, many providers have reviewed their curriculum, aimed at enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, which has led to an increase in research-informed teaching, problem-based learning, work-based research projects, and electronic forms of assessment and feedback. Teaching innovation and excellence is now widely rewarded through teaching awards linked to career progression, in addition to Higher Education Academy accreditation and National Teaching Fellowship awards.

Institutional understandings of graduate skills and attributes are inextricably linked to employability and are expressed as a combination of professional socialisation and personal development. Employers expect 21st century graduates to be independent learners and thinkers, to possess self-awareness, and to demonstrate initiative and entrepreneurship. Employability is embedded in curriculum and quality assurance processes and is mapped to learning outcomes. Graduate skills frameworks, developed in conjunction with employers, students and other stakeholders, define a range of skills that enable students to succeed in their chosen careers. Digital literacy is an essential component of employability and is developed through the increased use of technology enhanced learning. Technology enhanced learning champions have driven the digital skills development of staff and students, and technology-focused learning hubs provide support for the use of new technologies such as virtual classrooms, podcasts, video-conferencing and digital libraries.

Staff development is fundamental to developing innovative practices, which was reflected in the resources that providers invested in it, and the depth and breadth of training undertaken (mandatory and other) is noteworthy. HEIs allocate time for developmental activities and the dissemination of innovative practices; in FECs, peer observation is directly linked to staff development and the sharing of good practice. In alternative providers, teaching staff are observed regularly, and effective staff development policies promote academic, professional and pedagogic skills.

International partnerships and increasing international student numbers continued to be a priority for providers across the sector. Specific roles, such as pro-vice-chancellor for global affairs, were created to drive the implementation of an international curriculum and to expand learning and research opportunities for staff and students. A subtle change in vocabulary was discernible over the period of HER as 'internationalisation' was replaced by phrases such as: developing a global character, offering global programmes, communities of global citizens, global employment opportunities, and attaining a global reach.

In the first two years of HER, reviewers found that while there had been systematic interrogation of data in best practice, elsewhere there were inconsistencies in the use of data, limited oversight of the currency and accuracy of it, and a lack of clarity as to how it was used to inform planning. However, by the end of HER, robust scrutiny had improved the validity, reliability and availability of data across the sector. Accurate data enables correct judgements to be made, informs strategic planning and programme development, and provides a secure basis for the maintenance of academic standards. Data is used at programme, school and faculty levels by professional, academic and administrative staff, and by students. Improvements in the reporting and analysis of data have made real-time data available to staff, through the use of easily accessible dashboards, and data are used effectively to monitor and evaluate enhancement activities.

## **1 Introduction**

In 2013-16, HER was QAA's principal review method for universities and FECs providing higher education in England and Northern Ireland. A variant of HER - HER (AP) - became QAA's primary review method for alternative providers of higher education in 2014, and continues to operate. HER was carried out by peer reviewers (staff and students from other providers) and culminated in the publication of HER findings reports, which summarised key themes and trends.

The UK higher education sector accommodates considerable diversity, reflecting different types of providers (universities, colleges of higher education, and a wide variety of other institutions, charities and companies), courses and students. The further education sector is large, diverse and complex, with a long tradition of providing higher education. Further education providers vary from general FECs to specialist or sixth-form colleges. Alternative providers are also an important part of the UK higher education landscape, operating predominantly in England, with the greatest concentration being in London. Alternative providers offer highly specialised programmes and increase students' choice of where, what and how to study.

## **2 Methodology**

This report is a comprehensive analysis of 308 HER reports - 59 HEI reports, 176 FEC reports (including HER Wales) and 73 alternative provider reports - conducted during the three-year period of 2013-16. The brief for this report was to identify themes and trends, and to offer insight into the state of standards and quality across different parts of the higher education sector. HER reports provide a rich set of data and information, and evidence of the enhancement of learning through positive engagement with QAA and the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code). QAA findings reports<sup>1</sup> detail how many providers received positive outcomes, and how many received unsatisfactory judgements and failed to meet the expectations of the Quality Code in one or more areas.

In order to discern the lessons learned from the three years of HER, this report focuses on what worked well and on practices that made a positive contribution to academic standards and the quality of learning and teaching. For that reason, collective references in this report to alternative providers, FECs and HEIs are representative of organisations in which reviewers identified good practice - they do not relate to all providers, or types of providers, in the sector. Due to the number of examples, it is not possible to record here every instance of good practice and innovation mentioned in the HER reports; consequently, only illustrative examples are included. Wherever possible, examples other than those highlighted in QAA

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<sup>1</sup> QAA findings reports, available at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/research/analysis/review-findings](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/research/analysis/review-findings).

findings reports have been used. For clarity, a list of contracted words and acronyms can be found in the glossary.

The 308 HER reports were analysed using NVivo qualitative data analysis software as an analytical tool. Two section headings from the HER framework:

- learning opportunities
- how providers enhance students' learning

together with the HER thematic topics:

- student engagement in quality assurance and quality enhancement
- student employability
- digital literacy
- internationalisation

were used to structure the analysis. The themes highlighted in this report are:

- Graduates for the 21st Century
- Collaborative Provision and Partnerships
- Innovative Practice
- Internationalisation
- Use of Data
- Good Practice.

## 3 Analysis

### 3.1 Graduates for the 21st Century

Institutional understanding of graduate skills and attributes is inextricably linked to employability and is expressed as a combination of professional socialisation and personal development. Employability is embedded in curriculum and quality assurance processes, and mapped to learning outcomes. Employers offer an extensive range of opportunities to develop employability skills through work experience, work shadowing, volunteering, internships, research and part-time employment.

#### Good practice

Nottingham Trent University is engaged with a wide range of mutually beneficial employer engagements. These relationships have a positive impact on the experience and career development of students and produce clear benefits for all stakeholders. At the University of the West of England, engagement with employers is highly effective and there are links with a wide range of industries and professions. Students confirmed that the links with employers and industry were a reason for applying to study at the University. The opportunities accessed through employability-focused initiatives at De Montfort University made a positive impact on the student learning experience.

Graduate skills frameworks, developed in conjunction with employers, professional bodies, industry advisory councils, alumni and students, define a range of skills that, when added to subject-specific academic and professional skills, develop attributes that enable students to succeed in their chosen careers. Employers expect 21st century graduates to be independent learners and thinkers, possess self-awareness, and demonstrate initiative and entrepreneurship.

There has been considerable investment in careers services that support students during work placements and provide individual guidance in preparing for graduate employment. These services work closely with teaching staff, ensuring that employability is embedded in the curriculum. In best practice examples, employers were supported in the creation of frameworks that support students during work placements and internships. The number of staff working in careers services had increased and several HER reports mention that career services attained the Matrix quality standard.<sup>2</sup>

#### Good practice

London Business School students receive one-to-one career coaching. The impact of the career services department on the employability of the students it supports is demonstrated by the School's position in business school rankings.

Digital literacy (the ability to live, learn and work in a digital society)<sup>3</sup> is an essential component of employability and is developed through the increased use of technology enhanced learning. Technology enhanced learning champions in HEIs and e-learning coaches in FECs have driven the digital skills development of staff and students. Technology-focused learning hubs provide support for the innovative use of new

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<sup>2</sup> The Matrix quality standard assesses and measures how organisations support students in their career, learning, work and life goals. For more information, see <http://matrixstandard.com>.

<sup>3</sup> Developing students' digital literacy, available at: [www.jisc.ac.uk/guides/developing-students-digital-literacy](http://www.jisc.ac.uk/guides/developing-students-digital-literacy).

technologies such as virtual classrooms, podcasts, video-conferencing and digital libraries. Across the sector, VLEs have become a primary interactive medium for learning and communication, and their accessibility across multiple devices helps to develop independent learning.

### **Good practice**

Middlesex University's digital literacy project is aimed at reviewing current practice and identifying staff development needs, to realise the potential of digital literacy as a graduate attribute, and the updating of the VLE platform. Oxford University's Digital and Information Literacy Framework uses technology enhanced learning approaches and appropriate tools to build online communities, and to provide support materials for staff and students. The Digital UCLan project at the University of Central Lancashire set standards for content on the VLE, the management of electronic assessment, mobile study and online communication. Remote access allows students to participate in classroom activity if they are unable to attend the campus.

## 3.2 Collaborative Provision and Partnerships

Providers across the sector have long-established partnerships with private organisations, PSRBs, health organisations, European and international organisations, knowledge transfer partnerships, and local enterprise organisations. HEIs, FECs and alternative providers work closely with employers, business and industry to provide workplace settings that secure access to specialised resources in the workplace, such as high-voltage equipment, to enhance student learning and develop employability skills. FEC collaborative provision focused on market-led approaches and in meeting the needs of local economies. FECs invest in vocational facilities, visits to trade shows and exhibitions, and entry into competitions and awards, which enhances students' industry skills and knowledge. HEIs created vocational panels to understand the needs of local employers and to develop new provision, and lead governors with professional and industrial leadership experience are appointed to university councils.

### Good practice

West Sussex College, an FEC, is located in areas where the socioeconomic context is shaped and influenced by proximity to London Gatwick Airport. The majority of the College's higher education provision is taken part-time by students in employment who are seeking career advancement. Aylesbury College provides higher education opportunities to those in the region who are in employment and wish to study locally. At Bath College, an FEC, employer engagement in music production courses gives students access to people working successfully in the industry and to cutting edge facilities, enabling them to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.

When reviewing collaborative partnerships, providers focused on the management of risk and the maintenance of high quality provision to facilitate research and encourage student and staff mobility. Some providers had ended franchise and validation collaborations, which led to a reduction in the number of partnerships and students, while others had increased the number of students with existing partnerships.

The types of collaboration reported included:

- validated provision, where programmes are designed and delivered by partners with the provider's approval and oversight
- collaborative curriculum, where partners develop modules that contribute to a provider's courses
- collaborative presentation, in which partners provide local student support for the provider's qualifications and may contribute to teaching and assessment
- collaborative research degrees, where supervision is delegated to the partner.

Arrangements for collaborative provision covered:

- accreditation of awards
- distance programmes
- franchise and part-franchise
- joint, dual and multiple awards.

Some HEIs also offer certificates in partnership with public sector and commercial employers.

Link tutors are appointed for collaboratively delivered programmes and act as the key contact between the provider and staff in partner organisations. They are involved in the

design and delivery of collaborative programmes, provide timely support and guidance to partner staff, and are essential in maintaining standards and ensuring providers' policies and processes are followed. Improved online communication between partners, employing the same external examiners for collaborative programmes and those delivered by the provider, and providing training for partner staff were all identified as good collaborative practices. Reviewers described best practice examples of collaboration as symbiotic partnerships.

### **Good practice**

The effectiveness of sound quality management of the collaborative provisions at Manchester Metropolitan University rests with the link tutor, as set out in the Institutional Code of Practice for Collaborative Provision and Academic Partnerships. At Bracknell and Wokingham College, an FEC, link tutors attend programme committees, organise standardisation and moderation of assessment, and liaise with the external examiner. At SAE Education Ltd, an alternative provider, reviewers stated that external examiners provide one of the principal means for the maintenance of nationally and internationally comparable standards.

### 3.3 Innovative Practice

Across the sector, many providers have reviewed their curriculum, aimed at enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, which has led to an increase in research-informed teaching, problem-based learning, work-based research projects, and electronic forms of assessment and feedback. Some innovations required operational changes and increased resources to support, for example increased student-tutor contact, a shift in the academic year from semesters to trimesters, and new patterns of programme delivery. Teaching innovation and excellence is now widely rewarded through teaching awards linked to career progression, in addition to Higher Education Academy accreditation and National Teaching Fellowship awards.

#### Good practice

University College London's Connected Curriculum initiative was described as a clearly articulated approach to embedding research-based learning in all programmes. Reviewers noted the positive impact of the University of Hertfordshire Doctoral College in developing the employability of research degree students through the provision of training in professional and cross-disciplinary skills. University of Southampton staff can be rewarded for excellence and innovation in teaching through professorial titles. Leeds Trinity University appointed a Professor of Higher Education Pedagogy and established a Centre of Higher Education Pedagogy, which encourages innovation and enables enhancement initiatives. Abingdon Witney College, an FEC, has introduced the concept of problem-based learning into the curriculum which has developed students' employability skills and enabled entry to medical school. Seventy-three per cent of higher education teaching staff at Hartpury College, an FEC, had achieved Higher Education Academy Fellow or Senior Fellow status.

Staff development is fundamental in developing innovative practices and this was reflected in the resources invested in it across the sector. HEIs allocate time for developmental activities and the dissemination of good practice through communities of practice and networking events. In FECs, peer observation is directly linked to staff development and the sharing of good practice, both of which were identified as notable tenets of enhancement in the HER reports. In alternative providers, teaching staff are observed regularly and effective staff development policies promote academic, professional and pedagogic skills.

#### Good practice

Aberystwyth University builds reflection and enhancement into its quality assurance process. Manchester Metropolitan University's reflective approach to enhancing postgraduate research opportunities for professional development and academic study promoted an inclusive research community. Staff and students at Abingdon College, an FEC, benefit from substantial investment in the professional development of staff. The teacher observation system at Bolton College, an FEC, helps to drive up teaching standards and improve student employability and the student experience. At Derby College, an FEC, the features of good practice are significant and relate to the support for higher education-specific continuous professional development.

There were many innovations in technology enhanced learning. Providers established innovation and technology-focused learning hubs to provide designated support, and to create tools and develop applications to improve the student experience, such as virtual access and social media, and the use of tablets, mobile devices and gaming technology.

### **Good practice**

Lancaster University's innovation hub provides a designated team to support and seek the ideas of students to create tools and applications, aimed at improving the student experience. The hub provides innovative approaches to virtual access to the University for prospective students, and campaigns for improvements to learning spaces, and the use of gaming technology and badges within teaching and learning. UCFB College of Football Business Ltd, an alternative provider, uses social networking platforms to communicate effectively with students. North West Kent College, an FEC, recognises and rewards good practice and innovation in the use of e-learning by staff. Some programmes, such as performing arts, use external platforms such as micro-blogging sites to facilitate interaction and enable students to showcase their work. Tablet computers are loaned to students. North Warwickshire and Hinkley College, an FEC, established an innovative creative media company, Spin-top Media, which is led by higher education students, to give graphic design, moving image, games design and photography students real world experience.

Other innovations included the involvement of alumni in recruitment, delivering master classes, leading graduate conferences and acting as mentors, the use of social media to capture the student voice, and timetabling reform that responds to students' needs.

### **Good practice**

International alumni at Christies Education Ltd, an alternative provider, participate in recruitment processes by offering personal experience and local knowledge to prospective and current students. The University of Leicester engages alumni with employers in career events and its revised employability strategy has significantly enhanced its reputation for graduate employment. Noteworthy innovations at the University of Wolverhampton include the use of social media to gather student feedback, student-led teaching awards for the recognition of excellence in teaching practice, and outreach activity to increase student engagement in underrepresented groups.

### 3.4 Internationalisation

As a result of changes in government policy (2012-16) relating to student visa applications, a number of providers lost their Tier 4 status and were no longer able to recruit international students. Following a review of international provision and consideration of risk and financial matters, other providers had reduced their overseas collaborative arrangements or had entered periods of consolidation.

#### Good practice

Collaborative provision at Liverpool John Moores University has declined as a result of planned changes to the University's portfolio but is anticipated to increase in line with the University's strategy, which identifies partnerships of different sorts as key to realising its vision of a modern civic University with global reach.

The importance of developing international partnerships and increasing international student numbers continues, nonetheless, to be a priority across the sector. Specific roles, such as pro-vice-chancellor for global affairs in HEIs, and international managers or deans of faculty in FECs, were created to drive the implementation of an international curriculum and to expand learning and research opportunities for staff and students. Many HEIs, specialist alternative providers and some FECs with long-established international links had either increased their international collaboration or were seeking opportunities to do so. A number of overseas campuses had been opened and international partnerships were developed specifically to increase the number of international students.

#### Good practice

Queens University Belfast is developing international partnerships with a view to increasing the recruitment of international students to 20 per cent of the overall student population in 2020. Plymouth College of Art intends to build European and worldwide partnerships as part of the development of an international strategy and project work. Basingstoke College, an FEC, is seeking to develop employer-funded full-cost programmes and an international market with China, underpinned by a partnership with a further validating institution.

The impetus for continued global engagement was underpinned by the ethos that home-based students benefit from a strong international perspective and that a multicultural student body enhances learning for all students. Explicit links were made between enhancing employability and developing global citizens, and an increasing number of courses offer opportunities to study abroad on full or part-year exchanges, summer schools, field trips or Erasmus work.<sup>4</sup>

#### Good practice

The London Business School prides itself on recruiting a diverse and international student body. Coventry University makes explicit links between internationalisation and the enhancement of student employability through outward mobility. The University of Kingston participated in a project with the Higher Education Academy and the University

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<sup>4</sup> European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students: <http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/>.

of Bradford called 'Outduction', which looked at the final-year experience and developing employability skills, especially through study abroad and placements.

It was recognised that international applicants often require particular support, which has led to improvements in web-based information, the development of pre-sessional courses and orientation days (which are often delivered in applicants' home countries). The introduction of bridging modules and the rationalisation of programme start dates had improved progression opportunities for international students. Admissions processes had been strengthened and it is common practice for Tier 4 international applicants to be interviewed prior to being sponsored for a visa. Once in the UK, international students are supported by dedicated international support advisers, pastoral tutors, language support and careers advice. HEIs, alternative providers and FECs all acknowledged that maintaining academic standards and the quality of learning in international partnerships requires rigorous quality assurance mechanisms. These frameworks and procedures had been strengthened, and training for staff (and local overseas agents involved in international recruitment) was mandatory in most cases.

### 3.5 Use of Data

Data was generated to support and develop policies and to assess the impact of strategic objectives and enhancement initiatives. It is used to evaluate individual and cohort performance, equality and diversity, collaborative provision, employer engagement and complaints and appeals. Many HEIs had either purchased or developed their own data management and reporting systems and student survey platforms. In FECs, where no cross-college higher education specific data was produced, data was disaggregated to identify issues relating specifically to higher education provision.

Best practice examples in 2015-16 showed that the range of data providers used included:

- the Higher Education Statistics Agency
- the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education survey
- key information sets
- the National Student Survey
- the International Student Barometer
- the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey
- the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey
- internal student satisfaction surveys
- market intelligence sources
- sector comparators
- external examiner reports
- recruitment, retention, progression and achievement data
- annual statutory returns
- periodic monitoring processes.

HEIs used the analysis of data to drive improvements in the student experience and to target support for specific learner groups such as gender and ethnic groups, part-time and distance learners, and failing or vulnerable students. Student representatives are provided with performance data, including non-continuation and achievement rates, and National Student Survey and internal student satisfaction results. Some HEIs had created databases recording, for example, employers who contributed to curriculum development or offer work placements and internships, and this valuable information was shared across institutions. In FECs and alternative providers where responses to student surveys were sometimes too small to provide meaningful data, improved methods of gathering student feedback had been created. A number of alternative providers had moved to networked electronic systems of storage and retrieval of data as part of the enhancement of management information systems.

#### **Good practice**

The University of Derby makes systematic use of student-related data to inform action plans: this includes a Student Attainment Project, which has led to quantifiable improvements in reducing the attainment gap that adversely affects the achievement of many black and minority ethnic students. Leeds Trinity University evaluates the effectiveness of its approach to employability through the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey, demonstrating a high proportion of graduates in employment. DLHE data at the University of Hertfordshire demonstrated that the University's graduate employment rate has risen significantly, and is now ahead of the national benchmark. The 2015 DLHE survey at the University of Bristol showed that 93.4 per cent of recent graduates were in employment or further study.

### 3.6 Good Practice

Good practice focused on activities that enhanced learning and teaching and developed students' employability. A culture of innovation, promoted throughout the sector, was supported by revised corporate plans, and strategies and policies that measured the impact of enhancement initiatives against key performance indicators. Technology enhanced learning strategies and improved IT infrastructures optimised the use of digital technologies and encouraged independent learning.

#### Good practice

The University of Bristol's education strategy identifies the provision of learning and skills opportunities as a core element of enhancing students' future employability. The University considers employability opportunities driven by 'the recruitment of bright and capable students, the provision of an excellent standard of research-informed education, the quality of our employability provision and our close connections with large and small employers'.

A range of approaches were developed to capture the student voice - particularly of under-represented groups, such as part-time, distance learning, postgraduates and students in collaborative provision - and to enhance student engagement in quality assurance processes. This was accomplished by strengthening student representation on committees, and employing the same models of student representation on collaborative programmes, and by responding promptly and transparently to student feedback.

#### Good practice

The comprehensive ways in which Liverpool John Moore's University obtains, monitors, shares and acts upon student feedback in order to improve student engagement and the learning experience is good practice.

HEIs supported student transition to higher education through the increased use of social media, and by establishing mandatory meetings with academic tutors and integrated pastoral support for students with specific learning needs. Alternative providers had rigorous admissions processes and offered extensive support throughout application and induction processes. Transition into higher education in FECs was supported by comprehensive accreditation of prior experiential learning processes; flexible delivery patterns that accommodate part-time study and employment; and a range of 2+2 programmes (first two years in FEC followed by two years in an HEI). Diagnostic testing, academic and pastoral support, and early interventions to support students with mental health issues were also identified as good practice.

#### Good practice

The provision of the Interactive Learning Skills and Communication modules at Navitas UK Holdings Ltd, an alternative provider, prepares students effectively for transition to university. The Department of Computing at Goldsmiths College enables prospective applicants to sample the programme via a departmental blog. The majority of the students enrolled on higher education programmes at Bolton College and Brooklands College, both FECs, are part-time and many are in employment.

Good practice in assessment in HEIs, FECs and alternative providers included the engagement of employers in designing assessments that are relevant to real-world applications, increasing the use of industry assessors and distributing assessments throughout the academic year. Across the sector, students receive timely feedback, generally 10-15 days after submission, which indicates how they can improve.

#### **Good practice**

St Mary's University Twickenham uses comprehensive sets of assessment criteria for different modes of assessment, which promote consistency of assessment and assessment literacy in both staff and students. Synoptic methods of assessment at Brunel University has allowed a more holistic examination of the curriculum, and recent innovations include online and face-to-face staff-student discussions on the grading of assessments. The University of Bradford introduced a post of Attainment Officer to analyse and support student achievement through assessment approaches and strategies.

In the final year of HER, reviewers noted a number of cross-institutional enhancement approaches in HEIs between academic, professional, learning and technology support teams, libraries and careers services.

#### **Good practice**

The University of Hull's strategic transformational approach to cross-institutional enhancement, which involves effective partnership working between professional support and academic teams through a series of integrated projects, was one example of collaborative good practice.

## 4 Discussion

Reviewers found comprehensive evidence of improvements in the student experience and that providers had taken a coherent approach to enhancement and developing globally minded, work-ready graduates. The impact of enhancement initiatives is measured in key performance indicators, which are defined in revised programme design and approval frameworks and implementation plans. The emphasis on developing curriculum was driven by institutional cultures, underpinned by strategies and policies, and achieved by working closely with employers, students and other stakeholders. Embedding employability in more flexible curriculum structures, and increased opportunities for learning and assessment in the work place, were shown to have developed graduate skills.

While staff development was identified as good practice throughout the period of the review, the depth and breadth of training undertaken (mandatory and other) is particularly noteworthy. In addition to the customary in-house training, such as the use and application of institutional policies, mandatory training in HEIs, FECs and alternative providers included:

- a teaching, learning and assessment module for new staff
- methods of assessment and feedback
- technology enhanced learning and the use of VLEs
- developing core curriculum to include creativity, enterprise, employability and globalisation.

Nearly all HEIs and alternative providers also expected teaching and learning staff to attain Higher Education Academy Fellowship status. Mandatory training in most FECs also included:

- a focus on diversity and equality, inclusion and PREVENT (anti-radicalisation)
- regular updates on the Quality Code
- critical thinking and analysis
- reflection and evaluation of practice.

Moreover, there is an expectation that staff teaching vocational-professional subjects maintain their skills through relevant industrial updating. Observation of teaching can identify areas of enhancement in teaching and learning, and, in FECs and many alternative providers, staff are subject to peer observation, which is linked to appraisal and career progression. In most HEIs, peer observation is encouraged rather than mandatory, and teaching excellence is acknowledged through teaching awards linked to career progression.

The importance of developing international partnerships and recruiting international students was seen as a key challenge by HEIs and alternative providers. International activities focused on internationalisation at home (skills, exchange programmes and student placements, and curriculum development) and abroad (recruitment, alumni, and capacity building) and in many cases culminated in fewer collaborations with better partners. Following a review of the international student experience, HEIs and some alternative providers had strengthened policies and procedures and created dedicated websites detailing key information on fees and scholarships, immigration and visas, and studying and living in the UK. Improved pastoral support for international students and a focus on academic skills development in HEIs had reduced the incidence of academic misconduct and complaints to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator. A subtle change in vocabulary was discernible over the period of HER, as 'internationalisation' was replaced by phrases such as: developing a global character, offering global programmes, communities of global citizens, global employment opportunities and attaining a global reach.

In the first two years of HER, reviewers found that, while there had been systematic interrogation of data in best practices, there were inconsistencies elsewhere in the use of data. This included limited oversight of the currency and accuracy of data, and a lack of clarity as to how it was used to inform planning. However, by the end of HER, robust scrutiny had improved the validity, reliability and availability of data in HEIs, FECs and alternative providers. Accurate data enables correct judgements to be made, informs strategic planning and programme development, and provides a secure basis for the maintenance of academic standards. Data is used at programme, school and faculty level by professional, academic and administrative staff, and by students. Improvements in the reporting and analysis of data have made real-time data available to staff, through the use of easily accessible dashboards, and it is used effectively to monitor and evaluate enhancement activities.

## **Glossary**

FEC	further education college
HEI	higher education institution
HER	Higher Education Review
PSRB	professional, statutory and regulatory bodies
VLE	virtual learning environment

QAA2094 - Mar 18

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