Higher Education Review of York College

April 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 York College. The review took place from 1 to 3 April 2014 and was conducted by a team of four reviewers, as follows:

- Professor John Baldock
- Dr Philip Davies
- Mr Steve Evans
- Miss Hannah Reilly (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review the QAA review team:

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

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

In reviewing York College the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland. The themes for the academic year 2013-14 are Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement and Student Employability,[2] and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

The QAA website gives more information about QAA and its mission.[3] A dedicated page of the website explains the method for Higher Education Review of higher education providers in England and Northern Ireland[4] and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents.

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[1] The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/qualitycode.
[2] Higher Education Review themes: www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/higher-education-review-themes.aspx.
[3] QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus.
[4] Higher Education Review web pages: www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/higher-education-review.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about York College

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

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

Good practice

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

- The systematic and effective use of Professional Learning Communities and Breakfast Briefings that enable College-wide sharing of best practice (Expectation B3).
- The effective use of the range of mechanisms designed to enable students to develop their professional potential (Expectation B4).
- The deliberate steps taken to define and promote a range of opportunities that enable students to act as partners in educational enhancement and quality assurance (Expectation B5).
- The comprehensive structure and guidance for supporting tutors and students in creating and maintaining effective relationships with a wide range of employers (Expectation B10).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendation** to York College:

- articulate and disseminate the provider-level strategic approach to enhancing the quality of students' learning opportunities (Enhancement).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The implementation of the new Higher Education Admissions Policy (Expectation B2).

Theme: Student Employability

Employability is a key feature of all programmes at the College, with high levels of immediate graduate employment in demanding and competitive industries. The College demonstrates a priority for the future employment of its students and an extensive range of activities and opportunities are available. There are effective policies and procedures in place to drive initiatives.

Employability is fully embedded across the curriculum, underpinned by an extensive range of industry links and partnerships which result in workplace opportunities and contributions to

the curriculum from industry experts. Students have a wide range of opportunities to experience employability skills, the involvement of professional practitioners at College events and engagement in prestigious projects.

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

About York College

York College (the College) was created in April 1999 by the merger of York College of Further and Higher Education and York Sixth Form College. The College is the largest provider of 16-19 education and work-based learning in the subregion and offers a wide range of subjects, levels and modes of study. The College's mission is to provide a life-enhancing educational experience, through inspirational teaching, working in partnership and helping individuals to be the best they can. The mission statement is 'Where everyone matters and a successful future begins'. The College was a founder member of the York and North Yorkshire Progression Partnership (a HEFCE Strategic Development Fund initiative to support progression into higher education) which has evolved into the current Higher York (previously a HEFCE-funded Lifelong Learning Network). Higher York is a partnership of higher education providers in York and the City of York Council.

The higher education provision has expanded through partnerships with several higher education institutions including the University of York, York St John University, Leeds Metropolitan University, Sheffield Hallam University and the University of Huddersfield. The College also offers higher national diplomas (HNDs) and higher national certificates (HNCs) through Pearson. At the time of the review there were almost 600 higher education students enrolled.

There has not been any significant change to the College's organisational structures, configuration of academic departments or personnel since the QAA Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) in 2009. The main academic change which has arisen recently is the College's decision to transfer all validated Leeds Metropolitan University (LMU) awards to York St John University (YSJU). The decision to transfer validation arrangements from LMU to YSJU was due to LMU approving a new Collaboration and Partnership Strategy in November 2011. The implications of this new strategy for the College were that LMU would not be validating provision where they do not have the subject expertise within the University (this would impact on the College continuing to deliver awards such as the Foundation Degrees in Holistic and Spa Treatments and Media Make-up) and they would not validate 'top-up' awards (level 6) at partner institutions. At that time the College had three 'top-up' level 6 awards validated by LMU. The College felt that this disadvantaged local students, particularly part-time students, who would need to travel to Leeds to complete a level 6 outcome.

This transfer of awarding body required the College to work with YSJU through an extensive academic validation schedule during the 2012-13 academic year to be able to deliver these programmes with YSJU validation approval from the 2013-14 academic year. The outcome has been successfully achieved for all awards submitted for validation. A decision was also taken, due to low applications and enrolments, not to recruit to the Foundation Degree in Engineering pathways in 2013-14 and to review the Engineering portfolio with the support of the College's partner institutions. A decision has been made to recruit to Higher Nationals in Engineering from 2014-15.

The outcomes from the 2009 IQER identified a number of good practice features and recommendations. The good practice has been maintained with the exception of the Debbie Thornton Scholarship scheme, which enabled a wide engagement of staff in research and scholarly activity, to inform curricular development and delivery. It has been superseded by the introduction of Professional Learning Communities, which are communities of practice established for teams to explore/experiment with a range of teaching, learning and assessment activities.

The use of the assessment statements has been maintained through the Assessment & Verification Coordinator who visits relevant award teams annually to ensure assessment statements are implemented. The 'Raising the Standards' campaign has been developed

further into the 'York College Way' (YCW) and 'Good to Great' frameworks which set the standards expected of managers, tutors and support staff. This informs the continuing professional development programme developed around the College values and behaviours. Participation in the Yorkshire Accord Mentoring Scheme has been maintained and two staff with higher education responsibilities have participated within the last two years. Documentation relating to higher education is reviewed by Student Services and Marketing, in liaison with award leaders and the Quality Improvement Team to ensure information is accurate and current.

The five desirable recommendations from the IQER have all been actioned and progressed. Higher education matters are a standard agenda item for the Quality Improvement Strategy Group. A separate Higher Education Annual Report is not published. However, the College has in place a number of ways in which higher education planning and review takes place. These include the production and formal approval of all Annual Programme Reviews through the Higher Education Quality Group, higher education reports and updates to the Quality and Curriculum Committee of Governors.

Explanation of the findings about York 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 threshold academic standards of awards

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

Quality Code, *Chapter A1: The national level*

Findings

1.1   The College has long-standing validation processes. These are conducted according to the procedures of the relevant awarding body or awarding organisation and comprise: a development stage where course proposals are prepared in conjunction with representatives from the awarding body or awarding organisation; an internal scrutiny process within the College; and a faculty scrutiny process by the awarding body or awarding organisation, followed by a validation event including subject experts from the awarding body or awarding organisation and external representation.

1.2   Comprehensive guidance is made available from the relevant awarding body or awarding organisation dealing with the requirements of validation and review, often providing a template for the specification of modules within the award, including their credit rating and level. At the outset of the course development process the FHEQ is used as a reference tool and at validation stage panel members are provided with a copy prior to the validation event to inform scrutiny of the mapping process. The module specifications, produced as part of the validation process, provide a mechanism whereby the validating panel can satisfy itself that the learning outcomes can be achieved with regard to the volume of study, identified through the stated learning hours.

1.3   During delivery of the programmes there are opportunities within the Annual Programme Review process and through external examiners to verify and review the programme levels and volume of study. For example, external examiners in their annual reports are required to comment on the alignment of the outcomes with relevant qualification descriptors and whether students have been given adequate opportunity to demonstrate their achievement of the intended learning outcomes. They are also able to consider these through site visits and meetings with staff and students.

1.4   These procedures provide a process where programme proposals can be matched against the relevant qualification level descriptors at the course development stage, while at the same time reviewing that the volume of study is sufficient to demonstrate that learning outcomes can be achieved across individual modules and the course as a whole. Thereafter, this can be tested through scrutiny instigated by the College and the awarding body in advance of formal validation.

1.5   The review team investigated these processes by considering the examples of guidance from an awarding body dealing with the requirements of validation and review which included documentary requirements and guidance for annual evaluation requirements. Evidence was also provided, through a range of definitive course documents and minutes of validation events, of attention to the requirements of the FHEQ in the level of qualifications, attributes of graduates and mapping of learning outcomes to programme aims and module content. The review team also held meetings with groups of senior staff and academic staff where clear understanding of and familiarity with the processes were displayed. The standard templates for external examiner reports (for all awarding bodies) contain a request for confirmation that the provision meets the threshold academic standards in

accordance with the FHEQ. This is also cross-referenced with the reports of University Liaison Representatives who, while considering these elements themselves, also refer to the findings of external examiners. While meeting with academic staff, examples were also given of relevant external examiner comments during their routine visits.

1.6   The review team found that the processes work effectively. Despite a large number of revalidations during the academic year 2012-13, notably arising from the decision of LMU to withdraw from collaborative arrangements where it did not have relevant internal subject expertise, and the consequent partner arrangements with YSJU, all proceeded successfully and the minutes of the proceedings and decisions of the validation panel did not reveal any major concerns. A number included a condition to ensure the taxonomy of learning outcomes was appropriate to the relevant FHEQ level. The review team was satisfied, having reviewed the minutes of the events and discussed the conditions with relevant academic staff, that the condition related more to terminology in the learning outcomes than any concern as to the substantive nature of the outcomes themselves. External examiner reports do not reveal any concerns on the overall level of assessments, nor do student achievement statistics.

1.7   The validation and review processes are well embedded and understood by relevant staff. They comply strictly with the requirements of the different awarding bodies and no concerns, breaches or omissions are reported in the reports of any proceedings. Overall, the review team finds that Expectation A1 is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.8   The College's validation and programme review processes, detailed above, are also designed to ensure that relevant subject benchmark and qualification statements, and the requirements of professional, statutory or regulatory bodies (PSRBs), are used in the development of programmes and the setting of outcomes. In particular, the format of programme specifications, produced as part of the approval process, requires specific reference to any relevant statements.

1.9   These procedures include matching of the programme proposals against any relevant benchmark statements, PSRB requirements and any employer-based competency statements. Additionally, since 2008 the College has appointed a range of Higher Education Employment Skills Advisors (HEESAs). These are external appointments who are actively engaged in the relevant industry sectors and they report formally on the appropriateness of course structure and content, including the appropriateness of the learning objectives of the programme and all its elements. HEESAs also ensure new programmes are developed using relevant sector skills benchmarks.

1.10   During the delivery of the programmes, mechanisms exist to ensure continuing compliance with Expectation A2, namely during Annual Programme Review and through comments by external examiners during meetings with staff and end-of-year reports.

1.11   The review team investigated these processes by considering examples of programme specifications and definitive course documents where appropriate reference was made to relevant subject benchmark statements, and mapping exercises undertaken to evidence reference to these and other external reference points, including national occupational standards. These were also cross-referenced with the reports of University Liaison Representatives from the awarding bodies who consider these elements themselves. There is also much evidence of direct involvement with employers at the validation stage through relevant validation reports and minutes of validation events. The review team also held meetings with groups of senior staff and academic staff where clear understanding of and familiarity with the processes were displayed.

1.12   The review team found that the processes work effectively. As for the requirements of Expectation A1, and despite the large number of revalidations during the academic year 2012-13, all proceeded successfully and the minutes of the proceedings and decisions of the validation panel did not reveal any major concerns. The use made of the HEESAs provides an extra layer of external verification of industry standards.

1.13   The validation and review processes are well embedded and understood by relevant staff. They comply strictly with the requirements of the different awarding bodies and no concerns, breaches or omissions are reported in the reports of any proceedings. The review team is satisfied that effective processes are in place to ensure that all higher education programmes take account of relevant subject and qualification benchmark statements. Overall, the review team finds that Expectation A2 is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter A3: The programme level*

Findings

1.14   The College maintains procedures for scrutiny of information on aims, learning outcomes and expected student achievement through the validation and programme review processes. These include programme design (in conjunction with employers and with input from HEESAs and students), internal College scrutiny and a further process conducted at faculty level by the awarding body in advance of the final validation, the panel for which includes external representation. The programme specification, forming a key element of programme validation, incorporates a statement of the relevant information and is scrutinised at each element of the overall process.

1.15   The information is then published via course handbooks and programme specifications, and available on the College's virtual learning environment (VLE).

1.16   Relevant information on assessment is also routinely provided by assessment frameworks and assignment briefs. The former set out details of the Assessment Strategy and methods used on a programme, including all processes for setting and approving assessments, marking, moderation, extenuating circumstances, appeals and the external examiner system. The latter contain the precise instructions for a particular assessment and outline what is expected of students.

1.17   The maintenance and updating of definitive information is managed through the Quality Improvement Team and includes a process for annual review, updating where necessary, and approval of any changes by the awarding body.

1.18   All of the processes are designed to ensure the reliability and integrity of information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and assessment requirements in advance of publication.

1.19   Examples have been provided of the input of the Quality Improvement Team, for example the Framework Update meetings held in 2012-13, at which the Assessment and Validations Coordinator provides an update to course leaders on changes to regulations and use of the VLE. The Higher Education Administrator has access to all the programme pages and is able to add cross-College updates, documents and changes when appropriate.

1.20   The review team considered examples of programme specifications and assessment frameworks, and also met with a group of professional staff where responsibility for the accuracy of information was clear and understood by all.

1.21   During the meeting with students it was clear to the review team that the information provided in the student handbook and assignment briefs helps them understand what is expected of them and how to achieve this. The review team noted that the course handbooks tend to be in a common format to ensure consistency and refer to the relevant programme specifications on the VLE. Few students reported that they had taken the opportunity to view the programme specifications, although those that did felt they were useful.

1.22   The review team found that the processes for the scrutiny and publication of information on aims, learning outcomes and expected student achievement are clear, work effectively and the availability of such information is welcomed by students. There is also a

clear mechanism for the review and maintenance of information which, helpfully, is the sole responsibility of the Quality Improvement Team.

1.23   The review team is satisfied that effective processes are in place to ensure that definitive information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements is available for each higher education award and that such information is reviewed and updated as necessary. Overall, the review team finds that Expectation A3 is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter A4: Approval and review*

Findings

1.24   The College works with university partners to validate and periodically review its higher education programmes. The awarding bodies and awarding organisation are responsible for setting and maintaining threshold academic standards for all its higher education programmes and the College shares responsibility for managing the programmes. The Higher Education Quality Group has overall responsibility within the College for setting, maintaining and assuring standards of higher education provision which includes relationships with awarding bodies, the awarding organisation and professional bodies. The Higher Education Quality Group reviews the Annual Programme Review process, all external examiner, subject contact and HEESA reports, and College reports forwarded to higher education institutions, the awarding organisation and professional bodies.

1.25   There are formal documented arrangements with all partners. Management and due diligence processes are specified in the partnership delivery agreements which are well embedded in College processes. Programme design and approval is regulated by the awarding body's and awarding organisation's requirements and is governed by their regulations. The College aims to adhere closely to these regulations and monitors its activities through the oversight of the Assistant Principal of Higher Education and Lifelong Learning who reports formally to the Quality and Curriculum Committee of Governors and the Higher Education Quality Group. The delivery of programmes is further monitored by awarding bodies and the Higher Education Quality Group.

1.26   The College conducts internal consultation and scrutiny prior to the submission of all validation or periodic review documents to the awarding body to ensure the validity and relevance of programmes. Study levels are set through the mapping of learning outcomes to the qualification descriptors in the FHEQ which is done jointly with the awarding body. The volume of study is also agreed with the awarding body and student representation is used to check this.

1.27   The validity and relevance of awards are regularly checked through the use of external examiners, HEESAs, employer engagement activity, University Liaison Representatives, Link Tutors and Collaborative Delivery Coordinators. Student representation is present throughout the validation and review process and external examiners are consulted in review. The Collaborative Delivery Coordinator reports on each programme for LMU and University Liaison Representatives report for YSJU who also employ a scrutiny committee to review the development of all programmes and provide an overview of all quality issues in validation and the periodic review of programmes.

1.28   The team met with senior managers and academic staff to test how effective validation processes are implemented and to question how well the College makes informed use of external reference points at validation such as the FHEQ and subject benchmark statements. The team also examined the key role of the Higher Education Quality Group and discussed with members how they conduct monitoring processes to ensure that the validity and relevance of higher education programmes are specifically addressed by course staff. The team examined validation reports and related documentation: the two available periodic review reports, the minutes of relevant meetings and the mechanisms the College has for checking that this expectation is being evaluated.

1.29   The team looked at partnership agreements to see how well management processes implement the requirements of these agreements and how well they are embedded. The team met with a range of staff to examine the College's use of the Quality Code, the awareness of staff and the impact of its use on College programmes.

1.30   The team found that the College has an effective process for the design and approval of higher education programmes. The review process adheres closely to awarding body procedures and is well embedded. The College makes informed use of relevant external reference points. At validation, programmes are aligned to the FHEQ and the subject benchmark statements. The College is making effective use of the Quality Code and there are examples of the Quality Code being used in regulating the College's higher education provision.

1.31   The team found the comprehensive range of mechanisms for the approval and periodic review of the validity and relevance of programmes effective. These include input from external examiners, HEESAs, employer engagement activity, University Liaison Representatives, Link Tutors and Collaborative Delivery Coordinators.

1.32   Programme teams work well with the awarding body to ensure alignment with the FHEQ and this is subject to further scrutiny within the College and by the awarding bodies. Development and Enhancement meetings take place for all higher education programmes. These are composed of students, the award team and members of the Quality Improvement Team. They review the validity and relevance of awards, inform in-year developments and feed into the Annual Programme Review. The College is aware of the Quality Code and applies this to partnership arrangements and its validation processes effectively.

1.33   Validation and periodic review processes are well embedded and fully comply with awarding body regulations. All processes specified by the awarding bodies were found by the review team to be operational and working well. The review team concludes that the College has an effective process to approve and periodically review programmes that adheres to awarding body and awarding organisation guidelines. Informed use is made of relevant external reference points. The articulation of policy and practice of awarding bodies, the awarding organisation and relevant external reference points as part of the programme design, approval, monitoring and review processes is very well established and the review team concludes that Expectation A4 is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter A5: Externality*

Findings

1.34   The College makes use of a wide range of independent and external expertise to manage its academic standards. The College consults with University Liaison Representatives and Link Tutors in the preparation, development and running of programmes. The College also works with professional bodies who provide external benchmarks which the College maps to relevant modules. The Higher Education Quality Group reviews the contribution of external expertise through the Annual Programme Review process and also reviews of all external examiner reports to ensure College compliance with external recommendations.

1.35   The College aims to make good use of the views of external stakeholders. These include input from external examiners, HEESAs, employer engagement activity, University Liaison Representatives, Link Tutors and Collaborative Delivery Coordinators. External examiners and University representation are present at assessment boards to ensure the consistent application of awarding body regulations. Where possible the College also seeks to involve employers and students in validation and periodic review processes.

1.36   External examiners are nominated by the College and appointment is made by the awarding bodies. External examiners scrutinise assignment briefs and approve all assessment results. External examiner reports are required for each programme for the College. External examiner reports are submitted to the Quality Improvement Team who provide reports for award leaders detailing strengths, weaknesses, actions and progress from the previous academic year highlighted by the external examiner. These reports are discussed by the College's Higher Education Quality Group and in programme Development and Enhancement meetings where actions are made and progress reported.

1.37   The College makes good use of sector benchmark statements and relevant occupational standards are used in the subject areas of Sport Therapy, Holistic and Spa Management, the Foundation Degree in Young Children's Learning Development and the BA (Hons) in Education Leadership - Children's Workforce. National occupational standards are consulted for management and leadership for Foundation Degrees in Management with Business Studies and Community and Public Services.

1.38   The review team met with senior managers and academic staff to question how well the College makes informed use of external reference points. The team examined evidence from a range of definitive course documents, including the BA (Hons) Management and BA (Hons) Public Sector Management, to determine if appropriate 'mapping' of outcomes against subject benchmark statements, external reference points and national occupational standards is undertaken. The team questioned where responsibility lay for ensuring adherence to subject benchmark statements and requirements of PSRBs. The team met with a range of staff to examine if there was effective use of employers and externals in the management of standards.

1.39   The team also met with senior managers and academic staff to test the way that external examiners are used to independently monitor programmes and to check the process whereby teams review and act on external examiner reports. The team also checked whether external examiners are properly inducted and briefed. The review team asked members of the Higher Education Quality Group whether external examiner reports are reviewed to identify cross-College themes and whether these are followed through. The team also examined carefully whether external examiner reports were made available in full to students.

1.40   The team found the College makes effective use of external expertise in the management of quality assurance processes. Link Tutors act as a valuable connection between the award teams and the University and advise on the application of assessment regulations, assessment practice, teaching and learning strategies, enhancement of the student experience and resourcing. The College has aligned programmes to relevant professional body guidelines. For example, detailed mapping has been undertaken to align the Sports Therapy awards to the competencies laid down by the Society of Sports Therapy.

1.41   The team found the College makes appropriate use of external examiners on all programmes and gives full consideration to external examiner reports. The Higher Education Quality Group reviews all reports annually to identify College-wide issues. External examiners, for the majority of awards, visit annually to scrutinise assignment briefs, assessment decisions and feedback. The exception is the PGCE/CertEd provision where the external examiner may periodically visit for teaching observations; however, they do meet College staff at the Consortium Assessment Boards held in Huddersfield. A curriculum review meeting examines all external examiner reports following the exam board which results in actions subsequently checked by the awarding body.

1.42   Extensive use is made of employers in the management of threshold academic standards. Employers and external academics with relevant experience are routinely and effectively used in the validation and periodic review process. There is strong employer involvement in negotiating and agreeing project briefs. Policies and procedures concerning the involvement of employers are in place to drive initiatives, and strong employer input is evident within relevant modules embedded within the higher education curriculum.

1.43   The College has well established policies and processes to ensure that there is robust independent scrutiny and external participation in the management of threshold academic standards. The College has processes to ensure that there is contribution from a wide range of expertise and that effective use is made of external academic, professional bodies and employers. The review team found that the College's use of independent and external expertise is solid, valid and reliable and that Expectation A5 is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.44　　The College has responsibility for the design, monitoring and internal moderation of its assessment procedures. Assessment is governed by the regulatory framework of the awarding bodies and awarding organisation and by the College's own Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy. Programme teams set their own assessments which are internally and externally moderated. Marking is subject to rigorous internal and external checking and feedback to students is effectively monitored.

1.45　　Principles of assessment are set out in the York College Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy and are operated in accordance with the regulatory requirements of each awarding body and the awarding organisation. Broader assessment issues are covered in the regular schedule of Higher Education Workshops. The College Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy specifies the use of double-blind marking, internal verification and standardisation at award and module level and the review team found this to be well embedded. The annual monitoring process routinely reviews assessment issues and assessment statements are produced as a reference for staff and students.

1.46　　External examiner reports are submitted to the Quality Improvement Team who provide reports for award leaders detailing strengths, weaknesses, actions and progress from the previous academic year. These reports are discussed by the College Higher Education Quality Group and in programme Development and Enhancement meetings where actions are made and progress reported.

1.47　　Assessment is governed by the specific academic and regulatory framework of the awarding bodies and awarding organisation. University partners provide policies and practices on assessment to govern related processes such as exceptional circumstances, mitigation and the control of assessment boards. The College issues guidance to staff and students in the form of assessment statements for higher education awards validated by YSJU and LMU which are made available through the College VLE. The College has an Academic Misconduct Procedures document which defines plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct. Assessment guidelines are reinforced annually by the Assessment and Validations Coordinator to award leaders.

1.48　　The review team met with academic staff to discuss the creation and moderation of assignment briefs. The team looked at assessment statements and how visible they are and asked academic staff how they are used. The team also questioned academic staff about processes the College has in place for assuring that assessment is robust including double marking, internal verification of assessment and standardisation. The team also looked at the VLE to see what written instructions and guidance on assessment requirements and processes are available to staff and students. The review team considered documents outlining principles of assessment and considered if they are clearly laid out for all awarding bodies and the awarding organisation. The review team also examined procedures defining plagiarism and other forms of misconduct and the way they are applied. The team also met with academic staff and questioned closely the processes for moderation and checking as well as monitoring feedback.

1.49　　The team found the College has effective processes for carrying out the checking and verification of assessments. Unit teachers are responsible for setting individual assignments. All assessment questions are approved by the whole programme team in the

first instance during a moderation day and then agreed by external examiners in advance of being issued to students. The assessments are reviewed at a moderation meeting by the programme team, after which all assessments are sent to the external examiner for final approval. The Quality Improvement Team then ensures that all external examiner recommendations are followed. All marking is measured against learning outcomes and published criteria and moderated to ensure consistency.

1.50   The review team found that the assessment statements describe assessment practices which meet the principles set out in the partner agreements. The College provides induction, mentoring and written guidance on assessment in the form of assessment statements to all staff to ensure they understand the academic requirements, marking process and grading criteria. The use of assessment statements/frameworks was noted as an area of good practice in the 2009 IQER and continues to be well used by the College.

1.51   The team found the College makes effective use of external examiners to scrutinise assignment briefs and approve all assessment results. External examiner reports are considered and responded to effectively.

1.52   The College has a well established and robust process for the design, approval, monitoring and review of assessment strategies at all stages including initial validation prior to awarding body validation and approval, periodic and annual review. The College has effective processes to ensure that the assessment of students is accurate, valid and reliable. The review team found that the College's awards of qualifications and credit are based on the achievement of the intended learning outcomes and that Expectation A6 is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards: Summary of findings

1.53　　In the maintenance of threshold academic standards, all Expectations have been met. There are no features of good practice, affirmations or recommendations. There is evidence that the College is fully aware of its responsibilities for maintaining academic standards. Previous responses to external review activities provide confidence that areas of weakness will be addressed promptly and professionally. The team concludes the maintenance of the threshold academic standards of the awards offered on behalf of its awarding bodies and awarding organisation **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: Quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1 The College delivers programmes validated by LMU, YSJU, Sheffield Hallam University, the University of York, the University of Huddersfield and Pearson, each of which requires slightly different procedures and documentation for the completion of a successful process of programme approval and of periodic review and revalidation.

2.2 In addition to the processes of validation and periodic review managed by the awarding bodies, the College maintains strategic oversight of the design, approval and development of programmes through its Higher Education Quality Group which reports to Quality Improvement Strategy Group and the Senior Management Team. The College has developed its own programme development procedures which are applied prior to the external validation processes to maximize the likelihood of success. There is also evidence that the College conducts regular reviews and training events to maintain and enhance the capacity of its staff in the design and development of higher education programmes.

2.3 The Higher Education Quality Group reviews, as part of the Annual Programme Review process, all external examiner reports, HEESA reports and any College reports that are to be forwarded to the awarding bodies, awarding organisation or professional bodies. It also reviews the reporting lines between the College and its awarding bodies, awarding organisation and professional bodies.

2.4 The College, supported by the awarding bodies, operates procedures that ensure systematic and consistent application of appropriate criteria that define and describe the standards and quality of programmes. All panels involve the use of expert externals, both academic and from among professionals and employers. All the approval events make explicit reference to appropriate external reference points and, where necessary, professional standards.

2.5 The review team examined the documentation associated with the validation or revalidation of all higher education programmes provided by the College. The review team also met managerial and academic staff responsible for preparing for and conducting validation events, including representatives from some of the awarding bodies. The accounts provided confirmed the detailed and thorough approach to developing programmes and obtaining approval.

2.6 During the course of 2012-13 there had been the transfer of all LMU-validated programmes to validation either by YSJU or Sheffield Hallam University. The review team examined the documentation describing the detailed arrangements put in place by LMU and the College to ensure that students registered on programmes that were to be discontinued were informed of the changes and would be minimally affected.

2.7 The review team found validation events explicitly address the resources available to support learning, including the resources available to students such as books, journals and equipment. Where validation panels recommend further or different provision of learning resources, there is clear evidence these recommendations are implemented and checked. The College involves students in programme design and processes of development and review.

2.8 The College makes informed use of relevant external reference points. Programmes are aligned to the FHEQ, subject benchmark statements and, where relevant, occupational and professional standards. Comprehensive management and review processes are specified in the partnership delivery agreements with the awarding bodies and the evidence seen by the reviewers demonstrated these were conscientiously followed.

2.9 The review team concludes that the roles played by the College in the design, approval, monitoring and review of the higher education programmes it delivers meet Expectation B1. The comprehensive approach to the design of programmes together with the robust approval mechanisms ensure that risk in this area is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B2: Admissions*

Findings

2.10   Following the 2012-13 admissions, a review of the UCAS admissions data was undertaken through the Claremont Consulting UCAS Report. From this the College recognised a weakness in turnaround time for its applications to higher education students. As a result, the Higher Education Admissions Policy was revised for 2014 applicants taking guidance from awarding bodies and Supporting Professionalism in Admissions (SPA). The College now has a centralised procedure that is used for all higher education programmes for which the College has admissions responsibility.

2.11   The College's policies and procedures used to admit students are clear, fair and explicit. Admissions staff receive training from UCAS and SPA and use a set range of information to make judgements on applications. Promotional materials and activities are produced by the marketing team from the programme specification which has been validated by the awarding body. Judgements made during the selection process for entry are underpinned by transparent entry requirements sourced from the programme specification. Students are informed in writing of pre-entry information including course costs, expectations and a breakdown of the modules they will study. The Higher Education Admissions Policy has clear procedures for offering feedback to applicants as well as opportunities for complaints and appeals.

2.12   The team considered the College's higher education admissions processes by talking to staff and students and reading the Higher Education Admissions Policy and UCAS data analysis project, Claremont Consulting UCAS Report and the responsibilities checklist for all awarding bodies and the awarding organisation. The team also considered the flow chart indicating managing information responsibilities as well as asking staff to outline the processes for ensuring the information provided is relevant, accurate and current.

2.13   As the new Higher Education Admissions Policy was brought into place for 2014 applications, the College has not yet had the opportunity to embed the process and monitor the impact of changes made. Therefore the teams **affirms** the implementation of the new Higher Education Admissions Policy. Staff who met the review team were able to confirm that promotional materials and activities are accurate, relevant and accessible and provide information that will enable applicants to make informed decisions about their options. The review team found robust procedures are in place for ensuring the accuracy of this information from a single, awarding body-validated source. Staff confirmed that successful applicants are kept informed by the College admissions team through 'keep warm' letters and that any significant changes made to courses were also communicated through this process. This was reiterated by students who felt well informed pre-entry. They particularly highlighted course cost information, expectations and a breakdown of the modules they were to study; all made available in letters, online and in their student handbooks.

2.14   Overall, the team regarded the College's centralised admissions policies and procedures as clear, fair, explicit and consistently applied. Therefore the team concludes that Expectation B2 is met and the associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and teaching*

Findings

2.15   The York College 2013-16 Strategic Plan outlines the College's overall strategic approach to higher education learning and teaching at the College. The College has a range of strategies specifically relating to learning and teaching and the continued improvement of these activities. The College has created an environment where good practice is shared and staff are continually developed to enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices.

2.16   The College has an overarching Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy which draws on aspects from its other policies, strategies and procedures to outline expectations to staff and students around teaching, learning and assessment. Recruitment of teaching staff follows a robust procedure with defined minimum requirements and outlined recruitment processes standard to the College. The Teaching and Learning Improvement Strategy focuses specifically on the continued improvement of teaching and learning through the use of staff development, observations and Professional Learning Communities. Professional Learning Communities were introduced to the College at the start of the 2012-13 year with the aim of providing a beneficial impact on students by allowing staff to identify areas of their practice which they wished to develop and to form a working group around these areas. Features of good practice and areas for improvement are also identified across the College and used to inform staff development.

2.17   All students are provided with student handbooks at the start of their course as well as programme specifications, both of which make clear their expected learning outcomes. The College provides opportunities for all students to meet with personal tutors and create individual learning plans.

2.18   There is a clear strategic approach to learning and teaching throughout the College's higher education provision which is shared with staff, students and other stakeholders. Learning and teaching practices are informed by reflection and evaluation of professional practice through a range of initiatives which are well established within the College.

2.19   The team explored this area by examining the College's Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy, alongside its Teaching and Learning Improvement Strategy. The team also considered the York College 2013-16 Strategic Plan, York College Way and Good to Great Strategy. The team read examples of Professional Learning Community summaries and proposals. Staff development schedules and uptake including Higher Education Workshops and Breakfast Briefings were considered by the team. The team examined examples of higher education student handbooks and example individual learning plans. Meetings were also held with staff and students.

2.20   The team found the College has an inherent culture of developing their provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices, which is underpinned by the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Policy and the Teaching and Learning Improvement Strategy. Observation of teaching and learning is carried out by a trained team who observe teaching and learning across the College. Observation outcomes are used to inform professional

development opportunities. A continuing professional development programme is made available to all staff. Other opportunities for development are also available through Higher Education Workshops and awarding body conferences as well as through staff industry links. The College's Good to Great strategy focuses on professional development for management staff and how that feeds through to the behaviours and attitudes across the College. A robust procedure is in place for the recruitment of teaching staff, with defined minimum qualification requirements and a compulsory micro teach. New staff are given College inductions and a mentor. The team found the mentor system effective with regular opportunities to meet and review progress.

2.21   The team found learning opportunities are made clear to students through their student handbooks and programme specifications available from pre-admission. Academic rules and integrity are outlined in student handbooks and are a key part of the induction process. Individual learning plans and personal and professional development enable students to monitor their progress and further their academic development. Students and staff value opportunities for informal feedback.

2.22   The team identified the systematic and effective use of Professional Learning Communities and Breakfast Briefings that enable College-wide sharing of best practice as **good practice**. The introduction of Professional Learning Communities has allowed staff to identify areas for improvement to explore as practitioners in an evidence-based approach to enhancing learning and teaching. The College has then used effective methods for sharing the outcomes of these across the College. Professional Learning Community summaries are published on the VLE. Staff were invited to attend the College's annual conference on teaching, learning and assessment in July 2013 where teams who had completed a Professional Learning Community project fed back on the process and reported outcomes. Outcomes from the first round of Professional Learning Communities have informed project proposals for the next round which have been expanded to include professional as well as academic teams. Good practice is also shared through higher education practitioner Breakfast Briefings, which are practitioner led and are open to academic and professional staff to deliver and attend. Areas for discussion at Breakfast Briefings are chosen with consideration of the National Student Survey and areas arising from College annual monitoring reports.

2.23   The College has a top-down and bottom-up approach to its learning and teaching provision where staff and students work together to review and enhance learning opportunities and teaching practice. Therefore, the team concludes that Expectation B3 is met and the associated 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*

2.24   The College has a range of opportunities that enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. The College has a strong student support system through its student services provision and the relationships created between staff and students. Individual learning plans and personal and professional development link together with opportunities throughout the College to enable each student to develop, monitor their own progress and identify areas for personal enhancement.

2.25   The York College 2013-16 Strategic Plan outlines how the College uses 'the full range of assessment for learning techniques to inform target setting, progress monitoring and review to ensure that all students make excellent progress'. The Quality Improvement Strategy shows the College's strategic approach to enabling student development and achievement by placing students at the heart of the College and providing a robust framework for continuous improvement. Responsibility for planning and monitoring quality improvement is outlined in the Managing Strategy structure.

2.26   The College's Careers Coordinator has responsibility for ensuring students have access to careers and employability support, advice and guidance. The Careers Education Information Advice and Guidance Policy ensures all students and potential students have access to information and guidance to help their future progression. This also aims to enable students to manage their own progression and make successful choices. The Student Employability Policy and Procedure share the aims of the College's mission statement: 'Where everyone matters and a successful future begins'. This was put together in relation to the Equality Strategy. Student performance is monitored by award teams within divisions. Support for student development in terms of career and progression is available throughout their study, on the VLE, HEre to Help and the HE Hub. The College is a founding and key member of Higher York. This partnership aims to support progression to higher education study in the local area.

2.27   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 through the Senior Management Team. IT resources are replaced on a rolling system.

2.28   The team reviewed the College's Strategic Plan and Quality Improvement Strategy for areas relating to enabling student development. The team asked students about their experience at the College including the resources available and opportunities to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. The team asked staff to outline procedures for ensuring resources are available for students as well as exploring the support offered. The team considered the terms of reference and minutes of the Higher Education Quality Group. The team spoke to students about their individual learning plans and personal and professional development as well as reading examples of these.

2.29   The team found students are generally happy with resources available to them and are aware of how to access awarding body and external materials as well as extra support from learning centre staff. All service teams are being added to the College's VLE to improve accessibility of information. 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. Financial support and advice is highly effective and efficient. Further support services include on-site dyslexia testing which can be funded through finance support mechanisms.

2.30   The team identified the effective use of the range of mechanisms designed to enable students to develop their professional potential as **good practice**. Personal and professional development modules are designed to bring together mechanisms and opportunities that enable students to not only develop but monitor and reflect on their progress. Student individual learning plans identify personal development needs and help inform progression conversations which are linked in with personal tutorial sessions and the College's strong student services provision. Individual learning plans feed into personal and professional development, allowing students to track and monitor their progress. Students find individual learning plans very useful for setting targets and highlighting areas of improvement. Students are encouraged to copy formative and summative feedback into their personal and professional development folders, allowing them to track academic progress. The College's Student Employability Policy and Procedure aims to ensure that there are appropriate opportunities for students to develop the knowledge and skills they need to make successful choices and manage their progression into the world of work; extracurricular activities that support this are provided by the HE Hub and HEre to Help, which are a higher education student-only area and support service. The College makes good use of external sources to ensure students' work is industry appropriate by including employers in the validation of programmes and having continued input from HEESAs. Widespread and innovative use of work-related learning and placement support enhances the employability of students.

2.31   The College has a very good range of opportunities and resources in place to enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. A feature of good practice was identified in this area. Therefore, the team concludes that Expectation B4 is met and the associated 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

2.32   The College provides multiple opportunities for students to participate in the quality assurance and enhancement of their programmes. The Students' Union has a higher education representative who is also a full member of the College's Board of Governors. Student programme representatives are recruited across all programmes. Information relating to representatives, what is involved in being one and how to become one is provided in student handbooks. Training and support are offered and representatives are invited to sit on College committees. Students attend Development and Enhancement meetings. Students are involved in validation and review depending on the requirements of the awarding body or awarding organisation.

2.33   The Student Involvement Strategy includes implementation of surveys including First Impressions, On Programme and End of Course. Individual students are able to contribute through informal and formal mechanisms including module feedback, focus groups and surveys. Anonymous module evaluations are completed by students to feed into programme-level enhancement work.

2.34   The College takes deliberate steps to engage all students in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. The College has supported the development of a Students' Union with a dedicated higher education representative who is a full member of the College's Board of Governors. Further representation and student attendance on College committees are supported and encouraged. Individual students are able to engage with the College's assurance and enhancement procedures through formal and informal feedback through course-specific and higher education-wide surveys and focus groups.

2.35   The team asked student representatives about the structure and training offered to them. Students were also asked about representation on committees and other channels they are able to engage with. The team also considered minutes of higher education course representative meetings. Staff were asked how they involve students in assurance and enhancement activity. The team read minutes of Development and Enhancement meetings. To understand how individual students are engaged in the College's assurance and enhancement procedures, the team reviewed the College's Student Involvement Strategy and associated survey feedback as well as higher education student focus group reports. The team considered how students were made aware of these opportunities by reading a sample of student handbooks.

2.36   The deliberate steps taken to define and promote a range of opportunities that enable students to act as partners in educational enhancement and quality assurance were identified as **good practice** by the review team. The team identified that from the highest level students are actively engaged in the College's committee structure with one full higher education student member on the Board of Governors and regular student attendance and participation across Development and Enhancement meetings and committees. The Students' Union executive meets monthly with the College's Senior Management Team to feed back issues raised by course representatives. Students are able to feed back to the College through higher education focus groups which take place in the autumn term, allowing responses to be made and fed back to students during the academic year. Students feed back through external surveys such as the National Student Survey. A number of College-based surveys have been created through the Quality Improvement Strategy and allow the College to gather feedback at key stages of the learner journey.

'You Said, We Did' communications are used around the College to close the feedback loop. Students and staff who met with the team also shared experiences of informal feedback opportunities which are valued by all in the supporting relationships created between staff and students. Students are happy to discuss issues, concerns and ideas with staff and know that they will receive a response to their feedback.

2.37   The College takes deliberate steps to engage all students as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. Therefore, the team concludes that Expectation B5 is met and the associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.38   The College applies a wide range of formative and summative assessment procedures across the higher education programmes delivered. Assessment methods are varied according to the nature of the programme.

2.39   The criteria and methods of assessment are set out in assessment statements and the details of assessment on particular modules are communicated to students in assessment briefs. Assessment statements are consistent with principles set out in the College's Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy and, where relevant, in accordance with the regulatory requirements of Pearson. Module handbooks also describe the criteria and weightings of the elements of assessment that will be applied, as well as hand-in and feedback dates for coursework.

2.40   The principles that guide assessment together with the managerial methods used to assess students allow varied and appropriate opportunities to show they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the award of qualifications.

2.41   The review team examined documentation describing assessment principles and practice including the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy, guidelines on assessment for staff and students and the minutes of examination boards. The team also heard accounts of the assessment processes from staff and students.

2.42   The team found that before assessment briefs are issued to students they are moderated by the award teams for validity, clarity and to ensure they allow equal opportunities for all students to demonstrate achievement. Assessment briefs are also sent to external examiners and any amendments suggested considered by the award teams.

2.43   The team found the awarding bodies specify the policies, regulations and processes that govern the assessment of students and the recognition of prior learning. In the cases of YSJU and LMU the methods of assessment are set by the College, approved as part of the validation process and reviewed annually. In the cases of Sheffield Hallam, the University of York and the University of Huddersfield, assessments are set by the awarding body and communicated to students through the Universities' websites and the course handbooks.

2.44   There was evidence that all staff teaching and assessing higher education programmes receive appropriate and regularly updated training and mentoring in carrying out assessment and that assessment and feedback practices are informed by subject-specific and educational scholarship, and by the functional and employability skills required by the programmes. The College's Assessment and Validations Coordinator provides guidance, particularly in the form of support to award leaders, on compliance with the assessment requirements of the various awarding bodies and awarding organisation and on the management of examination boards.

2.45   The evidence available in annual and periodic review reports, together with the responses provided by students met by the review team, indicate that feedback on assessment is timely, constructive and enables students to build on knowledge and skills demonstrated and to improve in the future. Good practice in feedback is monitored and developed through the process of peer review and at sharing good practice events. However, feedback was raised as an issue by students in the student submission and

promptness of feedback has the lowest satisfaction rating in the most recent responses to the National Student Survey.

2.46   The evidence seen by the review team, and information provided in meetings with staff and students, indicated that the management of examination boards, the use of external examiners and the application of assessment regulations are appropriate and regularly reviewed.

2.47   The evidence provided to the review team confirms that the College's management of assessment, in collaboration with the awarding bodies and awarding organisation, is conducted in ways that allow students to demonstrate they have achieved the intended learning outcomes set by their programmes of study, and comply with Expectation B6 of the Quality Code. Therefore, Expectation B6 is met and the risk in this area 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

2.48   The College either nominates external examiners who are appointed by the awarding bodies (YSJU and LMU) or in other cases the awarding bodies (the University of York, University of Huddersfield and Sheffield Hallam University) and awarding organisation (Pearson) are responsible for the recruitment and training of appropriately qualified external examiners. The specific duties of external examiners are determined by the validation requirements of the awarding bodies and awarding organisation and vary slightly.

2.49   External examiners are used by the College to confirm that threshold standards are being appropriately applied. They also contribute to other aspects of the management of programmes including: advice on the content and structure of the curriculum, the approval of assessment briefs, the moderation of all final-year assessment, the sampling of first and second-year assessments, attendance at examination boards, and the submission of an annual report on the examination processes and student achievement.

2.50   The College, supported by the awarding bodies, has in place equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment that allow students to achieve intended learning outcomes. The awarding bodies have in place explicit, comprehensive and appropriate policies and regulations governing the nomination, appointment, induction and roles of external examiners. The reports of external examiners, together with the responses from the College and the minutes of examination boards, demonstrate careful use of external examiners in the management of the standards of awards and in contributing to the quality of curricula and the academic experience of students.

2.51   The review team was provided with recent external examiner reports for all higher education programmes delivered by the College together with the responses made by the College and evidence of the completion of actions that followed from the reports or responses. The review team also spoke to award leaders and staff from the Quality Improvement Team who are responsible for liaising with external examiners and providing them with all the documents and support they require.

2.52   The external examiner reports seen by the review team confirm the validity, reliability and integrity of the examination processes and that they are provided with appropriate access and responses by the College. The team found the College responds to external examiners' comments in timely and effective ways. Award leaders are asked to consider and respond to external examiner reports in their annual reviews and action plans. The Higher Education Quality Group reviews all external examiner reports and responses as part of their Annual Programme Review process with a particular focus on College-wide issues. The annual review responses are monitored by the Higher Education Quality Group and the universities responsible for the awards. Progress in implementing any actions suggested by external examiner reports is monitored at the College's Development and Enhancement Meetings and at mid-year examination and assessment boards. The College arranges for external examiners to meet students, and staff and students can view external examiner reports on the Blackboard VLE system.

2.53   The evidence seen and heard by the review team confirmed that the College makes appropriate use of external examiners to maintain the standards of awards as part of a broader system of quality assurance and enhancement. The uses made by the College of external examiners, in collaboration with the awarding bodies, are consistent with the requirements of the Quality Code, *Chapter B7*. Therefore, Expectation B7 is met and the level of risk in this area is low.

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

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

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

Findings

2.54   Primary responsibility for annual and periodic review lies with the awarding bodies and awarding organisation. Each of the Universities and Pearson requires slightly differing procedures for reviews. The College deals effectively with this variety of approaches to review, having put in place a clear structure for review management within the College. Annual monitoring is overseen by the Higher Education Quality Group which scrutinises documents before they are submitted to the awarding body or awarding organisation.

2.55   The College's award teams compile Annual Programme Reviews together with plans to consolidate good practice by addressing any issues that have emerged. These reports and plans are scrutinised by the Higher Education Quality Group before submission to the relevant university. Any feedback from the awarding body is subsequently considered by the Higher Education Quality Group and the relevant award team.

2.56   The College has in place policies and procedures that allow it to maintain strategic oversight of the variety of processes that are used to monitor and review the programmes it delivers. It also systematically responds to the outcomes of monitoring and review in ways that develop and enhance programme delivery.

2.57   The team examined annual review documentation and reports for 2012-13, completed periodic review and revalidation reports and spoke to academic and professional staff, from the College and the awarding bodies, who have participated in reviews and revalidation.

2.58   The Annual Programme Review documentation seen by the review team was comprehensive and included detailed consideration of individual modules, student outcomes, student progression, student evaluations and commentary on them, and responses to the previous year's review and comments from external examiners. The schedule for Annual Programme Reviews is also clear and timely, with first reports to the Higher Education Quality Group early in the autumn term. In addition, Annual Programme Reviews contain, within the process, quality improvement action plans developed by the award teams. The action plans allow potential improvements identified by the team to be put into practice speedily in the next academic year, both at programme level and, where appropriate, across the whole of the higher education provision. The annual reviews also feed into the College's annual divisional self-assessment reviews and are combined into a College self-assessment review reviewed by the Board of Governors.

2.59   The team found students participate in annual monitoring through Development and Enhancement meetings. These are held twice a year. Students are also represented on the Higher Education Quality Committee which oversees the Annual Programme Review processes and on course monitoring team meetings. Where relevant there are also procedures for contributions to annual monitoring to be made by Collaborative Delivery Coordinators and HEESAs.

2.60   The periodic review documentation seen by the review team indicated the periodic reviews are comprehensive and timely, and in all cases had led to revalidation. Annual Programme Reviews inform the periodic reviews for each award. Periodic reviews are managed by the awarding bodies and where successful lead to revalidation of the College provision. All periodic reviews include a meeting of the review panel with students, timetabled as part of the review.

2.61   The evidence seen and heard by the review team confirmed that the awarding bodies, awarding organisation and the College have in place comprehensive and well integrated processes for annual and periodic review that meet the Expectation of *Chapter B8* of the Quality Code. Therefore, Expectation B8 is met and the level of risk in this area is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B9: Complaints and appeals*

Findings

2.62   Students on higher education programmes have access both to the College's complaints and appeals procedures, set out in the College Complaints and Compliments Policy, and those of the awarding bodies and awarding organisation. Students are directed to these policies in the student handbooks, assessment statements and on the websites of the College and the awarding bodies and awarding organisation.

2.63   The College has in place a range of well advertised procedures that allow students to raise questions, complaints and appeals through both informal and formal routes and that meet Expectation B9 in theory.

2.64   The review team asked students and staff about their awareness of procedures for complaints and appeals and, where relevant, to describe their experience of using them and how they had been dealt with. The team also examined how the routes available for complaints were explained in handbooks and on the College website.

2.65   The team found that where formal complaints are made to the College they are reported to the Quality Improvement Team and recorded, tracked and, on completion, signed off by a member of the Senior Management Team. In these ways the College is able to monitor use of the procedures and update them where necessary.

2.66   Both students and staff met by the review team confirmed that most student concerns or complaints are dealt with informally through direct communication between students and their tutors.

2.67   The evidence provided to the review team indicated that complaints by higher education students are rare and that they are expeditiously dealt with. In the last full academic year before the review (2012-13), five formal complaints had been received and all had been dealt with without referral to the awarding body or awarding organisation.

2.68   The evidence provided to the review team indicates that the College and the awarding bodies and awarding organisation have in place effective complaints and appeals procedures that are consistent with the Expectation set out in *Chapter B9* of the Quality Code. Therefore, Expectation B9 is met and the risk in this area 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

2.69   A significant proportion of the higher education programmes delivered by the College involve work-related learning, work placements and internships that require collaboration with employers, professionals and a variety of public, voluntary and private providers to ensure the quality of the students' learning experiences in these various environments.

2.70   The College is committed to ensuring that the skills developed by students on its higher education programmes are those recognised as up to date and appropriate in the technical and professional environments that many of the students are aiming to enter. Both in its wider mission statements and in the detailed descriptions of the curricula it delivers, the College indicates a commitment to developing the employability and work-readiness of its students. The College has developed a common framework of policies and procedures designed to manage, monitor and ensure the learning quality and the safety of arrangements that place students in external working environments. These make use of best practice examples from within, and without, the College. At the time of the review, under the direction of the Higher Education Quality Group, this guidance was currently being reviewed to take account of changing patterns of provision.

2.71   Work-related learning is monitored by the award teams, often as an assessed part of the programmes. The health and safety aspects of work-related learning are governed by the College's health and safety policies and procedures contained in a Student Work Placement Health and Safety & Safeguarding Policy. The College conducts an annual audit of employer support for the student learning experience, including the provision of work-based learning through placements.

2.72   Work-related learning is reviewed as part of the annual programme monitoring processes. Development and Enhancement meetings, and examination boards receive reports from the tutors leading the work-related aspects of programmes and the student work on placements is assessed and reported to the examination boards.

2.73   The College has in place clear policies and procedures designed to develop and manage learning opportunities provided to students in collaboration with external organisations and practitioners. The oversight of these arrangements is explicitly designed to assure the quality and standards of the students' learning experiences outside the College.

2.74   The review team examined a wide range of documentary evidence describing how the College manages interactions with external organisations supporting the learning of students. The team also questioned staff and students about their experience of organising and participating in learning that involves organisations and people outside the College.

2.75   The team found that the College produces a handbook for tutors involved in arranging and supporting students on various forms of work-based learning and professional placements. The handbook describes the roles of award leaders, tutors, mentors and students in the setting up and delivery of work-related learning. Tutors are supported and advised in the management of work-related learning by the HEESAs. Course handbooks also describe in detail how work-related learning is managed and assessed.

2.76   The team found work-related learning is supported by links made by staff with external organisations and by offers from employers or other organisations to provide student work opportunities. These are monitored by a Work Placement Team under the direction of the Head of Enrichment who also assists students in finding and negotiating their own placement opportunities. The Careers Team also informs staff and students of relevant internship opportunities when they arise.

2.77   The review team considers that the policies and practices that the College uses to manage a wide range of links with employers and professionals, which are then used to arrange placements and internships and provide a framework of support for students and staff, are excellent. The comprehensive structure and guidance for supporting tutors and students in creating and maintaining effective relationships with a wide range of employers is **good practice**.

2.78   The evidence seen by the review team, together with the information it obtained from staff and students in meetings, allow it to conclude that the College manages its collaborations with external organisations and professionals effectively and in ways that are consistent with the Expectation of *Chapter B10* of the Quality Code. Therefore, Expectation B10 is met and the risk in this area is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research degrees*

Findings

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

Quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.80   All applicable Expectations in the area of the quality of learning opportunities have been met. There are four examples of good practice in this area, one affirmation and no recommendations for improvement. The College has plans to enhance this area further. Student engagement management of this area is widespread and supported. Managing the needs of students is a clear focus of the College's strategies and policies in this area. Therefore, the review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities is **commended**.

3 Judgement: Quality of the information produced about its provision

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

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

Findings

3.1 The College has good policies and procedures for ensuring the information about its higher education provision is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The programme specifications, validated by the awarding body and awarding organisation, are the primary source from which materials are developed. Information is available in print and electronically through the website and VLE.

3.2 The York College 2013-16 Strategy is published on the College's website, with its mission published in each student handbook. Application and admissions processes are clearly described in the Higher Education Admissions Policy. Successful candidates are kept informed of any changes to their course as well as general information on what to expect from the College and their course via 'keep warm' letters from the admissions department. Student handbooks are created from the validated programme specification. Programme information is also available on the College's VLE. The Student Charter is available online, in the student guide and through York College Way for managers, tutors and support staff.

3.3 The College has robust procedures in place to ensure that all information is created from a single source which has been validated by the awarding body and awarding organisation. This procedure is extended to all published information - public, online and written materials - to ensure a consistent message.

3.4 The review team considered the College's flow chart that outlines responsibilities for managing information and also took into account how changes to information are made through this process. The team explored how the expectations of staff and students were made clear to all by reading the Student Charter and York College Way. The team were able to view the information provided in a range of student handbooks. The team asked staff about the processes the College has in place for ensuring the information provided by them is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The team also asked students if they felt well informed about their programme of study from the admissions stage to their current level of study. The team were given a demonstration of the College's VLE.

3.5 The review team found staff are aware of and fully compliant with procedures for ensuring the relevancy and accuracy of information. The College is in the process of upgrading its VLE and is now working to create a minimum requirement for staff using the system. Students who met with the team are happy with both the print and electronic information they receive. They appreciate the 'keep warm' letters and were happy to be made aware of course costs and expectations before arrival. Students find the smartphone app that links to the VLE useful.

3.6 The information produced for students, staff and other stakeholders is appropriate, relevant and accurate. Good, clear policies and procedures are in place for ensuring the information about learning opportunities is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. Therefore, the team concludes that Expectation C is met and the associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Quality of the information produced about its provision: Summary of findings

3.7   The Expectation in the area of information about higher education provision has been met. There are no examples of good practice, affirmations or recommendations in this area. The student engagement in the management of this area is not widespread. The College is aware of its responsibilities for assuring information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. Previous responses to external review activities provide confidence that areas of weakness will be addressed promptly and professionally. The team concludes the quality of the College's information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

4 Judgement: 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 seeks to promote an ethos which expects and encourages the enhancement of student learning opportunities at all levels of the organisation. This is intended to facilitate a wide range of award-level enhancements and is also stated to improve the employability opportunities for its students. The College maintains that it integrates enhancement initiatives in a systematic and planned manner at provider level through the oversight role of the Higher Education Quality Group. This is supplemented by a variety of student engagement mechanisms to provide student input into decision-making when preparing for review and validation of the curriculum. Additionally, each award holds Development and Enhancement meetings twice a year at which students and staff meet to discuss an agreed agenda as part of the College's higher education quality review processes.

4.2 The College has processes to identify and disseminate good practice within the higher education team using a range of events. These include regular higher education practitioner Breakfast Briefings led by practitioners and linked to the National Student Survey themes, Higher Education Workshops where information is presented and the implications discussed, and standardisation/moderation events for awards with common modules.

4.3 Quality assurance procedures are used to identify opportunities for enhancement of the curriculum. This includes the addition of an enhancement matrix into the Annual Programme Review template and a requirement to identify enhancement actions in Annual Programme Reviews as well as audits of enhancement activities.

4.4 The review team conducted a comprehensive review of a range of College-wide strategic policy documents including the Strategic Plan and the Quality Improvement Policy, along with the remit of high-level College-wide committees including the Higher Education Quality Group and the Quality Improvement and Assurance Committee - sometimes referred to as the Quality Improvement Strategy Group. The review team also held meetings with the Principal and groups of senior, academic and support staff.

4.5 The review team witnessed a clear ethos among all those met during the review visit which expects and encourages enhancement of student learning opportunities, in addition to those broader benefits to students offered by the 'enrichment' activities. This ethos pervades all levels of the organisation. Against this backdrop, there is much evidence of the use of quality assurance procedures to identify opportunities for enhancement. Evidence adduced in this connection included the Annual Programme Review process, particularly the addition of an 'enhancement' matrix in the template, and the termly Development and Enhancement meetings for each of the programmes. Furthermore, the good practice identified is disseminated widely and effectively through the higher education Breakfast Briefings, Professional Learning Communities and Higher Education Workshops.

4.6 While the documentation reviewed provides many examples of enhancement activity 'on the ground', the College's response to the Expectation for a provider-level approach to enhancement and 'the integration of enhancement initiatives in a systematic and planned manner at provider level' lacks clarity, is not consistently articulated and was not fully understood by some participants in the meetings held. For example, 'enhancement' as anticipated within the Expectation was at times confused with the 'enrichment' activities available for students. The latter, although praiseworthy, do not impact upon the students'

learning opportunities; that is, the provision made for learning including planned study, teaching, assessment, academic and personal support and resources.

4.7   There is not a common understanding or clear and consistent explanation of the College's strategic role in leading and integrating enhancement initiatives as anticipated by the Expectation. During meetings with a range of staff, the strategic approach of the organisation to the enhancement of learning opportunities was variously described as 'inherent' in the overall ethos of improvement; a 'bottom-up and top-down' approach, signifying that it is the responsibility of everyone at all levels; and 'led by the middle manager in each area and brought together and overseen by the Senior Management Team'. Moreover the 'enrichment' initiatives (which prepare students for employment and life generally) were regarded as an important element of any enhancement strategy. Therefore, the team **recommends** that the College should articulate and disseminate the provider-level strategic approach to enhancing the quality of students' learning opportunities.

4.8   While the review team did not find a consistent and clearly articulated strategy at provider level, nevertheless an underlying strategy or approach is apparent and understood by all to encourage enhancement developments and to monitor and promote these at all levels. For example, the Strategic Plan identifies objectives to develop and maintain inspirational and highly effective teaching, learning and assessment, with outstanding support. The Quality Improvement Policy aims to drive the aspiration that students receive the very best in teaching and learning through the professional development of staff, the development of Professional Learning Communities in identifying and sharing good practice and using the student voice to shape teaching, learning and curriculum developments. These are monitored at all levels, including the monthly Senior Management Team meetings where appropriate. The review team is satisfied that the College is aware of its responsibilities to improve the quality of learning opportunities and there are policies and structures in place to monitor and integrate enhancement activities across the organisation.

4.9   Overall, given the clear ethos of an awareness of the importance of enhancement and the many examples of the identification and dissemination of appropriate initiatives, the review team considers that the Expectation relating to enhancement is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.10   The Expectation for the area of enhancement of learning opportunities has been met, although understanding of the Expectation is not consistently articulated and was not understood by some staff. No features of good practice and no affirmations were identified. One recommendation has been made. The recommendation does not require and will not result in major structural, operational or procedural change. There is evidence that previous responses to external review activities provide confidence that the area of weakness will be addressed promptly and professionally. Therefore, the review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

5   Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1   Employability is a key feature of all programmes at the College, with high levels of immediate graduate employment in demanding and competitive industries. The College demonstrates a priority for the future employment of its students and has an extensive range of activities and opportunities available. There are effective policies and procedures in place to drive initiatives. The Careers Education Information Advice and Guidance Policy seeks to ensure that all students have access to information and guidance to help their future progression. The Student Employability Policy and Procedure details activities for all levels within the College and aims to ensure that all students have a successful future when they leave the College. Innovations resulting from these key policies include those in the following paragraphs.

5.2   The College has a Careers Coordinator who has responsibility for ensuring students have access to careers and employability support, advice and guidance. Staff are engaged with professional bodies and provide professional support and career advice, develop employability skills with students and capitalise on links with key industry stakeholders.

5.3   The College has in place a number of support mechanisms to assist student employability. Student career development is a focus throughout their programme and the College has provided support for careers advice through the VLE, HEre to Help and HE Hub.

5.4   The College works with the higher education provider partnership in York, Higher York, to support progression to higher education study in the local area and develop graduate employability by providing opportunities for developing employability and entrepreneurship skills.

5.5   Employability is fully embedded across the curriculum, underpinned by an extensive range of industry links and partnerships which result in workplace opportunities and contributions to the curriculum from industry experts. Students have a wide range of opportunities to experience employability skills and the involvement of professional practitioners at College events and to engage in prestigious projects which include:

- Nursing students have the opportunity to work at the clinical simulation unit at the University of York and undertake a four-week placement opportunity within North Yorkshire
- Holistic and Spa Therapy students have training with employers Dermalogica and the International Dermal Institute
- Sports Therapy students can gain additional industry-based qualifications embedded in the Foundation Degree in Sports Therapy including a Certificate in Sports Massage, making these students more attractive to industry employers.

5.6   The College also has an unusually wide range of links with local employers which provide specialist industry experience to students across the curriculum. The College has in place effective partnerships with Radio York, York Minster, York racecourse, the Royal York Hotel, York NHS Trust, and the City of York Council where students have been able to work on 'Fash Mob Event' and York City Fashion Week.

5.7   Students also benefit from a wide range of specialist and visiting lecturers from industry including companies such as Creative York, The Creative Industries Development Agency and conferences at Venturefest. There are open projects including York Open Studios, Arts Market, 'Make it up North' and a range of exhibitions.

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 27 to 29 of the Higher Education Review handbook.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

e-learning
See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

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

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

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

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

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