



Higher Education Review of Northern College

March 2016

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About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Northern College. The review took place from 15 to 17 March 2016 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Ms Ann Hill
- Mr Stuart Cannell (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 6.

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

The [themes](#) for the academic year 2015-16 are Student Employability and Digital Literacy,² and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.³ A dedicated section explains the method for [Higher Education Review](#)⁴ and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents. For an explanation of terms see the [glossary](#) at the end of this report.

¹ The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code.

² Higher Education Review themes: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2859.

³ QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us.

⁴ Higher Education Review web pages: www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Northern College

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

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

Good practice

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

- The highly effective use of learning technologies to inform and underpin learning, teaching and assessment (Expectation B3).
- The high level of individualised support provided by the College to improve students' learning opportunities (Expectations B4 and Enhancement).
- The embedded and comprehensive APEL process that promotes student transition to higher education programmes (Expectation B6).

Recommendations

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

By September 2016:

- integrate the curriculum and teaching and learning strategies to secure the higher education strategic aims (Expectation B3)
- further develop formal student representation to enable fuller engagement in the quality assurance and enhancement processes (Expectation B5)
- ensure that oversight of annual monitoring processes is applied systematically and operated consistently (Expectation B8)
- develop a strategy to provide cohesion and integration of the range of learning technology platforms that includes systematic monitoring and review (Expectations C and B3)
- formalise and strengthen the relationship between higher education priorities and enhancement practices (Enhancement).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The steps taken to further increase recruitment of students through the use of social media in marketing (Expectation B2).

Theme: Digital Literacy

Digital literacy is embedded in Northern College programmes and this reflects the College's strategic aims, including transforming individuals and communities by the development of reflexive practice.

The College plans to develop its digital leadership strategy and a brief has been developed to align with the existing College Technology Enhanced Learning Strategy 2014. Strategic objectives include the promotion of creativity and innovation in teaching and learning, ensuring support for students' acquisition of digital literacy skills, and capacity building.

The College has a reliable IT infrastructure, which is very responsive and which supports learning and teaching effectively. However, it was not clear what measures are in place to ensure that legacy material is effectively archived.

The College ensures that students are supported in the development of digital literacy throughout their programmes and develop transferrable skills that have professional relevance for employment.

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

About Northern College

Northern College (the College) was founded in 1978 and has a mission: 'To provide outstanding adult residential and community education for the transformation and empowerment of individuals and communities.'

The College is located in a former stately home three miles outside Barnsley in South Yorkshire. It is a non-profit organisation with charitable aims and at the time of the review there were 78 part-time students enrolled at the College.

The College gives priority to its networks with employers, colleagues and the broader world of adult education. In addition, it places emphasis on social purpose leadership, digital innovation, diversity and inclusion, academic resilience, embedding Maths and English, and learner support. Programmes are digitally blended, as the College believes that a combination of online and face-to-face engagement is most effective for reflexive learning. Many of the College's students are drawn from community workers, drugs workers, trainers in trade unions or Third Sector settings.

Its strategic aims and priorities are:

- to consolidate and extend excellence on the TeachNorthern Higher Education Programme, including to influence social purpose thinking across the Education and Training Consortium
- to develop a national profile for social purpose Teacher Education
- to continue to increase enrolments
- to develop new higher education programmes, in line with social purpose principles, recently identified by the College in order of priority as:
 - Youth and Community degree
 - Social Work degree
 - Voluntary Sector Management degree
 - Early Years degree.

Since the QAA Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) in June 2011 the following changes have been made at the College:

- the conclusion in 2011 of a foundation degree programme with Bradford University
- recruitment to the BA (Hons) Education and Professional Development award through the University of Huddersfield since 2012
- the establishing of a Teacher Education programme area in 2013
- significant personnel changes, with a dedicated Teacher Education team established in 2015
- the establishing, in 2011, of the role of Higher Education Coordinator
- restructuring to enable a Higher Education Strategy Group to be established in 2011.

Key challenges identified by the College are:

- the steady expansion of higher education programmes
- building the Teacher Education team and the social purpose model of initial teacher training
- influencing the development of the BA (Hons) Education and Professional Development programme.

The BA (Hons) Education and Professional Development and Cert Ed/PGCE (Lifelong Learning) programmes are provided through the University of Huddersfield on a part-time basis. This is managed through the University's Education and Training Consortium.

The last review (IQER) of the College was carried out in June 2011. The review identified a number of recommendations. It considered that it would be advisable for the College to:

- implement a formal structure that clearly articulates how responsibilities for managing and delivering higher education standards are delegated within the management and committee structure of the College, and ensure that this process is completed before any expansion of the College's higher education provision
- engage more formally and explicitly with the academic infrastructure to ensure that full account is taken of recognised effective practice in the management of academic standards and quality of its current and future higher education provision
- consider ways in which its oversight of its higher education provision could be enhanced by developing further the roles of the Higher Education Coordinator and the Higher Education Strategy and Development Group
- review its Teaching and Learning Policy to ensure that staff have clear guidance on the College's strategies for teaching, learning and assessment of its higher education provision and that this Policy is overseen and led by an appropriate committee
- consider working with its awarding body to review existing agreements between employers, students and the College to ensure that responsibilities and expectations for support and learning resources are clear when students undertake work-based or placement learning.

In addition it considered that it would be desirable for the College to: explicitly identify higher education provision within college policies as a means of facilitating the planning and development of its higher education portfolio; and implement a formal mechanism to facilitate the sharing of good practice across higher education programmes.

The review team found that the College has made progress with regard to these advisable recommendations but further development is required in implementing formal structures, with their associated responsibilities, and engaging with the academic infrastructure. This is

reflected in the recommendations made in this report. Likewise, with regard to the desirable recommendations, the sharing of good practice could be extended in formal processes.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

1.1 The College's framework for the maintenance of academic standards is governed by the requirements of its awarding body, the University of Huddersfield, which has responsibility for setting the academic standards of its awards.

1.2 The College has limited ability to change aspects of the programmes, as they are developed and approved by the University with regard to professional body requirements. The College can recommend modifications to programmes directly or through the Education and Training Consortium, although the ultimate decision rests with the University. As the College follows the appropriate regulations agreed with the University, this would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.3 The review team considered appropriate and relevant documentation and examined how the relevant courses are maintained within the College through discussions with the head of the College, and senior, academic and support staff.

1.4 The review team found that not all staff are fully aware of how relevant frameworks and Subject Benchmark Statements impact on the development and operation of each programme. Furthermore, there is limited awareness of the application of the Quality Code with each programme.

1.5 The College adheres to its awarding body's policies and procedures in relation to maintaining the appropriate standards and relevant national levels and frameworks for qualifications. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.6 The College's role in maintaining academic standards is outlined within the Contract of Collaboration, which is signed by both the University of Huddersfield and the College. The awarding body is responsible for the validation of programmes and the award of credit.

1.7 Documentation from the University shows a clear process and governance structure for the management of the College's responsibilities for academic standards. All information regarding the assessment of students and their respective marks is stored within the University's systems, to which the College has access. As the College follows the University's required assessment regulations this would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.8 The review team considered all appropriate and relevant evidence, including programme specifications, module handbooks and committee minutes. The team discussed the College's processes for assessing credit in meetings with the Principal, and senior, academic and support staff, regarding the College's internal structure in assessing credit. Furthermore, the team met students to discuss their understanding of assessment regulations.

1.9 The review team found that academic staff use the module handbooks as the principal document to engage with the assessment regulations. Following the College's marking of the assessed work, the University undertakes secondary marking, sampling and moderation. The College is guided through this process by the University and reported that the process is very rigorous and structured.

1.10 The College fulfils its obligations in respect of the Quality Code's requirements for academic standards. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.11 The College uses programme specifications and module handbooks as the definitive record for each programme and qualification that it offers. These are written and approved by the University of Huddersfield as the awarding body.

1.12 Each of these documents contains relevant information, including learning outcomes, assessment methods and module codes. Responsibility for maintaining the definitive records of programmes rests with the awarding body. The College engages with these documents appropriately, which would allow this Expectation to be met.

1.13 The review team looked at appropriate and relevant evidence module handbooks and programme handbooks. The team explored how effectively students are guided through programme, module and assessment information and how staff engage with the process.

1.14 The review team found that students are aware of their respective programme specification and module handbook. These are discussed with students at the beginning of their programme and formally available to download through the University's virtual learning environment (VLE).

1.15 The College has adequate internal procedures in place to ensure that any changes that might arise from the awarding body will be effectively implemented within their own document repositories. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.16 The College's higher education provision consists of the following Teacher Education programmes: an In-Service Certificate in Education (Lifelong Learning) at level 5 on *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ); an In-Service Professional Graduate Certificate in Education (Lifelong Learning) at level 6; and a level 6 honours degree programme (BA Hons) Education and Professional Development programme.

1.17 The approval of the higher education programmes, which are all offered in part-time study mode at the College, is ultimately the responsibility of the awarding body. Awarding body approval is undertaken by the University of Huddersfield and attended by appropriate staff from the College. Changes, such as module review can only be made to programmes through a formal process, which requires approval by the University.

1.18 Programme and module specification documents are drafted by the University and are validated in accordance with the procedures established within the University's Quality Assurance Procedures for Taught Courses. The University, as degree-awarding body, ensures, through its own programme approval processes, that programmes meet UK threshold academic standards.

1.19 Schools within the University are responsible for the development of the College's courses, and these are validated within the context of the regulations of the University. The higher education provision offered by the College was successfully revalidated in March 2015. Business planning processes are supported by an academic programme consultant from the University, known as a Designated Academic Liaison Officer (DALO), who has a key responsibility for the implementation of the University's quality assurance procedures. The review team heard that this role is well regarded by the course team.

1.20 The procedures put in place by the College's awarding body, together with their implementation and maintenance by the College, would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.21 The review team tested the role that the College plays in maintaining academic standards through its contribution to the design and approval of modules, programmes and qualifications by scrutinising a range of documentation submitted as part of the programme approval processes. During the visit, the team met staff, University staff, current students and alumni to explore the operation of the University process and the College's internal policies and procedures, such as the College reporting structure and quality assurance cycle.

1.22 The requirements of the University are well understood among academic and professional support staff, and the College makes an appropriate contribution to the production of validation documentation in line with the University's requirements. The College contributes to validation events, the most recent having taken place in

March 2015, and plays its role in ensuring that conditions are met and that the validation process and event are concluded properly.

1.23 In addition, the review team noted that the College has responded to the recommendations from the 2011 IQER report in a number of areas, and has recently implemented a formal structure that articulates how responsibilities for managing and delivering higher education are delegated within the management and committee structure of the College. The team heard evidence that the recently convened Higher Education Strategy Group reports to a senior committee (the Academic Standards Committee). However, it is too soon to measure the impact of this development regarding the strengthening of academic standards.

1.24 The College carries out its responsibilities effectively to ensure that the programme design process meets the expectations of the Quality Code. The College adheres to the approval process of the University, including those procedures that ensure that programmes are approved at a level that meets the UK threshold standard.

1.25 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.26 The University of Huddersfield has overall responsibility for these processes. The University's Academic Regulations, and University Network and Consortium Handbook, set out expectations in relation to assessment practices, including the design and aggregation of individual elements to show achievement at learning outcomes at module and programme level. The procedures for the assessment and examination of students enrolled on the awarding body courses are governed by the examination regulations of the University.

1.27 The provision is second-marked within the College in accordance with the arrangements set out in the University's Consortium Handbook, before being submitted for consideration at the University's moderation event.

1.28 The design of assessments is discussed with the College within an annual programme of network meetings held at the University. Assignments are then published by the University in its programme handbooks. Annual planning of the scale of provision and the management of the associated resources is undertaken through the University's Education and Training Consortium, with all partner colleges having involvement through representation on its Steering Committee and membership of its board.

1.29 Definitive programme documentation includes specifications that set out the aims and intended learning outcomes of the programme, and which are compatible with the FHEQ, consistent with the relevant Subject Benchmark Statement and aligned with the professional standards relating to the lifelong learning sector. Module descriptors specify how a wide range of assessment strategies deliver programme outcomes and have explicitly stated credits and level.

1.30 The College and the University have partnership agreements that are supported by a management structure and processes to enable oversight of the higher education. This would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.31 The review team considered the effectiveness of the approach to the award of credit and qualifications by looking at relevant University and College policies, regulations and procedures, programme specifications, module descriptors, student handbooks, assessment information and reports from assessment boards. The review team also met academic staff, professional support staff and senior staff to discuss the procedures in place.

1.32 Assessment is designed to ensure that programme learning outcomes can be met. Programme specifications and modules records demonstrate that each qualification is aligned with the relevant level of the FHEQ, and the University validation processes ensure that the level and volume of study are appropriate. The University produces and maintains definitive module records and assessment briefs.

1.33 Staff whom the review team met demonstrated a clear understanding of the assessment regulations and policies, and provided evidence of engagement with them. The team heard that they also receive useful training from the University. The review team found that there was a thorough understanding of the key role that assessment plays in the demonstration of learning outcomes.

1.34 The review team scrutinised documentation that made clear the University's requirements for first and second-marking and the moderation of its assessment practices. The requirements are well understood and adhered to. Teaching staff know what is expected of them and they confirmed this at meetings.

1.35 Students confirmed that the academic credit of individual modules or units and intended learning outcomes are clearly communicated through induction processes, through their programme handbooks and information presented on the University's VLE, and by teaching staff. They know and understand what is expected of them to achieve the requisite learning outcomes; for example, they were able to provide some good examples relating to the detail of the wide range of assessment strategies that are used to enable them to demonstrate the required learning outcomes.

1.36 The operation of Assessment Boards is clearly articulated within the University's definitive documentation. Assessment Boards are chaired by the University and attended by College staff. The Boards are chaired by a senior member of staff to ensure independence from the programme team, and follow a clearly defined procedure.

1.37 The College follows the arrangement for assessment set out by its awarding body and carries out its responsibilities diligently to ensure that the achievement of relevant learning outcomes has been demonstrated through assessment.

1.38 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.39 Responsibility for the monitoring and review of academic standards is shared between the College and the University. Processes for internal and external moderation, discussed in detail under Expectation B6, ensure that programmes are delivered as approved and that standards of the University, aligned with the FHEQ, are met. The academic health of the programmes is addressed through annual monitoring.

1.40 Programmes delivered with the University are subject to periodic re-approval, which checks that standards are appropriate. The University undertakes a revalidation of courses every five years, as determined by the University's quality assurance arrangements and in accordance with the procedures established within the University's Quality Assurance Procedures for Taught Courses. Programmes delivered at the College were successfully revalidated in May 2015. The external examiners appointed by the University provide ongoing assurance of the standards of the provision.

1.41 Annual monitoring is conducted in line with the processes established by the University. The University appoints a DALO who makes at least one visit to the College per year and who provides advice as appropriate in all matters relating to the operation of the provision, including preparation of the Annual Evaluation of Course Report.

1.42 College staff submit an Annual Evaluation Report to the University using a template provided by the latter. This brings together module reflection, external examiner views, employer engagement matters, a commentary on management information, and other relevant annual monitoring data. It is submitted to the University together with an action plan. The College does not have a separate monitoring process for its higher education provision. The process of annual monitoring is discussed in detail under Expectation B8.

1.43 The College's management structure allows for explicit consideration of higher education matters and the associated regulatory processes. This ensures that programmes are reported upon through a revised committee structure, and enables oversight of higher education provision and the requirements of the University.

1.44 The review team finds that the policies and procedures in place for programme monitoring and review are designed to ensure that standards are aligned with those of the University, and through this, with UK threshold standards. These policies and procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.45 The review team tested the approach to monitoring and review by meeting with staff and analysing documentation such as committee minutes and action plans. The overall College quality improvement plan and self-assessment report, although substantive, relate only to the further education provision. This has informed the recommendation under Expectation B8 that the College should ensure that oversight of annual monitoring processes is applied systematically and operated consistently.

1.46 The College undertakes annual monitoring of its awarding body programmes, following a template provided by the University and submitting that to the appropriate school. From the evidence it saw and the meetings it held, the review team confirmed that, overall, there are appropriate procedures in place from the University for the monitoring and review of programmes; in addition, the reports of external examiners confirm that academic standards are met. Staff at the College share a common understanding of how programme monitoring works and follow all procedures effectively.

1.47 The review team concludes that the College, with the support of the University, has the appropriate policies in place for ongoing monitoring and review of programmes.

1.48 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.49 Academic standards for the higher education provision are set in partnership between the College and the University of Huddersfield. In addition, in order to support the maintenance of academic standards, the University appoints external examiners for each programme. The external examiner reports annually to the University on the conduct of the programmes.

1.50 External examiners are appointed to both programmes in accordance with the University's Regulations for Awards. The reporting back of actions to external examiners is undertaken by the University school Course Leader. Programme or regulatory changes are also managed through this procedure.

1.51 The principal reference points used by the College to inform its higher education provision are the University's processes and procedures, which ensure alignment with the Quality Code and the FHEQ. The maintenance of the College's academic standards is also supported by the key role of the DALO. The DALO's main function is to ensure that the University's requirements are met in relation to the quality of students' learning opportunities and the academic standards of the programmes. The DALO is an experienced member of the course team and produces a brief annual report.

1.52 External examiners' reports confirm that the academic standards achieved by students are appropriate for the award and level of study, as do the annual evaluation reports produced by the College.

1.53 The programmes are operated through the University's Education and Training Consortium, which comprises 21 providers. Within the University's collaborative arrangements provision, the external examiners do not identify specific centres in their reports, but in their feedback it is possible for the teaching team to identify features of the College's good practice and those for improvement, for example the early adoption of the mandatory iPDP (e-portfolio) and the use of vlogs as summative reflexive practice.

1.54 In respect of action to be taken the College takes and considers the relevant comments in respect of its programmes and compiles a brief action plan relating to any issues raised. Additionally, written feedback from the examiners is provided to each of the partner institutions through comments made on the moderation forms attached to samples of student work.

1.55 There is an accreditation of prior learning and achievement (APEL) scheme, which supports students, and the review team met students who confirmed its effectiveness.

1.56 The policies and processes in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.57 The review team examined a range of relevant documentation, including policies and procedures relating to external examining, such as the operation of Assessment Boards and external examiner reports.

1.58 The review team explored with the College its degree of confidence in its ability to meet and maintain academic standards, especially in relation to the systems and processes of the University, including the work of the course assessment boards, which involves external examiners.

1.59 In meetings, staff demonstrated a clear understanding of their responsibilities for securing externality and the review team found that the engagement of the programme leader and teaching staff are effective. Actions required by external examiners are reported and monitored throughout the year, through a range of annual monitoring processes, including the Annual Evaluation Report.

1.60 However, the review team could not locate any specific reference to the progression of the action plans arising from the Annual Evaluation Reports through the College's committee structure, such as the Academic Standards Committee.

1.61 External examiners are recognised as an essential element of the verification of assessment, and their confirmation of appropriate outcomes at the Assessment Boards at the end of the academic year confirms the overall standards of the University programmes. The review team found that assessments are appropriate and at the national standard.

1.62 External examiner reports are not routinely made available to students through the College's VLE or social media platforms. The review team heard that this is due to the difficulty of extrapolating specific relevant comments relating to the College's provision when a single report is provided for all partners. The review team considered it would be beneficial for the College, with the University, to develop the existing arrangements so that students are enabled to access and locate the relevant aspects of external examiner reports.

1.63 The systems in place at the College enable it to fulfil its contractual responsibilities with the University, make use of appropriate external expertise, identify and address issues promptly, and prepare appropriately for external participation in the assessment process. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

1.65 All seven Expectations in this judgement area are met, with a low level of risk. The review team makes no recommendations or affirmations and there were no features of good practice.

1.66 The College applies effective processes to ensure the maintenance of the awarding body's academic standards, and relevant national levels and frameworks for qualifications. College policies and procedures for programme monitoring and review are designed to ensure that standards are aligned with those of the awarding body, and through this, with UK threshold standards.

1.67 The programme specifications and module handbooks are the definitive record for each of the programmes. While these are designed and approved by the awarding body the review team found that students are aware of each for their respective programmes.

1.68 The College adheres to the awarding body's processes for assessment to ensure that the achievement of relevant learning outcomes has been demonstrated.

1.69 The College undertakes its responsibilities effectively for maintaining academic standards and aligns its practice and processes with those of the awarding body and with the Quality Code.

1.70 The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies at the College **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

Expectation (B1): Higher education providers, in discharging their responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, operate effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes.

Quality Code, Chapter B1: Programme Design, Development and Approval

Findings

2.1 The College's higher education provision consists of franchised programmes. As outlined under Expectation A3.1, the design and approval of higher education programmes offered is ultimately the responsibility of its awarding body, the University of Huddersfield. Schools within the University are responsible for the development of its courses and these are validated within the context of the regulations of the University.

2.2 The Education and Training Consortium of the University works collaboratively with partners. College staff influence the design of programmes where possible in the partnership arrangements, through positive formal relationships. This is achieved through the link tutor (DALO) and partner network meetings held by the University. An example of College staff's involvement in the design of programmes relates to module review and the promotion of new professional standards within the Teacher Education programmes.

2.3 In addition, the College regularly contributes to continuous professional development events, which take place within the Education and Training Consortium to disseminate and share good practice. This is formally reported upon in the annual evaluation report, which forms part of the quality assurance arrangements required by the University. An example of the College's commitment to programme design and development is a project, funded by the Consortium, which has the potential to influence the design of modules, regarding a developmental reflective approach to pedagogy.

2.4 The College recognises its responsibility for ensuring that programmes are delivered as specified in the validated programme documentation, and engages effectively with the link tutor system and Consortium arrangements established by the University. The programmes operated at the College were recently subject to a successful revalidation process by the University.

2.5 There are clear and robust quality assurance processes in place for the design and approval of programmes, to which the College makes a positive contribution.

2.6 The policies and processes in place and the strong relationship with the University would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.7 The review team explored the strength of these arrangements through discussion with staff from the College and the University, and by scrutinising a range of programme documentation, including the revalidation event documentation, annual evaluation reports, statements of resources planning, committee minutes, and documentation from the University. The review team was confirmed the productive nature of the College's relationship with the University and is confident that the College is effectively discharging its responsibilities in adhering to validated programme documentation.

2.8 In examining programme and validation documentation such as programme specifications, module descriptors, programme handbooks and context documents,

the review team explored the extent to which the defining characteristics are embodied in the design of programmes. This was further explored in meetings with senior and teaching staff of both the College and the University.

2.9 The College's framework for programme design and approval of higher education programmes is robust and effective. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education

Findings

2.10 The University of Huddersfield has overall responsibility for recruitment, selection and admissions, with the College operating within the University's processes and procedures. The College has an admissions tutor who works directly with the University to ensure that the admissions processes and procedures operate effectively.

2.11 The College applies systems, processes, policies and procedures that adhere to the principles of fair admissions. This would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.12 The review team examined a range of appropriate and relevant documentation that describes the College's policies and processes for the admission of students. Furthermore, the team met students to discuss their experience of the admission process and also heard from staff involved with managing the process.

2.13 The review team found that when students contact the College directly, they are given the appropriate information on how to apply formally for the programmes and given effective assistance and support. Once accepted onto their programme, they are invited to join a number of online groups within the College's chosen social networking platform that are relevant to each course and year group. The team found that this was an extremely important tool in creating a sense of community for the students from the outset of their student experience.

2.14 The College highlighted that recruitment was a challenge in the development of its higher education provision. At the time of the review visit initial steps had been taken to market programmes through social media platforms. The team found that this is making a significant contribution to student recruitment. The review team **affirms** the steps taken to further increase recruitment of students through the use of social media in marketing.

2.15 The College provides appropriate support and information to students within the admission, selection and recruitment process. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.16 The programmes currently taught at the College were successfully revalidated in May 2015. There is a College Curriculum Strategy and Higher Education Strategy; however, the review team found that the College did not always align the strategy policies and the operational aspects of teaching and learning. The College describes its teaching environment as a 'community of praxis', in which its students, graduates, mentors and staff members have space to discuss and think about education and what it means to be an educator.

2.17 The College has a responsive and reactive approach to issues raised by staff and students. This was evident in a range of workshops provided to raise student skills. Staff receive appropriate training for their respective roles, including support from the University of Huddersfield. The University has ultimate responsibility for ensuring that all staff are appropriately qualified to tutor on their awards. The College carries out annual observations of teaching, learning and assessment. The structure that the College has in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.18 The review team examined appropriate and relevant documentation describing the College's strategies and policies related to learning and teaching. The team also considered committee minutes, feedback data and other information and guidance available to staff, students and external stakeholders. Furthermore, the team held meetings with senior, support and academic staff, in addition to students and alumni.

2.19 The review team found that all College staff are currently enrolled on programmes and courses related to their roles. The College is currently at the beginning of pursuing Higher Education Academy accreditation, which it would use to develop and enhance its teaching practice further.

2.20 The review team found that the College's approach to digital technologies is highly valued and appreciated by the students. The team heard how the use of learning platforms enables students to communicate effectively with their tutors and each other between class sessions, which could sometimes be up to six weeks apart. This approach successfully creates a sense of community within the student body and facilitates learning at distance. Should students struggle with the use of learning technologies the College deploys a Digital Nurse, who provides effective support. The highly effective use of learning technologies to inform and underpin learning, teaching and assessment is **good practice**.

2.21 However, the review team also found that the College's strategy for learning technologies is disjointed and in need of further consideration. This is also considered in Section C of this report, and there is a recommendation to develop a strategy to provide cohesion and integration of the range of learning technology platforms, which includes systematic monitoring and review.

2.22 In addition, the review team found limited cohesion between the College's Curriculum Strategy, Higher Education Strategy and the application of teaching and learning.

The review team **recommends** that, by September 2016, the College integrate the curriculum and teaching and learning strategies to secure the higher education strategic aims.

2.23 While the review team found areas for further development at the College it was evident that students have a strong and positive learning relationship. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement

Findings

2.24 The College has a range of processes in place to support students. These include academic support, extended library services, and a Digital Nurse for assistance with learning technologies. For students who declare a disability or learning difficulty the College works with the University of Huddersfield to provide a Personal Learning Support Plan. The College has two trained thinking environment coaches who provide appropriate pastoral and academic support when needed. The Equality and Diversity Policy, which was updated in November 2014, outlines the approach the College takes in ensuring opportunity for everyone who 'learns, lives and works' within the College.

2.25 The College has a structure in place to allow for appropriate student support. This would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.26 The review team examined documents that describe the College's procedures for enabling student development and achievement. These included the Contract of Collaboration, the minutes of Student Panel meetings, and information in handbooks and on the College's website. Furthermore, the team met senior staff, academic and support staff, students and alumni, and discussed the effectiveness of the College's approach.

2.27 Students met by the review team are extremely satisfied with the level of individualised support that they receive at the College. In addition, the learning environment is supportive, with extensive peer networks. The high level of individualised support provided by the College to improve students' learning opportunities is **good practice**.

2.28 The College, with the support from its awarding body, has effective systems, processes and procedures in place to enable students to achieve their academic and personal potential. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student Engagement

Findings

2.29 The College provides a range of mostly informal mechanisms for students to provide feedback on their learning experience at programme level, such as critical incident questionnaires and rolling records of formal Student Panel meetings.

2.30 Staff and students value the small-scale personal approach to teaching, which means that student feedback is often conveyed locally and informally, enabling a speedy resolution.

2.31 The College is supported by the processes of the University of Huddersfield, which requires a student representative structure to be in place for its programmes. The College is responsible for implementing this and the engagement of students as partners in quality assurance and enhancement.

2.32 The Student Panel meetings at the College are chaired by the University's DALO. A rolling record of this is forwarded to the University's course committee for consideration.

2.33 There are no elected student representatives in place to participate in higher education groups, and students confirmed that they are not represented on the College's Academic Board or any other deliberative committee, such as course committees, which would provide a formal structure for explicit student engagement.

2.34 Feedback is gathered in a variety of mechanisms, such as Critical Incident Questionnaires, module and course evaluations, and through a wide range of social media platforms, which are very well used by students and which provide an effective means of providing feedback. There is a low completion rate of the University's course and module evaluation surveys and the College is taking steps to address this through an action plan contained in the annual evaluation report. Students are aware of this and confirmed that they are engaging more positively in the process.

2.35 The College has appropriate informal structures in place to ensure that the student voice is heard at programme level. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.36 The review team analysed the operation and effectiveness of student engagement by examining the involvement of students in the College committee and course structure, the impact of the student voice, and the feedback provided by the College in response to student comments. The team examined documentation such as Student Panel action points, Critical Incident Questionnaires and student handbooks. It also explored the access to, and use of, the University's VLE and the College's social media platforms, and met students, teaching and professional support staff, and alumni during the visit.

2.37 There are no formal student representatives and no College higher education student council. The College acknowledges that its delivery model makes it difficult for all cohorts of students to be represented in person at the University's Student Panel meetings. Students attend the College two days per month or every six weeks, sometimes on a residential basis, which students find extremely valuable in developing a 'community of praxis'.

2.38 In the student submission to this review students confirm that there is a strong relationship between the student body and the College, and examples are provided in respect of the effective response to student issues such as financial matters.

2.39 The review team heard that distance and other personal commitments can pose difficulties for students to attend student representative meetings, and to ameliorate these limitations, students are positively encouraged to use various social media platforms as communication and discussion tools. Students are involved in design of new programmes through the development of a 'community of praxis', and through the establishment of critical friendship groups and other student engagement activities, such as student conferences held at the University. Students regard these events, and the use of e-portfolios, as positively transformational in their development of intellectual capacity and critical thinking.

2.40 The strong relationship between staff and students enables feedback to be dealt with on an informal basis. Students are made aware of actions taken by the College through their tutors and social media platforms. Students consider that their views are taken seriously and acted upon, for example by providing more support regarding the interpretation of grading criteria.

2.41 The review team noted that the senior leadership team does not regularly record its consideration of student feedback, and although surveys and logs are considered through annual monitoring processes, the analysis recorded was not sufficiently detailed with qualitative comments and quantitative data to inform future planning.

2.42 Due to the lack of formal representation by students, the review team **recommends** that, by September 2016, the College further develop formal student representation to enable fuller engagement in the quality assurance and enhancement processes.

2.43 The College actively and effectively seeks feedback from its students at programme level and responds appropriately. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low, due to the College's commitment to using student feedback, which is meaningful and enacted. However, there is no formal systematic student representation on organisation-level committees and students more routinely are not represented at this level.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.44 As outlined in Expectation A3.2, the College processes for assessment operate in accordance with the academic frameworks and regulations of the University of Huddersfield. The overall approach to assessment is set out in the University Network and Consortium Handbook document. The College does not have its own procedures.

2.45 Assessments for awards made by the University are checked through the involvement of DALOs, and standardisation and internal moderation activities held at the University. Assessed work is internally verified by the University to ensure appropriateness, achievement of learning outcomes and marking to agreed criteria. The University's moderation procedures directly involve all academic staff delivering its awards and ensure both the standardisation of assessment as well as the sharing of good practice. The College uses a social media tool as the primary means of communication between staff to ensure that assessments are standardised.

2.46 The University's regulations and guidelines are available to staff and students on the University's VLE, and these include information relating to admissions criteria and extenuating circumstances. Students are familiar with these.

2.47 Details of assessment criteria are contained within programme handbooks, where they are explained at the start of each module. Students are issued with assignment briefs, which are devised by the University. The College has processes for the accreditation of certificated and non-certificated prior learning and prior experiential learning, and complies with the University's processes, procedures and policies in relation to APEL/APLA. This process is used effectively.

2.48 Students submit their assessments online by means of an e-portfolio and feedback is provided online. Major assessments are uploaded via plagiarism-detection software and then marked with an online assessment tool. All assessments are second-marked and moderated throughout the year, thus allowing for consistent standards to be maintained.

2.49 Students retain ownership of their e-portfolio post-graduation and are able, if they wish, to share this with employers or prospective employers. The review team heard that the use of the e-portfolio contributes significantly to the acquisition of students' digital literacy skills.

2.50 The policies and procedures of the College, together with the regulations and procedures of the University, would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.51 The review team examined the effectiveness of the approaches and procedures in respect of assessment by scrutinising assessment documentation, the collaborative partnership agreement, University regulations, the Consortium Handbook, programme handbooks, minutes of course assessment boards, College committee minutes, annual evaluation reports and external examiners' reports. The team also held meetings with

teaching staff, a representative from the University, students, alumni, and professional and support staff, and viewed content within the College's social media platforms.

2.52 The evidence reviewed showed the procedures to be effective in practice. The University procedures ensure that effective assessment strategies allow students to demonstrate competence to meet the intended learning outcomes of their programme of study. Course Assessment Boards meet at least biannually, with extraordinary meetings if required, and membership includes the College's higher education course leader.

2.53 External examiners consider that feedback to students is of a very high standard, with an emphasis on formative feedback for progression. Students confirmed that they are made fully aware of assessment tasks and understand what is required of them, and reported that they are satisfied. They find the assessment criteria, which are mapped to the Education and Training Foundation professional standards, appropriately challenging.

2.54 Students additionally reported that they are satisfied with the volume and promptness of feedback on assessed work and that they find the emphasis on formative feedback very helpful. They commented that the College adheres to its agreed timeframe of a three-week turnaround time, generally providing feedback well in advance of that deadline. The use of the online student portfolio enables staff to engage more frequently with students and this enhances the quality of the students' learning experience.

2.55 The College has in place procedures to recognise students' prior learning. These operate under the agreements and regulations of the University and are valid and reliable. The suitability of all applicants claiming APEL is considered by school panels within the University. The University's link tutor (DALO) advises the College on APEL procedures, monitors mentor arrangements, and records and provides training for the Education and Training Consortium partners. The review team heard that a significant proportion of students currently on programme at the College are recruited through the APEL procedure (approximately 40 per cent). Students whom the team met spoke very highly of the process and consider that access and completion of the APEL bridging process has been transformational in enabling them to achieve their learning outcomes. The embedded and comprehensive APEL process that promotes student transition to higher education programmes is **good practice**.

2.56 Applications for mitigating circumstances for the awards of the University are submitted to the University. The review team scrutinised policy documentation relating to academic malpractice, regulations for awards, plagiarism, and the management of reasonable adjustment, provided by the University for its programmes. Students have access to their originality reports through the use of plagiarism-detection software and the College is able to identify potential issues of plagiarism at an early stage.

2.57 Policies and procedures for the assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning are in place and effective. Assessment methods are designed and approved by the University to provide opportunities for students to demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes. Criteria and expectations for assessment are presented to students at induction and within programme handbooks, and they are clearly understood. Verification processes are in place to ensure that standards are being met. Annual Evaluation Reports use evidence from a range of performance data and external examiner feedback to provide evidence of appropriate assessment practices.

2.58 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining

Findings

2.59 External examiners are appointed by the University of Huddersfield as awarding body. Their nomination and role are within the remit of the regulations and processes of the University. Schools at the University are responsible for the initial consideration of external examiners and they are allocated accordingly.

2.60 The University is responsible for producing programme documentation and making it available to the external examiner. This includes programme specifications, module handbooks and module descriptors. The external examiners submit work directly to the University's designated course leader, in accordance with the procedures set out by the University's quality assurance procedures. The external examiners provide reports that cover all institutions within the collaborative partnership. The University shares copies of the reports with the College.

2.61 The College engages with the external examiners by supplying samples of marked students' work. External examiners do not attend at the College.

2.62 The University's designated course leader provides a response to the external examiner in consultation with the College. The contents, including any recommendations and examples of good practice, are included in the University's annual monitoring report.

2.63 Additionally, written feedback from the external examiners is provided to each of the Education and Training Consortium partners through comments made on moderation forms attached to the samples of student work. The feedback is specific to each College and any comments requiring action are clearly identified and responded to within two months, in time for the University's annual evaluation process. Action plans are also reported on within the University's Course Assessment Board reporting cycle.

2.64 The College's Higher Education Coordinator extracts strengths, weaknesses and areas for development and action points from external examiner reports where possible. The review team heard that there have been no specific actions that needed to be addressed within recent years. In respect of the strengths of the programmes, external examiners have commented favourably on the range of staff and students' digital literacy skills, which is worthy of wider dissemination across the partnership (see Enhancement).

2.65 The College uses external expertise to maintain and ensure the currency of awards, and to support the vocational and professional relevance of the programmes of study. This includes alignment with the professional standards of the sector-endorsed Education and Training Foundation.

2.66 There are no employer advisory boards but the College does engage productively with employers, including local authorities, colleges, trade unions and community-based organisations who sponsor students for the Teacher Education programmes.

2.67 The external examiners appointed by the University, the College's recognition of the role of the external examiners, and the processes in place to ensure that the external examiner reports are considered and responded to, would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.68 The review team explored the nature and depth of the relationship between the College, the University and external examiners in discussion with staff and students.

Additionally, the team analysed a range of documentation, policies and procedures, including the content of external examiner reports, and was satisfied that any issues arising are addressed appropriately through the University's processes; however, it is not clear where actions are considered within the College's own annual monitoring processes (see Expectation B8).

2.69 The external examiner reports provide assurance that the College is maintaining threshold standards, that assessments measure student achievement against the learning outcomes and that standards are comparable with other higher education providers in the UK.

2.70 However, the review team found that presentation of external examiner reports is cumbersome, as the engagement is centred on receiving and responding to the external examiner reports, which mainly provide an overview of the programmes across all providers, rather than separately reporting on the provision at each of the University's partners. Therefore, it is not always possible to extract specific feedback, although the moderation process, as described above, helps to identify specific points. There is opportunity and scope for external examiners to comment directly on the College's provision and recommend any areas for development.

2.71 The review team heard that although students have an awareness of the role of external examiners, they are not familiar with the names and details of their examiners, and external examiner reports are not routinely shared with them. Students commented that should they wish to see a report, it would be made available to them. It may be helpful to the College if students were made aware of this opportunity.

2.72 The measures in place at the College to ensure the use of external examiners' reports to maintain academic standards for each qualification are effective. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review

Findings

2.73 As stated under Expectation A.3.3, the College's programmes are subject to the annual monitoring and periodic review processes of the University of Huddersfield.

2.74 Revalidation of programmes takes place every five years and there is a process for this which is outlined in the University's Quality Assurance Procedures for Taught Courses. Periodical review processes are set out by the University and a successful revalidation recently took place in March 2015.

2.75 There are processes in place should a programme be discontinued, and the review team was assured that students on that programme would continue to complete their studies to achievement of the award with full delivery and support provided.

2.76 Annual monitoring of the University's franchised programmes requires the programme team to complete a template provided by the University and to submit that together with an action plan relating to the previous academic year; this includes any outstanding action to be taken in respect of external examiner reports.

2.77 The annual evaluation reports consider, among other things, course data, student feedback, employer engagement, responses to external examiner reports, competitor positioning, good practice worthy of wider dissemination, and a dated action plan. The University amalgamates annual monitoring reports into overview reports of the programmes across all providers within the Education and Training Consortium, to consider the programmes as a whole and feed these into their annual monitoring processes and relevant school course committee reporting.

2.78 The University appoints DALO, who makes at least one visit a year to the College, and who provides advice as appropriate in all matters relating to the operation of the provision, including preparation of the Annual Evaluation Report.

2.79 The College engagement with these processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.80 The review team tested the Expectation by evaluating the College's arrangements for annual monitoring and review. The team did this by scrutinising relevant documents, including procedural documents, the College's quality improvement strategy, annual monitoring reports, external examiner reports, the minutes of relevant committees, and quality improvement plans, and through meetings with students, professional support staff, academic staff, senior managers and a representative from the University.

2.81 The review team explored the effectiveness of these processes and found that annual monitoring processes enable due consideration of student feedback and appropriate use of external examiner reports, which generate action plans. However, the team was unable to confirm that actions have been addressed, including improving student contribution to module evaluation.

2.82 It was not clear to the team how the College's organisation-level oversight of the higher education provision includes detailed programme-level scrutiny. Although there is a

Higher Education Strategy Development and Coordination Group, which convenes on a termly basis, it is not formally represented within the College's reporting structure organogram, and its membership, terms and remit are not included in the overall terms and remit of the College's key committee structure. Additionally, the College's underpinning quality improvement strategy, and annual quality and planning cycle, do not contain any explicit consideration of higher education matters.

2.83 Staff whom the review team met demonstrated an understanding of the processes in respect of the University processes and their own responsibilities, but were unclear regarding the College's own processes for annual monitoring and review, or how the outputs of the University processes feed into and strengthen the College's own quality assurance and quality improvement cycles for the higher education provision.

2.84 Additionally, staff were unclear how, where and when actions arising from Annual Evaluation Reports are addressed or completed, or how they result in systemic continuous improvement. The College's Rolling Action Plan, which comprises actions to be taken in response to Annual Evaluation Reports, does not identify reporting structures, responsibilities for monitoring or timescales for completion, or how actions are followed through from year to year. Similarly, although there are action plans and quality improvement plans for Teacher Education, it was not clear how these relate to the Annual Evaluation Reports or, indeed, whether the proposed actions are related to the further or higher education programmes.

2.85 The review team read the College's self-assessment report, and the recently produced self-assessment and quality improvement plan for the Teacher Education provision, but these did not contain any consideration of higher education matters, actions, target dates or indicators of success. Following further discussion and scrutiny of documentation, the team heard that the Annual Evaluation Reports and their action plans are not reported upon within the College's committee structure and they are not considered by the corporation.

2.86 The review team **recommends** that, by September 2016, the College ensure that oversight of annual monitoring processes is applied systematically and operated consistently.

2.87 The review team could not discern any engagement with the Quality Code, or any articulation of how UK threshold academic standards are explicitly achieved and commented upon within the annual monitoring process. This would be helpful to the College and its consideration of higher education matters. Additionally, the team noted that the College has not addressed fully the advisable recommendation from the previous IQER report relating to more formal and explicit engagement with the Quality Code to ensure that full account is taken of recognised effective practice in the management of academic standards and quality of its current and future higher education provision.

2.88 There is a lack of annual monitoring processes at the College to enable it to systematically, effectively and consistently discharge its responsibilities for overseeing, assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities. The review team concludes that the Expectation is not met and the level of associated risk is moderate, due to weaknesses in the operation of the College's academic governance, and the lack of emphasis given to assuring standards of quality in the College's planning processes.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

Quality Code, Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints

Findings

2.89 There is a framework in place for supporting informal and formal resolution of complaints and appeals. The College advocates informal resolution before any formal procedures are used and provides support for students through its Student Services team. This informal route via tutors was identified in the student submission to this report as the usual route for dealing with any concerns, and students are aware of how to escalate complaints should the need arise.

2.90 The University of Huddersfield Network and Consortium Handbook, and the collaborative agreement between the University and the College, set out the responsibilities of both organisations in respect of student complaints and student appeals.

2.91 The College is responsible for progressing student complaints through this process in the first instance. This procedure is also applied to cases of academic integrity. Any complaint or appeal that is not resolved at the College may be referred to the University's formal stage and ultimately to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.

2.92 The Network and Consortium Handbook and standardised programme handbooks make it clear that students have a right to request a review of a complaint or appeal through the University's appeal procedures, highlighted in the Students' Handbook of Regulations, within 28 days.

2.93 Information on how to submit a claim for mitigating circumstances is provided to students in the Network and Consortium Handbook and Students' Handbook of Regulations. Within this documentation, students are informed that they have a right of appeal if a mitigating circumstances application is rejected.

2.94 The arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.95 The review team evaluated the effectiveness of the arrangements for handling complaints and appeals by reading a range of student handbooks, scrutinising academic regulations and accessing the student charter.

2.96 The review team also explored the complaints and appeals processes with students and academic and professional support staff. The team heard that the College encourages informal discussion of complaints at programme level to seek early resolution, and discussions with staff identified that many informal means exist for students to raise concerns. To date no formal complaints have been received by the College.

2.97 Students described fully the arrangements for complaints and appeals, and confirmed that these arrangements are clearly and effectively communicated to them. They also confirmed that students who remain dissatisfied can seek to involve the University or seek support from the College's Student Services team should that be necessary.

2.98 There are effective procedures in place for considering complaints and appeals, and students are aware of the policies and procedures and how they could seek support outside of their programme team.

2.99 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.100 The College is a member of the University of Huddersfield's Education and Training Consortium, which has a network of other providers that offer similar programmes.

2.101 The College's provision includes workplace observations and mentoring of students. The College supports these processes with relevant guidance information. The College has appropriate structures and procedures in place that would allow for this Expectation to be met .

2.102 The review team considered a range of relevant and appropriate documentary evidence including the Contract of Collaboration, Higher Education Strategy, Curriculum Strategy and mentor handbooks. The team also met senior staff, academic and support staff, students and alumni to discuss the effectiveness of these procedures and how they work in practice.

2.103 The review team found that students whom they met were supported on their work placements. It is the responsibility of the student to find and secure a position to undertake their work-based learning. It is also the responsibility of the student to find and secure an appropriate mentor who will assist in guiding them through their learning. If there are any problems in securing a mentor, the College can take action and provide an intermediate mentor until a permanent one can be secured.

2.104 The review team heard from mentors that the information that the College provides is appropriate and gives them the information necessary to carry out their roles effectively. Furthermore, the team heard that students valued their mentors' support and the contribution they made to their professional development.

2.105 The College has effective arrangements in place for work-based provision. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Findings

2.106 The College does not offer research degrees, therefore this Expectation does not apply.

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

2.108 There are 10 applicable Expectations in this judgement area and nine are met with a low risk. The Expectation for programme monitoring and review (B8) is not met and the level of risk is moderate.

2.109 The review team makes three recommendations in this area, which relate to the Expectations for learning and teaching (B3), student engagement (B5), and programme monitoring and review. There is a further recommendation in Expectation B3, which is cross-referenced to a substantive recommendation in information about higher education provision (Expectation C).

2.110 There is also an affirmation relating to recruitment, selection and admission to higher education (Expectation B2), and three features of good practice in learning and teaching (Expectation B3), enabling student development and achievement (Expectation B4) and assessment of students and the recognition of prior learning (Expectation B6).

2.111 The first recommendation in this area relates to Expectation B3 and learning and teaching. It relates to the limited cohesion between the College's Curriculum Strategy, Higher Education Strategy and the application of teaching and learning. The review team recommends that the College integrate the curriculum and teaching and learning strategies to secure the higher education strategic aims by September 2016.

2.112 The review team's second recommendation is concerned with student engagement (Expectation B5). Due to the lack of formal representation of students in the College's deliberative processes the review team recommends that, by September 2016, the College further develops formal student representation to enable fuller engagement in the quality assurance and enhancement processes.

2.113 The final recommendation in this area is in regard to programme monitoring and review (Expectation B8). From meetings and scrutiny of documentation the review team found that programme evaluations and their action plans are not reported upon within the College's committee structure. The review team recommends that, by September 2016, the College ensure that oversight of annual monitoring processes is applied systematically and operated consistently.

2.114 A further recommendation is cross-referenced to learning and teaching (Expectation B3), and this is considered more fully under Expectation C.

2.115 The review team makes one affirmation in this area with regard to recruitment, selection and admission to higher education (Expectation B2), and affirms the steps taken to further increase recruitment of students through the use of social media in marketing.

2.116 There are three areas of good practice identified by the review team and these are the highly effective use of learning technologies to inform and underpin learning, teaching and assessment (Expectation B3), the high level of individualised support provided by the College to improve students' learning opportunities (Expectations B4 and Enhancement), and the embedded and comprehensive APEL process that promotes student transition to higher education programmes (Expectation B6).

2.117 The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

Expectation: 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 provides information to prospective students through a range of mediums including the website, a blog dedicated to its higher education provision, and social media platforms. All formal programme information is approved and written by the University of Huddersfield. The College uses a number of digital platforms to communicate to students regarding programme content and learning.

3.2 The College has a Social Media Policy that outlines the responsibilities when accessing social media for College purposes. It also has an E-Learning Strategy to outline the operation of its range of learning platforms. This would allow the Expectation to be met.

3.3 The review team examined relevant and appropriate documentation describing the College's policies and processes for the production of information for internal and external stakeholders, including the Contract of Collaboration and E-Learning Strategy. In addition, the team discussed the effectiveness of these policies and processes in meetings with senior, academic and support staff.

3.4 The review team found that students receive appropriate information about their programmes before, during and after the admissions process. Additionally, all students are fully aware of the content of their programmes and what is expected of them.

3.5 The review team found that the College makes use of a range of different learning and online platforms. These include a social networking platform, which the College uses as a repository of information, and a number of other specific forums that allow students to communicate with each other effectively and safely. In addition, students also use the VLE provided by the University, which provides all relevant course information. The purpose and cohesion of the range of learning platforms was not clear to the review team, nor were the strategic decisions and direction for their development. In addition, the review team found that there was no formal mechanism for the updating and checking of information across the various platforms used by the College.

3.6 The review team heard that a strategy is to be developed that will provide guidance and a framework for future development and rationalisation of the College's information applications and systems. However, at the time of the review visit no formal development had taken place. The review team **recommends** that, by September 2016, the College develop a strategy to provide cohesion and integration of the range of learning technology platforms that includes systematic monitoring and review.

3.7 The College, in conjunction with its awarding body, provides all relevant information to prospective and current students in a timely manner. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

3.9 The one Expectation in this judgement area is met, with a low level of risk, and is cross-referenced with Expectation B3 in relation to learning and teaching. There are no affirmations or features of good practice.

3.10 The College provides information through a range of media including a website, a blog and social media platforms. These are informed by a Social Media Policy and E-Learning Strategy.

3.11 The purpose and cohesion of the learning platforms lacked clarity, as did strategic decisions and direction for their development. In addition, the review team could find no formal mechanism for updating and checking information, although the team was informed that a strategy is to be developed. Therefore, the review team recommends that the College develops a strategy to provide cohesion and integration of the range of learning technology platforms, which includes systematic monitoring and review, by September 2016.

3.12 The review team concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1 The College has developed enhancement initiatives that derive from a strong institutional commitment and an ethos of furthering the enhancement of learning opportunities for students within a culture of social purpose education. The College invests time and effort into individual and team initiatives to improve the student and alumni experience, and also increase the accessibility of its higher education provision.

4.2 Examples include the effective use of learning technologies to improve staff and students' digital literacy, the development of a dedicated higher education 'community of praxis', a high level of individualised student support processes, including mentorship, and a high progression rate from further education, either into higher education and/or employment.

4.3 The review team confirmed the productive nature of the relationship with the University of Huddersfield and how the College uses this relationship to support staff development and a social purpose ethos through projects funded by the Education and Training Consortium. This includes, for example, a BA (Hons) Educational and Professional Development social media marketing project designed to increase students' learning, which has resulted in increased Cert Ed/PGCE student recruitment.

4.4 Other enhancement initiatives that are part of the College's Reflexion Programme are funded by the Education and Training Foundation lead body, and explore functional models of digital resilience that contribute to the quality of students' learning experience through the sharing of good practice and the development of 'community online' learning.

4.5 The contribution of alumni is extensive and highly regarded by students, who spoke positively about the role of alumni as peer mentors. Peer mentors enable them to develop a high level of employability skills and professional potential, underpinned by the social purpose values that the students take into the workplace.

4.6 The College provides an impressive level and range of individualised support mechanisms for students during their programme, through both teaching activities and the involvement of professional support services, such as the Library, Learning and Support Centre. For example, library staff teach and also provide one-to-one student support for academic writing and study skills, which is highly valued by students, along with the responsive support provided by the digital services technologist.

4.7 Students are enabled to become highly confident learners, which stems from the high level of commitment that the College has to reinforcing a culture that expects and encourages self-responsibility and self-agency, aligned with a social purpose mission. The engagement of students through the College's 'community of praxis' enables them to become more confident regarding their use and exploitation of learning technologies and social media, and this is widely promoted by teaching and professional support staff.

4.8 The review team identified the College's enhancement approach through the meetings it held with staff and students. These meetings provided the team with information that aligned with the College's higher education strategy and identified a range of initiatives designed to enhance students' learning opportunities. The College's pursuit of enhancement

is evident in the range of current initiatives that are helping it to develop and reinforce an ethos in its higher education programmes, which expects and encourages the enhancement of students' learning opportunities.

4.9 These practices for enhancement demonstrate that the College has a set of strategic aims that would allow the Expectation to be met.

4.10 The review team extensively explored the College's arrangements and approach to enhancement through meetings with senior managers and teaching staff, and professional support staff, students and alumni. The review team also examined documentary evidence that focused on enhancement initiatives and how these were managed to form a strategic approach at College levels.

4.11 The review team found that, although the College has produced a statement of higher education strategic aims and priorities, a document entitled Strategy for Growth, and a quality improvement strategy, it is unclear how these will inform any operational plans or how the impact will enhance the quality of students' learning opportunities. Similarly, terms and remits of committees do not include consideration or deliberation of enhancement as a standing item, and the committee organogram does not include representation of the Higher Education Strategy Development and Coordination Group. This committee plays a key role relating to the potential enhancement of the higher education provision, and was the focus of a recommendation in the June 2011 IQER report.

4.12 The review team found that despite consideration of quality improvement measures the College lacks an articulation of the deliberate steps taken at provider level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities. Quality assurance processes are intended to be used to inform enhancement initiatives that, if systematically planned and evaluated, would usefully inform the College's overall strategic approach to enhancement. The review team **recommends** that, by September 2016, the College formalise and strengthens the relationship between higher education priorities and enhancement practices.

4.13 Despite the lack of an overall strategic approach to enhancement it was clear to the review team that the College enhances the quality of students' learning opportunities in an exceptional way, including the high level of individualised support provided by the College to improve students' learning opportunities (see also Expectation B4).

4.14 The College undertakes work to enable deliberate steps to be taken to improve the quality of the student learning opportunities. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.15 In reaching its judgements on the enhancement of student learning opportunities the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

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

4.17 There is one recommendation and a feature of good practice cross-referenced to Expectation B4, which informs the review team's findings in this area.

4.18 The College has developed enhancement initiatives that derive from a strong institutional commitment and ethos to the learning opportunities for students within a culture of social purpose education.

4.19 There is an impressive level and range of individualised support mechanisms for students through teaching activities and the involvement of professional support services. Enhancement is also evident in the range of current initiatives helping to develop and reinforce an ethos that expects and encourages the development of students' learning opportunities.

4.20 However, there are limitations in the College's deliberate steps to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities, including systematic planning and evaluation. The review team recommends that, by September 2016, the College formalise and strengthens the relationship between higher education priorities and enhancement practices.

4.21 Despite the lack of an overall strategic approach to enhancement it was clear to the review team that the College enhances the quality of students' learning opportunities in an exceptional way, including the high level of individualised support provided by the College to improve students' learning opportunities.

4.22 The review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the College **meets** UK expectations.

5 Commentary on the Theme: Digital Literacy

Findings

5.1 The College does not currently have a strategic approach to teaching and learning that articulates the use of learning technologies, and which is specific to higher education. However, the review team heard that there are plans to develop a digital leadership strategy following a recent College restructuring process. This will be produced by a new E-Learning Group, chaired by the Academic Director for Student Support. A meeting has not yet taken place, although a brief has been developed that will inform digital literacy plans, and this will be aligned with the existing College Technology Enhanced Learning Strategy 2014.

5.2 The review team heard that the new Strategy will be considered according to the recommendations arising from the experimental digital work of the higher education teaching team, and will be relevant to all modes of higher education study. Strategic objectives include the promotion of creativity and innovation in teaching and learning, ensuring support for students' acquisition of digital literacy skills, and capacity building. It is not yet clear how the Strategy will be implemented or monitored.

5.3 The College recognises that through maintaining strategic oversight of its processes for, and outcomes of, programme design, development and approval, it can ensure that the higher education programmes reflect the strategic priorities, which include developing digital literacy, and it works closely with its awarding body to ensure this. Digital literacy is embedded into each programme, particularly in respect of assessment, and this reflects the College's strategic aims, such as transforming individuals and communities by the development of reflexive practice.

5.4 Annual monitoring and review activities evaluate the extent to which students are attaining the intended learning outcomes, which include digital literacy where that is embedded within the academic programmes.

5.5 The review team heard and saw documentary evidence to conclude that digital literacy is recognised and supported by the College's corporation, senior managers, and academic and professional support staff through the College's strategic focus, and by its commitment to developing an effective digital infrastructure. The team heard that the College has a reliable IT infrastructure, which is very responsive and supports learning and teaching effectively.

5.6 However, it was not clear to the review team what measures are in place to ensure that legacy material is effectively archived or on what platform; for example, evidence requested by the review team regarding the APEL group support provided to students pre-enrolment had been deleted (see Expectation C).

5.7 As part of the College's responsibility for setting and maintaining academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, the College ensures that, through the acquisition of digital literacy skills, students develop qualities and transferrable skills that have professional relevance and which are necessary for employment. These include the use and exploitation of a wide range of social media tools, the development of an online 'community of praxis', and the creation of innovative learning materials through the use of e-portfolios (iPDP), critical friendship groups and other blended-learning type initiatives.

5.8 Students are supported in the development of digital literacy from pre-entry and throughout their programmes, and IT skills form part of the academic skills assessment through all stages of the courses. Students spoke very highly of the individual and group support that they are offered by learning technology staff, as well as teaching and

professional support staff, particularly regarding the development of research skills and academic writing.

5.9 Students are familiar with the wide range of digital resources made available to them at the University of Huddersfield, and they are confident in their ability to use the University's VLE (Unilearn) and single-search databases (Summon; EBSCO).

5.10 The review team heard and scrutinised documentary evidence from external examiners, awarding bodies and students, which showed that the student learning experience is good. For example, external examiners report upon the sharing of good practice across the Education and Training Consortium in respect of the imaginative use of social media to enhance the quality of students' learning, such as the use of vlogs for summative reflexive work for oral feedback at a Course Assessment Board.

5.11 Staff involved in teaching and supporting digital literacy learning are equipped to fulfil their role in relation to their specific contexts, and aligned to professional standards (the Education and Training Foundation). They are provided with a wide range of staff development opportunities to enable them to support students' learning and fulfil their potential, including attendance at conferences, and engagement with professional organisations such as Jisc, CoLRIC (Council of Learning Resources in Colleges) and NIACE (National Institute of Adult Continuing Education).

5.12 The review team heard that the College is committed to equality in enabling student development and achievement, and, in particular, in developing an inclusive learning environment where the acquisition of digital literacy skills is essential. For example, the College's Digital Nurse provides ad-hoc workshops when students need information on a specific subject area or e-learning. The workshops are convened quickly and in response to students polling on the College's social networking platform, which is a primary communication tool and discussion board for students.

Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 30 to 33 of the [Higher Education Review handbook](#).

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

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

Academic standards

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

Award

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

Blended learning

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

Credit(s)

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

Degree-awarding body

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

Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

Dual award or double award

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

e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

Enhancement

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

Expectations

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

Flexible and distributed learning

A programme or module that does not require the student to attend classes or events at particular times and locations.

See also **distance learning**.

Framework

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

Framework for higher education qualifications

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

Good practice

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

Learning opportunities

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

Learning outcomes

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

Multiple awards

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

Operational definition

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

Programme (of study)

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

Programme specifications

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

Public information

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

Quality Code

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

Reference points

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

Subject Benchmark Statement

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

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)

Learning that is delivered or supported through the use of technology.

Threshold academic standard

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

Virtual learning environment (VLE)

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

Widening participation

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

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