

Higher Education Review of Dearne Valley College

June 2014

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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 Dearne Valley College. The review took place from 10 to 12 June 2014 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Jill Lyttle
- Dr Sarah Shobrook
- Laurence McNaughton (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review the QAA review team:

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

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 5.

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

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

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

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

² Higher Education Review themes: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106.

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 Dearne Valley College

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

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

Good practice

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

- The effective oversight of academic standards and of the quality and enhancement of learning opportunities provided by the Higher Education Quality and Standards Group (Expectation A4 and Enhancement).
- The deliberate steps taken which consistently exceed awarding body requirements (Expectations A4, B1, B8, C and Enhancement).
- The highly effective operation and monitoring of admissions procedures (Expectation B2).
- The systematic and holistic approach to quality improvement in learning and teaching (Expectation B3 and Enhancement).
- The excellent and wide-ranging support mechanisms that enable student development and achievement (Expectation B4).
- The clear commitment to developing and enhancing interactive technologies (Expectation C and Enhancement).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The steps being taken to strengthen students as partners in quality assurance and to formalise their representation on committees (Expectation B5).

Theme: Student Employability

Dearne Valley College is committed to serving the needs of its local population, which has traditionally low levels of participation and aspiration. It also seeks to support employers in developing the local economy. Both student employability and employer engagement are prominent in College strategies.

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

About Dearne Valley College

Dearne Valley College (the College) is a small to medium general further education college located in the borough of Rotherham, in the heart of South Yorkshire. The focus is on high quality vocational provision with progression routes from pre-entry to higher education. This includes apprenticeships and work-based learning, a large training programme for the unemployed and nearly 1,500 students on vocational further education programmes. The College currently enrolls 164 higher education students. Higher education is a strategic priority for the College and is an important part of the curriculum portfolio. The College vision is 'together towards excellence in everything we do'. This mission is supported by the College's core values:

- 'the learner at the centre of all we do
- passionate about high quality
- a respectful and supportive environment'.

The College plays an important role in the local community. There is a strong commitment to employability and widening participation. These factors along with the vision and core values underpin the Higher Education Strategy.

In October 2012 a new Principal and Chief Executive started. With effect from March 2014, the Director of Quality has strategic responsibility for higher education at the College including the safeguarding of academic standards and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities. Delivery of higher education programmes sits within two curriculum areas: Public and Social Sectors and Leisure Industries. The management of the higher education curriculum is within these areas and is carried out by the Curriculum Area Manager. A number of cross-college roles contribute to the management of higher education:

- Quality Manager: FE and HE Achievement
- Higher Education Coordinator
- Quality Manager: Learning and Development
- Quality Manager: Assurance and Improvement.

The scale of provision has been fairly consistent in recent years, although it has undergone significant change. Provision is validated by Teesside University, Leeds Metropolitan University, Sheffield Hallam University and Pearson. In 2013 the College terminated its relationship with the University of Huddersfield and ceased to offer the Certificate in Education/Professional Graduate Certificate in Education. Initially this was replaced by the City and Guilds Diploma in Teaching and Learning in the Lifelong Learning Sector but this was replaced by the new Diploma in Education and Training in February 2014.

There has been a single cohort (2012-14) partnership agreement with Rotherham College of Arts and Technology as a result of a joint bid to the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) for additional numbers as part of the core and margin exercise. The aim of the partnership is to increase local participation in higher education. The two colleges have a strong relationship and positive working relations. There is a partnership agreement in place which clearly outlines areas of responsibility.

In addition to institutional validation with Teesside University in 2012-13, the College was successful in achieving the Investors in Diversity Standard and was re-accredited with the Matrix Standard.

Current challenges to the College include managing the transition from Leeds Metropolitan University to Teesside University as the primary validating partner. For 2013-14, first year

students are working towards the new qualifications while second year students are part of the exit strategy. In addition, the College is adjusting to revised funding arrangements and changes in local competition. It is these challenges which have brought about changes to the Higher Education Strategy. The core of the Higher Education Strategy is about widening participation and providing local opportunities for students who may not otherwise aspire to higher education. The structural changes are intended to consolidate arrangements for the management of Higher Education at the College.

At the last QAA review in 2010, there was confidence in the College's management of its responsibilities for the standards of the awards it offers; confidence in the College's management of its responsibilities for the quality of learning opportunities; and reliance could be placed on the accuracy and completeness of the information the College is responsible for publishing about itself and the programmes it delivers. The College continues to develop the identified areas of good practice where relevant and has addressed the recommendations made. Reporting structures have been clarified and the current structure provides a more focused approach to the strategic and operational management of higher education. Governors have a clear line of sight in relation to higher education quality and standards.

Explanation of the findings about Dearne Valley College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

Terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers have been included in a [brief glossary](#) at the end of this report. A fuller [glossary of terms](#) is available on the QAA website, and formal definitions of certain terms may be found in the operational description and handbook for the [review method](#), also on the QAA website.

1 Judgement: Maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards

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

Quality Code, Chapter A1: The national level

Findings

1.1 The College structures its higher education programmes in accordance with the academic requirements of its awarding bodies: Teesside University, Leeds Metropolitan University, Sheffield Hallam University and Pearson. Using the FHEQ, the Quality Code and the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark* as reference points, the College is responsible for writing and developing new programmes with Teesside University using their approval templates and procedures.

1.2 Processes are in place that allow the College to allocate its programmes to the appropriate level in the FHEQ in accordance with the responsibilities afforded to it by its awarding bodies.

1.3 The review team tested this by scrutinising the development process for the new foundation degrees in conjunction with Teesside University and reviewing paperwork around the various awarding body regulations. The team reviewed minutes from the Higher Education Quality and Standards Group to cross-reference the embedding of academic standards in all higher education programmes.

1.4 The review team found that the College processes work effectively and that the College adheres to the requirements of each awarding body. The Higher Education Quality and Standards Group ensures that each qualification is allocated to the appropriate level in the FHEQ and is in accordance with the requirements of the awarding body. During the academic year 2012-13, the College validated four foundation degrees with Teesside University and decisions by the validation panel did not recognise any concerns regarding the use of the FHEQ.

1.5 External examiner reports were considered in respect of existing provision and these confirmed that the programmes are set and assessed at the correct level of the FHEQ. The Higher Education Quality and Standards Group has an overview of all external examiner reports and this forms part of its annual quality assurance process.

1.6 The review team is satisfied that effective processes are in place to ensure all higher education programmes take account of the FHEQ in programme design and delivery. Overall, the application of the FHEQ is effective and programmes are allocated to the appropriate level. Therefore, the review team finds that the Expectation in *Chapter A1: The national level* is met in both the design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter A2: The subject and qualification level

Findings

1.7 All higher education programmes at the College are designed to take account of the relevant subject and qualification benchmark statements. Programme specifications are appropriate and fit for purpose and the relevant benchmarks have been applied.

1.8 The validation and design processes in place ensure programmes of study take account of relevant subject and qualification benchmark statements. There is currently a range of annual programme monitoring and review processes that the College adhere to for each of its awarding bodies or awarding organisation. These processes are overseen at the College by the Higher Education Quality and Standards Group.

1.9 The review team investigated the processes that the College operates by considering examples of programme specifications and definitive documents from the various awarding bodies and organisation. Consideration was given to how these documents are mapped to the relevant subject and qualification benchmarks. Validation documents were reviewed to confirm use of benchmark statements. In meetings, the team cross-referenced the understanding of staff in regard to the use of subject and qualification benchmarks.

1.10 The College has recently designed a new suite of foundation degrees with Teesside University. The team found that through this approval process explicit use was made of the *Foundation Degree qualification benchmark* to set relevant standards and curriculum content. The validation process with Teesside University confirmed appropriate use of the benchmark statements within the new foundation degrees. Staff used the relevant subject benchmarks for the new programmes with Teesside University.

1.11 The review team confirmed that the College writes the programme specification for Teesside University, Pearson and Leeds Metropolitan University programmes and considers these programme specifications are complete and appropriate. Staff clearly understand how to embed and apply relevant subject and qualification benchmark statements.

1.12 Overall, the College develops and uses programme specifications effectively in accordance with the requirements of its awarding body or awarding organisation and takes account of the relevant subject and qualification benchmark statements. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation in *Chapter A2: The subject and qualification levels* is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter A3: The programme level

Findings

1.13 The College makes available definitive information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements for each programme of study via programme specifications and student handbooks. In 2012-13, four new foundation degrees were validated in partnership with Teesside University. These programmes went through an internal and external validation process to ensure the definitive aims and learning outcomes for the programmes were appropriate and set at the correct level. Students, staff, employers and awarding body representatives were all involved in this process.

1.14 The FdA Early Years is periodically reviewed within the Sheffield Hallam University systems and the development of handbooks and materials rests with the Sheffield Hallam University. Definitive information, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements for the HNC and HND programmes are defined by the awarding organisation, Pearson, and the College adheres to their requirements. The Foundation Degrees in Sport and Exercise, and Travel and Tourism Management, validated by Leeds Metropolitan University, underwent a summative health check in 2013 instead of a periodic review as the partnership between Leeds Metropolitan University and the College is in the process of being dissolved, and was confirmed as appropriate and effective.

1.15 The design of the programme specifications and the information contained in the student handbooks demonstrates that the College has processes in place that ensure the definitive information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements are accurate and available to students.

1.16 The review team tested this Expectation by reviewing programme specifications and student handbooks for clarity and accuracy around definitive information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements for a programme of study. The review team held meetings with senior staff and academic staff to test understanding of familiarity with the processes and with students to talk about programme specifications and handbooks.

1.17 The review team found that the College has clear lines of accountability for the production and processes that ensure definitive information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievement. External scrutiny processes, such as annual programme monitoring and review and external examiner reports demonstrate that the College adheres to its responsibilities. The team also found that the College's internal quality assurance processes ensure definitive information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievement is correct, current and available to students.

1.18 Overall, the external scrutiny and the internal quality assurance processes ensure that the definitive information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements for a programme of study are made available. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation in *Chapter A3: The programme level* is met both in design and operation and the associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter A4: Approval and review

Findings

1.19 Course development, design and approval processes are aligned with, and overseen by, the awarding bodies or awarding organisation. This delegation of responsibility is clearly articulated in the partnership agreements that the College has with its awarding bodies and organisation. The Director of Quality is responsible for ensuring that threshold academic standards are set and maintained in accordance with the awarding body and organisation frameworks. This is monitored by the Higher Education Quality and Standards Group. The College is responsible for the design of its programmes before approval by the validating partner. New modules are discussed at team meetings before being presented at the Higher Education Strategy Group (see Expectation B1).

1.20 The Higher Education Strategy Group discusses course development, design and approval matters before feeding into the Higher Education Quality and Standards Committee. All monitoring and oversight is informed by periodic review via module feedback forms, self-assessment reports, annual monitoring reports and external examiner reports in addition to the guidance the College supplies to staff help engage with these processes, such as professional development days, and internal policies and strategies. Therefore, this contributes to the feature of good practice: the effective oversight of academic standards and of the quality and enhancement of learning opportunities provided by the Higher Education Standards and Quality Group (see also Enhancement).

1.21 The review team tested the processes to approve and periodically review the validity and relevance of programmes by examining programme specifications, validation documents, relevant committee minutes, the College's operations manual, partnership agreements and articulation agreements, as well as the College's Quality Improvement Plan. In addition to this, the team also met relevant staff from the College to discuss the process. These meetings included staff from Teesside University and employers, where the team, in light of the College's commitment to benefitting the community through courses aligned to market needs, sought evidence from industry professionals and employers.

1.22 The review team found the College's embedding of its awarding bodies' processes to be significant and demonstrated on all programmes. While ultimate responsibility for approval and review, particularly in terms of raw process (see Expectation B1), lies with the validating partner, the ownership that the College seeks with regard to the effective monitoring of its programmes' fitness for purpose demonstrates a clear intention to go beyond the minimum requirements as stipulated by College's validating partners. While periodic review of programmes is the responsibility of the awarding body, the College takes ownership of this process as a way of sharing good practice and enhancement opportunities across the College. Of note, the College's Quality Calendar, Quality Improvement Plan and QAA mapping document clearly articulate what is expected further to the articulations of the awarding body. Academic and senior staff that the team met verified their understanding of what the College requires with regard to programme and module feedback analysis. Therefore, the team considers this to contribute to the feature of good practice: The deliberate steps taken which consistently exceed awarding body requirements (see also Expectations B1, B8, C and Enhancement).

1.23 Overall, the College has a clear understanding of its responsibilities with regard to the approval and review of its programmes. While the team is satisfied that the College

adheres to the different stipulations as required by its respective awarding bodies and organisation, it is clear that the College makes extra provision to enable an ownership and involvement above what is expected. The ongoing review process influences staff development and course improvements in order that enhancement of all College programmes can be made. Consequently, the team concludes that the Expectation in *Chapter A4: Approval and review* is met both in design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter A5: Externality

Findings

1.24 The College takes steps at all levels to ensure externality in the management of threshold academic standards. An interest and understanding of the local community is central to the College's ethos. The College's focus is on ensuring that its students understand the benefits of involving themselves in higher education in order that they can go on to better jobs or higher study. This philosophy is at the heart of the Higher Education Strategy and, consequently, the College's Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy.

1.25 External input into the design and monitoring of courses is sought through employer forums and focus groups. The College clearly records and monitors its interactions with employers. For the validation of the new programmes with the Teesside University, consultations took place with employers to form part of the programme proposals.

1.26 External examiners are employed by the awarding institution in compliance with the awarding body partnership agreements. For university-approved programmes, the College nominates its own choices for external examiners. Pearson appoints its external examiners. External examiner reports are reviewed by the Higher Education Strategy Group and the Higher Education Quality and Standards Group. The Higher Education Quality Standards Group considers the issues raised and ensures that actions planned from the previous reports have been addressed. The Higher Education Strategy Group considers how they might be used to enhance programmes at the College. A composite report of comments is produced by the Quality Team for the Higher Education Quality and Standards Group.

1.27 To test how the College meets this Expectation, the team reviewed processes relating to external examiners and external examiner reports, validation documents, Viewpoint, and College and programme quality improvement plans. The team also tested how the College assures itself that it is fulfilling its intention to deliver courses that are desired in the area. The team then examined evidence that verifies College oversight. In meetings with staff and employers, processes and mechanisms enabling external participation in the management of threshold academic standards were discussed.

1.28 From meetings with staff, it is clear the College desires to be employer and employment-focused. Through forums, employers and industry professionals are able to feedback on programmes and contribute to quality assurance processes.

1.29 The review team found that while the awarding bodies are responsible for formally responding to external examiner reports, the College also provides a response. The review team also learned that there is an ongoing dialogue between the College and its external examiners. Some staff work as external examiners themselves. Internal panels that meet to discuss new programmes feature members of Teesside University staff.

1.30 The College engages with employers, awarding bodies and external examiners in order to manage its threshold academic standards. Through its review and reporting processes, there is evidenced independent external input into the College's programmes. The Higher Education Quality and Standards Group demonstrates good oversight of these processes. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation in *Chapter A5: Externality* is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.31 Assessment requirements, regulations and processes are covered within the separate awarding body and awarding organisation agreements. The College's Higher Education Assessment Strategy applies to all programmes and is updated regularly. This is part of the overarching document, the Higher Education Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy. The College provides a number of documents designed to provide guidance on assessment strategies and practices to staff delivering higher education programmes. Staff develop their own assignments in line with the FHEQ and the principles of the College. Members of staff attend moderation meetings with the universities to verify the standard of marking and attend the award and progression boards of the awarding bodies. Staff also participate in professional development workshops organised by the partner universities which include approaches to assessment. External examiners are appointed by the awarding bodies and organisation to scrutinise work that has been marked by the College tutors.

1.32 The Operations Manual requires the College to adopt the philosophies of its awarding bodies. Further to this, the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy and, more specifically the Higher Education Assessment Strategy, while fulfilling the requirement of its validating partners, also shows the College's consistent intention to take ownership of its programmes. Within the document, responsibilities are clearly laid out.

1.33 To determine how the College meets this Expectation, the team examined evidence relating to assessment procedures at the College including assessment strategies. The team met staff and students to test whether there is a clear sense of the College's assessment policies and procedures being carried out. This includes, but is not limited to, questions relating to moderation and feedback of assessed work (see also Expectation B6).

1.34 In meetings with staff, the team was able to confirm that the Strategy is embedded within the teaching practices of the College. College staff are very clear about how the policy works, how it impacts on their programmes and, ultimately, who is responsible for specific areas. The team found that College protocols relating to feedback are clearly understood by students and staff. Students are clear that their marks are not finalised until the moderation boards have met. Final validated marks are approved through a clear and transparent system which includes an internal moderations process as a prerequisite to the external moderations process with the respective awarding body. External examiner reports are used for the review of assignments following a moderations board with the awarding body.

1.35 Overall, the College's assessment related policies and procedures are well understood by staff and students. They are implemented and followed by staff and are therefore robust, valid and reliable. Therefore, the team concludes that the Expectation in *Chapter A6: Assessment of achievement of learning outcomes* is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

1.36 In reaching its judgement about threshold academic standards, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.37 Of the six expectations in this area, all are met and the associated risk with each is low. There are two features of good practice to which the maintenance of the threshold of academic standards contribute. There are a number of examples of how deliberate steps have been taken to exceed awarding body requirements. The Higher Education Standards and Quality Group is effective in its operation and oversight of threshold academic standards. There are no affirmations or recommendations.

1.38 Any need for action has been acknowledged by the College in its review documentation or during the review and the College has provided clear evidence of appropriate action being taken within a reasonable timescale. There is evidence the College is fully aware of its responsibility for maintaining threshold academic standards. Previous responses to external review activities provide confidence that areas of weakness will be addressed promptly and professionally.

1.39 The review team concludes therefore, that the maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: Quality of student learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, Chapter B1: Programme design and approval

Findings

2.1 The College has an internal process for identifying new provision and approving programmes which conform to the requirements of the awarding bodies and organisation. Most recently there has been a streamlining of the process due to the College moving to Teesside University as its sole validating awarding body in addition to Pearson. Programme design and approval processes are aligned with, and overseen by, the awarding bodies and organisation. This delegation of responsibility is clearly articulated in the partnership agreements. Further responsibilities for design and approval of programmes are outlined in Expectation A4.

2.2 Initial conversations surrounding potential new programmes are held at course team level before being taken to Higher Education Strategy Committee where questions regarding resources and a programmes' compliance with the College's strategic plans are discussed. They are then considered by the Higher Education Quality and Standards Group. The College goes through an internal approval before approval by the awarding body. The awarding body attends and provides advice to the College. External input into the design and monitoring of courses is sought through employer forums and focus groups.

2.3 The College's design and approval policies are appropriate. College and awarding body responsibilities are well articulated, understood and adhered to. Alignment to the Quality Code is assured through the College's mapping document, as well as definitions of timescale for revalidation. Staff responsibilities are clearly articulated and understood. Documents relating to the design of programmes, as discussed in Expectation A6, provide evidence of a thorough and objective approach.

2.4 The team reviewed information pertaining to the design and approval of programmes, such as validation documents, service and partnership agreements, the Higher Education Operations Manual and the Higher Education Quality and Standards Group minutes which referenced programme and design and approval. In addition to this, the team met senior staff who have responsibility of oversight of these processes and teaching staff who have been involved in the process of programme design, employers and a member of staff from Teesside University in order for the College's processes to be talked through in practice. The team also met staff who have responsibility for resourcing and supporting new and current programmes. The team saw evidence of the newly validated programmes.

2.5 In meetings with staff, the team learned that policies are understood and staff demonstrated a keen knowledge of how new programmes are brought into effect. The review team found the move to Teesside University has given the opportunity for the College to advance its quality procedures in terms of gathering feedback on courses and a broader range of sources to inform new programmes and new programme development. These discussions are also evidenced formally through the committee structure in the Higher Education Strategy Group and ultimately the Higher Education Quality and Standards Group. Due to College staff's involvement with industry, potential new programmes are also easily identified via consultation documents.

2.6 Internal approval meetings at the College, before awarding body approval, are undertaken with external members from validating partners as members of the

committee in order to provide advice. The team found that there are also significant mechanisms in place at the College that exceed that which is stipulated by the awarding body. The College involves itself with oversight at the highest level and a clear reporting structure gives opportunity for staff to contribute and see the results of their contribution. Staff that the team met are actively aware and involved with the any programme improvements being made. The broad range of committees that the College uses to deliberate and make suggestions are clearly documented and understood. The team saw a variety of evidence that supports the College's procedures for input. Latterly, the College also showed the team a vast array of feedback mediums and consultations for new programmes. The review team concludes this contributes to the feature of good practice: The deliberate steps taken which consistently exceed awarding body requirements (see Expectations A4, B8, C and Enhancement).

2.7 Overall, the College displays a good understanding of what is required for programme design and approval with regard to its agreements with its awarding bodies and organisation. Furthermore, the College demonstrates an approach to oversight that is clear to all staff who met the team. The level of transparency and discussion provides the College with wholly effective processes. Therefore, the team concludes that Expectation in *Chapter B1: Programme design and approval* is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B2: Admissions

Findings

2.8 The College is responsible for its own admissions. The overall process is administered centrally by the Higher Education Coordinator and has followed Teesside University's admissions process since 2013. Full-time applications are processed through UCAS and part-time applications are processed directly. Admissions criteria are set by the College, approved at validation and reviewed through the annual programme monitoring process. Both standard and non-standard criteria are set out on the College and UCAS websites, when applicable, and in programme specifications.

2.9 The College seeks to be relevant and responsive to local needs. A key aim of the College's general strategy is 'right student; right programme, right level, right place'. The admissions process supports this aim by the use of an interview template to explore whether the course and the applicant are a suitable fit for each other before an offer is made. Academic staff use the interview for clarification and guidance and to identify any specific support needs, not as a selection tool. Unsuccessful applicants are directed towards the Schools Liaison Officer for follow-up guidance and to Viewpoint, the College's complaints mechanism. To date, the College has received no complaints or appeals in connection with its admissions process. The College has amended its procedures in response to recommendations from previous external reviews. An annual survey of incoming students is conducted to seek their views on the admission and induction process.

2.10 The College has policies and procedures in place to ensure fair admissions, including central administration and overview. Admissions procedures are clearly structured. The information provided for applicants is accessible, explicit and presented consistently on the website. There is a single point of reference and guidance for programme staff involved with interviews. The interview process should ensure that applicants fully understand the requirements of the programme they wish to follow.

2.11 The team confirmed the College's practice in relation to admissions by reading guidance provided by Teesside University, Pearson and internal College documents, including strategy documents, programme information, relevant committee minutes, and reports produced by review processes. The team also looked at examples of promotional and other information provided for applicants and at the College and UCAS websites. The team talked with students and staff about their experience of the recruitment and admissions process.

2.12 The team found that the policies and procedures described above are implemented consistently and fairly. The admissions process is well understood and implemented efficiently by staff involved. Students consider the information provided to be accurate and useful. The College is responsive to suggestions for improvement and an effective annual review of its admissions process is in place. The review team considers the highly effective operation and monitoring of admissions procedures to be **good practice**.

2.13 Overall, the College demonstrates its commitment to its local area by its holistic approach to admissions and by helping to raise the aspirations of potential students. Policies and procedures are reviewed regularly and changes made where appropriate. Admissions criteria are set out clearly and consistently and are monitored regularly. The interview process enables both staff and applicants to consider applicant needs and signposts applicants to further information or support as necessary. Therefore, the review team

concludes that the Expectation in *Chapter B2: Admissions* is met in both design and operation 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

2.14 The College's Teaching Learning and Assessment Strategy emphasises active learning to promote independence and autonomy in its students. The Quality Calendar timetables key dates throughout the year. These include consideration of student feedback from various sources; assessment results; analysis of progression and achievement data; module and programme review; and staff appraisal and development activities. The Higher Education Quality and Standards Group monitors and evaluates the relevant quality systems and standards with a view to enhancement.

2.15 The College aims to embed a culture of continuous reflection and self-assessment at all levels through its quality improvement plan process. Programme and cross-college support service quality improvement plans feed into the overall higher education Quality Improvement Plan and member of staff have individual quality improvement plans. The College's staff intranet includes dedicated higher education resources and an opportunity for sharing good practice through an emerging online Scholarly Activity Forum.

2.16 Teaching staff are approved by the validating university and have online access to Teesside University learning and teaching resources, including its operations manual. Systematic developmental teaching observations take place and these inform individual quality improvement plans and the varied programme of staff development activities undertaken on staff development days.

2.17 Programme handbooks follow the template of the relevant awarding body. They provide information that sets out the learning opportunities and support available for students, as do the College website and the virtual learning environment. Regular personal development planning tutorials support students in developing wider skills and also enable individual discussion of assessment feedback (see Expectation B4). They are held both individually and within a peer group. The tutorial programme covers the development of both academic and generic skills.

2.18 The College articulates its systematic review and enhancement of its learning opportunities and teaching practices through the systems and structures detailed in its Quality Cycle and Quality Calendar, in particular the quality improvement plan system. The support put in place for staff development enables staff to support and enhance student learning. There are regularly programmed opportunities for students to discuss their learning progress individually with their tutors. Through the oversight of the Higher Education Standards and Quality Group, there are systems in place to ensure that student development opportunities are maximised.

2.19 The team evaluated the effectiveness of the College's approach to learning and teaching by reading awarding body and internal College documents, including strategy and working practice documentation; quality improvement plan documentation; committee minutes; teaching observation and other staff development documentation; programme handbooks; tutorial documentation; and the student written submission. The team cross-referenced these documents to external reports where relevant. The team saw

demonstrations of the staff intranet and the student virtual learning environment. Discussions with staff and students assisted the team in understanding the impact of the College's systems on staff capacity and the student learning experience.

2.20 The team recognised the thought and effort that the College puts into creating a distinctive and recognisable higher education environment for higher education students. The virtual learning environment clearly delineates relevant resources. As higher education provision is important to the College it strives to create a clear higher education identity for staff, as well as students. The team noted the pivotal role played by the Higher Education Quality and Standard Group in the systematic review and enhancement of the provision of learning opportunities. College resources support staff to enable them to enhance the quality of support offered to students.

2.21 The team found that observation activities include informal peer observations and formal observations feeding into staff appraisal and staff development events. Staff teaching on higher education programmes have seven days for continuing professional development and scholarly activity, which include structured sessions for sharing good practice. The College part-funds staff to undertake relevant qualifications or other development activities beyond internal provision. Staff told the team that the change of validating body provided them with valuable staff development opportunities in designing new programmes. This included working with employers to identify appropriate curricular and skills needs. In discussion with staff the team saw that part of the motivation for developing their own practice is a real commitment to students achieving to the best of their abilities.

2.22 The team found that staff are aware of individual student needs and target guidance and support appropriately. They know their students well, both individually and collectively, and address their learning needs effectively. The team found students to be enthusiastic and committed to their programme and to the College. They are very appreciative of the dedication of the staff. The systematic and holistic approach to quality improvement in teaching and learning is **good practice** which also contributes to the enhancement of the student learning experience (see Enhancement).

2.23 Overall, the College has a wide range of effective mechanisms to support and facilitate staff development. There is a high level of staff engagement and commitment to the enhancement of student learning opportunities. A variety of teaching activities and learning opportunities is provided. Students are appreciative of the level of staff commitment to their learning and of staff responsiveness to individual needs. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation in *Chapter B3: Learning and teaching* is met in both design and operation and that 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's core values include mutual respect and a supportive environment. Recent changes to higher education management structures have resulted in a more transparently consistent and cohesive approach to enabling student development, including the provision of resources. The Director of Quality has a clear role in the oversight of all relevant aspects through the Higher Education Quality and Standards Group. College bursaries support academic and personal development in each year, for example, the provision of tablet computers to first year students. The Higher Education Strategy emphasises work-related learning and employer links have a high priority.

2.25 Programme handbooks include information about sources of academic and other support. The College provides a dedicated Higher Education Studies Skills Advisor in addition to a range of tailored learning support available to all students. The Learning Resources Centre is open during the day and in the evening when part-time students are in College. Student support services, both for academic learning and for personal support, are available to both full-time and part-time students. Students have access to additional study facilities and to their own area in the College's virtual learning environment.

2.26 The College involves local employers in the design and content of programmes to ensure fitness of purpose and relevance to the needs of the local economy. Programmes, which are all vocational in nature, include work-related learning activities to develop students' academic, personal and professional skills. Activities aimed at raising student aspirations and enhancing employability include classroom-based tasks, industry talks from potential employers, workplace and residential visits. The tutorial programme (see Expectation B3) includes careers discussions about 'next steps' destinations, whether further study through top-up degrees or employment, and a careers day to raise awareness of 'next steps' is held annually (see Theme).

2.27 Structures and responsibilities for regular monitoring and evaluation of relevant arrangements and resources are clearly articulated through strategies and working practice documents. This applies to both programme and College levels. Taken together, they form a framework of supportive resources that enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.

2.28 The team investigated the operation of these processes through the examination of internal College documents, including its strategies, programme and careers information; committee minutes; statistical data; and the Student Submission. The team was able to cross-reference some aspects of the provision to external reports. The team also saw a demonstration of the virtual learning environment and viewed support and other relevant information available on the public website. The team met staff who explained the range of resources and activities provided for students, students who confirmed their awareness and understanding and employer representatives who gave a perspective on the development of employability through curricular and other activities.

2.29 The team found that the transition from applicant to student is facilitated by the pre-entry interview which provides a real opportunity to clarify student expectations and identify individual support needs (see Expectation B2). Induction sessions include academic and support information as well as social time for each student group. Survey results are

used to inform the following year's programme. The team considers programme handbooks to be comprehensive and clear. Each programme includes guidelines and expectations on work-related learning for employers and students alike. The team found these generally consistent. Staff and employer representatives confirmed the strong links between the College and local employers. Reports from external examiners and other bodies comment favourably on the range and quality of the work-related activities in the programmes.

2.30 Students who met the team were committed to their programme and to the College, speaking highly of its physical and electronic learning resources, its support systems and the range of opportunities available to them. Learning environment resources are clearly available to both full and part-time students. Students told the team that they are clear about which member of staff to go to for various types of support. They recognise staff commitment to helping them to progress. Staff at all levels told the team that part of their job satisfaction comes from seeing students achieving their existing goals and aiming higher. The review team considers the excellent and wide-ranging support mechanisms that enable student development and achievement to be **good practice**.

2.31 Overall, the College adopts a holistic approach to student development. It provides a range of support mechanisms and commits resources in order to support a higher education identity for its students and to raise student aspirations for the next steps in their career. High student retention rates and achievement confirm the effectiveness of these arrangements. Students express their appreciation of staff helpfulness. Staff commitment to enabling students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential is clear. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation in *Chapter B4: Enabling student development and achievement* is met in both design and operation and that 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

2.32 The College's Learner Involvement Strategy sets out its approach to student engagement. It is designed explicitly to enable students to participate actively in meetings and to develop relevant skills. Students are informed of this through the Student Charter which is included in programme handbooks (see Expectation C). Students are provided with regular opportunities for direct engagement in various ways through induction and other surveys; module and programme evaluation; the college-wide Student Association; the Viewpoint system; and 'Have Your Say' cafes. Students are involved in initial programme design and in annual module and programme review processes.

2.33 Every programme has a student representative from each year. Initial training and ongoing support for student representatives is provided by the Student Involvement Coordinator. The College engages its higher education student representatives as a body through the Higher Education Student Council. Student representatives gather student views for the Higher Education Student Council and responses are fed back both to the Higher Education Student Council and in open programme 'Have Your Say' cafes. Responses to wider College issues are publicised through 'You Said, We Did' posters. Discussion of student views from all sources, including those coming from the Viewpoint system (see Expectation B9), is programmed into the annual Quality Cycle and the relevant Quality Improvement Plans, which in turn feed into enhancement activity (see Enhancement).

2.34 The College has processes in place to ensure regular ongoing opportunities for student engagement, including in programme design, monitoring and review. Students can engage through their representatives on the Higher Education Student Council and through regular surveys. Collated student feedback is discussed at College committees and through representative structures. Although there is as yet little or no student representation on College committees, existing processes enable effective participation of students in ensuring and enhancing their educational experience.

2.35 The team examined documentation relating to the College's policies and practices in this area, including internal strategy and quality documents; terms of reference and minutes of relevant committees; the Student Charter; student surveys; training documentation; and the Student Submission. The team was able to cross-reference some aspects to external reports. Discussions with staff and students drew out the details of how the processes operate and examples of how students had been involved in them.

2.36 The team found that the College takes clear, deliberate steps to engage students and to solicit and respond to their views. The Student Involvement Coordinator discusses actions taken in response to student views directly to students in their programme groups (Have Your Say cafes). The Student Association (established in September 2012) meets frequently and consults with, and is consulted by, senior management about emerging issues and developments. However, its role is not formalised within the College's Quality Cycle or committee structures. Both staff and students were able to give the team examples of actions taken by the College in direct response to student feedback and of their involvement in ongoing projects, for example, the upgrading of the virtual learning environment. The team found that students are confident in raising issues informally with the College as well as through formal structures. They are positive about their current

opportunities for involvement, feel involved in decision making, and appreciate the feedback loop being closed through existing structures.

2.37 The team learned that student representatives have not routinely been members of College committees above programme board level and that the College is seeking ways to improve student engagement. The review team **affirms** the steps being taken to strengthen students as partners in quality assurance and to formalise their representation on committees.

2.38 Overall, the College clearly places great value on student contribution and uses a variety of ways to encourage participation, which is widespread. Notwithstanding the current low level of involvement of direct student representation at committee level, the team took the view that students are enabled to participate in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience, and are well supported in so doing. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation in *Chapter B5: Student Engagement* has been met in both design and operation and that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.39 The Higher Education Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy underpins the College's approach to assessment. This document is reviewed every 18 months and was mapped against the Quality Code during the recent validation procedure with Teesside University. The assessment requirements are outlined by the awarding bodies and organisation in the partnership agreements and related documents. The College's internal mechanisms support the management of the assessment process. These include module feedback forms, self-assessment reports and receipt of relevant validating documents and summative health check of programmes at the College's Higher Education Strategy Group. From here, oversight is found at the Higher Education Quality and Standards Group. Accreditation of prior learning is dealt with at admissions and administrated by the Quality Team at the College. This is in line with policies and procedures set out by the awarding body.

2.40 The College's Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy and information on assessment, including briefs and marking criteria, is available to students in course handbooks and the College's virtual learning environment. Monitoring of assessment is part of the Observation Working Practice, which is linked to the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy.

2.41 The review team analysed the College's Strategy for Teaching, Learning and Assessment as well as staff development strategies in relation to assessment. The team also reviewed course handbooks to determine how they outline assessment requirements for each module. The team met students to discuss their assessment experiences and interviewed staff regarding the application of the Teaching and Learning Assessment Strategy and its effective implementation in practice. Staff also answered questions about the College's policies and procedures to accommodate accreditation of prior learning.

2.42 Students who met the team find assessment criteria and expectations are clearly outlined in handbooks and are explained well by staff. The College operates a turnaround time of three weeks for marking and providing feedback on assessments for all programmes. Work is submitted either in hard copy or via the College's virtual learning environment at the discretion of the course tutor. Students confirmed that the turnaround period for assessment feedback is adhered to. They are very happy with the feedback they receive for assignments. The students commented on the clarity of feedback and how they are made aware about what they need to do in order to improve.

2.43 In meetings, staff demonstrated a confident understanding of the process of assessment and moderation. The review team confirmed that in advance of an external moderation with the awarding body and in line with the College's Quality Calendar, the College undertakes internal moderation. All documentation relating to a particular assessment or assessments are sent to the external examiner. Staff are also clear about the College's management of Accreditation of prior learning and follow guidance given by Teesside University.

2.44 Overall, the College has policies and procedures in place to ensure students have appropriate opportunities to show they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for

their awards. The staff are aware of their responsibilities for assessment and the accreditation of prior learning. Students are very positive about their assessment experiences. Therefore, the team concludes that the Expectation in *Chapter B6: Assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning* is **met** in both design and operation 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

2.45 Ultimate responsibility for the appointment and management of external examiners lies with the awarding bodies and organisation. External examiners for Higher National programmes are appointed by Pearson and the College undertakes the training and regular briefings. Nomination, approval and employment of external examiners for the FdA Early Years validated by Sheffield Hallam University is the sole responsibility of the University. Induction of all external examiners is the responsibility of the awarding body. The College also conducts its own induction of external examiners with a more specific induction to particular programmes which is conducted by the course tutor. New external examiners are linked by the College with another external examiner who acts as mentor.

2.46 The awarding bodies are responsible for contact with the external examiner and for the initial response to examiners after receiving the report, although the College also provide a formal response to the external examiner report which is recorded in an annual monitoring report and returned to the partner University. These responses are considered at the Higher Education Quality and Standards Group and are then used to contribute to the College's Quality Improvement Plan. In addition, a composite external examiner report is produced for the Higher Education Quality and Standards Group to allow oversight of issues raised and as a checking mechanism for receipt of reports and responses to the awarding bodies.

2.47 The team examined external examiner reports and met staff to discuss the process of nominating external examiners. The team considered the different mechanisms the College employs to make the reports and information about external examiners available to students. The team also pursued questions relating to responsibilities with regard to external examiners. Furthermore, the team saw evidence of how the College acknowledge and respond to external examiner reports. In light of multiple awarding bodies and organisation, the team looked at evidence that demonstrated the College's oversight of all external examining activity. The team also met students to discuss their involvement with external examiners.

2.48 In meetings with the team, College staff demonstrated that they are fully aware of the importance of external examiners. There is a robust system that allows for acknowledgement and discussion of external examiner reports, as well as taking into account any comments raised by the reports and how they then might feed back into the College in order to improve programmes. The students whom the team met are aware of the reports and where they can be found. The team learned that the external examiner will talk to some students about their experience of assessment although they may not be brought in for first year work. The team found that external examiner reports are discussed at course team level and made available to students through the virtual learning environment. For newly validated programmes, there is no requirement for the external examiner to feedback on level 4 work. However, discussion of external examiner reports remains a standing item on course team meetings' agendas.

2.49 At the time of the review, new courses validated by Teesside University had not gone through a full cycle of external examiner reporting. However, the external examiner reports that the team saw and their summaries did not indicate any issues at the College. The team also saw evidence showing that formal responses to the awarding bodies are being completed. The team confirmed that external examiner reports are formally discussed

at the Higher Education Quality and Standards Group and the particular points raised then feed into the College's Quality Improvement Plan.

2.50 Overall, there is clear evidence to support the effective use of external examiners with staff and students appropriately engaged. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation in *Chapter B7: External examining* is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review

Findings

2.51 The College's quality systems are outlined in its Quality Calendar. The Quality Calendar underpins all of the College's review and monitoring of programmes and clearly articulates what information is required at what part of the year. The Higher Education Quality Cycle details how and where feedback is gathered and received. Overall responsibility for programme monitoring and review lies with the Higher Education Quality and Standards Group. The Higher Education Strategy Group takes the lead in monitoring all higher education programmes. Information and feedback from course teams and students is gathered and centralised at this group before being fed to the Higher Education Quality and Standards Group. Compliance with the Quality Code is assured through the Quality Code mapping document. This exercise forms part of the Higher Education Quality Cycle which, in turn, forms part of the College's Quality Calendar. External examiners are used and a summary of their reports is produced by the Quality Office for the Higher Education Quality and Standards Group.

2.52 Programmes are reviewed and monitored through the gathering of information via self-assessment reports, programme quality improvement plans, annual monitoring reports and external examiner reports. Feedback to improve the College's programmes is also gathered from students via module feedback forms and student representatives. The College also incorporates a wide range of strategies and opportunities for cross-college feedback on all aspects of its provision, with a number of mechanisms for feeding into the College's Quality Improvement Plan in order to improve programmes through minor modifications, staff development and resource allocation. With regard to its higher education provision, these include the Higher Education Strategy, the Learner Involvement Strategy and the Higher Education Assessment Strategy. Programme review and monitoring procedures are in line with the College's Higher Education Strategy and with partnership service agreements that the College has with its awarding bodies and organisation.

2.53 The team reviewed evidence from programme self-assessment documents, quality improvement plans, service agreements, external examiner reports, documents relating the College's internal quality processes and committee minutes. The team then sought to align these with the principles as set out and discussed as part of Expectation A4. During the review process, the team met College staff involved with programme monitoring and review. This included senior staff with oversight and teaching staff with responsibility for gathering feedback. The team also met students to confirm whether information was being gathered from them so as to ensure a comprehensive overview of the College's programmes.

2.54 The review team found the College review and monitoring processes are well embedded in the College's Higher Education Quality Cycle. Staff are clear about the structures for feedback and, consequently, the monitoring and review that exists at the College gives ample opportunity for the College to enhance its programmes via minor modifications and creates significant focal points for staff development. Review of programmes features as standing item on the Higher Education Quality and Standards Group. Each programme has its own quality improvement plan which, in conjunction with feedback mechanisms available through the Higher Education Quality Cycle, feeds into the overarching College Quality Improvement Plan. Items arising from the quality improvement plans are discussed at Higher Education Quality and Standards Group meetings. Reports for awarding bodies are constructed using this information. Staff value the quality improvement plan process and feedback mechanisms available and feel the ongoing review activity is

highly effective. Furthermore, staff engage well with quality processes in order to enhance elements of programmes via staff development and training. In meetings with students, the team was told that students always feel they are listened to and that issues raised are always dealt with effectively. The team confirmed employers contribute to course review and monitoring and the College provides opportunity for industry input into its programmes.

2.55 The stipulations as required by the awarding bodies make clear where responsibility lies for the monitoring and review of programmes. The College's policies and procedures for monitoring and review provide a clear, all-encompassing and detailed structure of reporting as evidenced through the various committees, internal panels and meetings. Proposals for minor modifications to courses are put forward by the course tutor and then approved by the awarding body. Courses have a clear revalidation schedule as stipulated by the awarding bodies.

2.56 Feedback is provided through external examiner reports and a subsequent external examiner report summary, as well as feedback from students and employers. These reporting mechanisms form part of what is required by the awarding bodies. However, the College then uses this information to inform the quality improvement plans for programmes and for the College as a whole. Peer observation among staff, while still in its infancy, provides another forum for feedback and enhancement. In turn, all this information then feeds into staff development. In meetings, it was made clear that College staff clearly understand these processes, how they are implemented and how they consequently feed back into the College to enhance all higher education provision. The College takes ownership and assures itself that these procedures are understood and followed due to the clear lines of reporting, a clear timeline for review and clear mapping with the Quality Code. Therefore, the review team concludes that the deliberate steps taken which consistently exceed awarding body requirements are **good practice**. (See also Expectations A4, B1, C and Enhancement)

2.57 Overall, the College has in place effective systems for the monitoring and review of programmes. The College works well with its awarding bodies and organisation taking deliberate steps to exceed requirements. Therefore, the review team concludes the Expectation in *Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review* is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B9: Academic complaints and student appeals

Findings

2.58 The College has a policy in place for student complaints called Viewpoint and this is a cross-college policy. Academic appeals follow the processes for each of the individual awarding bodies: Leeds Metropolitan, Sheffield Hallam University and Teesside University. Each process is signposted to students in programme handbooks and on the virtual learning environment.

2.59 Viewpoint is the complaints and compliments process. It was accepted and approved by Teesside University at the institutional validation and recognised in the partnership agreement. Students are directed to either the College website or College reception to collect a Viewpoint form. The Director of Quality is responsible for receiving the forms and relevant managers investigate complaints and prepare responses. The time frame for responding to students is 15 days. Complaints from students on validated provision are escalated to the awarding body or awarding organisation if they are not resolved by the College. Complaints and compliments are reported through the Customer (Stakeholder) Responsive Group and summarised to the Quality Strategy Group and Governors Standards Committee. Any Viewpoints from higher education students are summarised for the Higher Education Quality and Standards Group. All Viewpoints receive a formal response, stating the outcome and actions. The working practice outlines the process for appeal if this does not bring about resolution.

2.60 Academic appeals follow the policies and procedures of the awarding bodies or awarding organisation. Information is provided in the student handbooks. Students on Pearson programmes can appeal directly to the Director of Quality. Teesside University refer to academic appeals as an Academic Review and as part of the partnership arrangement the Director of Quality and the Quality Manager for FE and HE Achievement undertook training on how to manage and record academic appeals for Academic Review. The College has in place fair, effective and timely processes to deal with complaints and appeals.

2.61 The review team tested the complaints and compliments process through a demonstration of Viewpoint, and cross-referencing against students understanding. Teesside University institutional validation and partnership agreement were also reviewed in regards to the complaints process. Student handbooks were reviewed to determine what information is provided to students. In meetings with staff and students, the complaints process and appeals processes were discussed.

2.62 The review team found that the systems for complaints are as described above and are consistently and appropriately applied. To ensure that the complaints procedure is followed consistently across the College there is a clear reporting line from the Director of Quality to the relevant person or persons that deals with the complaint. The complaints process has been accepted by Teesside University as fit for purpose and is included in the partnership agreement. Students whom the review team met clearly understand the complaints process. The team found the Viewpoint process is explained clearly in the handbooks with Teesside University but is not evident in the Sheffield Hallam Early Childhood Studies programme handbook.

2.63 The review team confirmed that the academic appeals process varies according to the awarding body and students are made aware of the different processes through their

student handbooks. At the student meeting students confirmed they are aware of the relevant academic appeals process and they know how to put in an academic appeal.

2.64 Overall, the College has an effective complaints and compliments process in place. This is well understood by students and has been accepted by Teesside University as fit for purpose. The academic appeals process is made clear to students as per the requirements of the awarding body or awarding organisation and staff at the College have trained in the Academic Review procedures for the Teesside University. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation in *Chapter B9: Academic complaints and student appeals* is met in both design and operation and the level of associated 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

2.65 The College has an arrangement with Rotherham College of Arts and Technology to deliver an HNC/D in Computing. The College entered into the partnership agreement to enable widening participation and raise aspirations of local students to go on to higher education. This partnership emerged from a joint bid to HEFCE for additional student numbers. There has been a single cohort (2012-14) of students on the HNC/D Computing as a result of the joint bid. The partnership agreement clearly outlines areas of responsibility including recruitment, admissions, complaints and reporting. The programme is being delivered under Pearson accreditation at Rotherham College of Arts and Technology. Dearne Valley College has responsibility to assure itself of the appropriate setting and maintaining of threshold academic standards and the quality of students' learning opportunities and the responsibility to maintain oversight so as to manage risk. The College manages the partnership and oversees all changes in service provision where necessary to ensure delivery of the agreed services.

2.66 The College does not have any official work-based learning, work placements or policy based partnership work with employers. The links to local employers and employability is embedded through the curriculum design of the new foundation degrees with Teesside University.

2.67 The arrangement for delivering the HNC/D Computing has been implemented securely and managed effectively by Dearne Valley College. Dearne Valley College carried out a due diligence process with Rotherham College of Arts and Technology prior to the HNC/D Computing being delivered. The partnership agreement between the two colleges demonstrates a clear commitment to the adherence of quality processes and procedures. There are effective lines of communication and reporting lines between the two colleges.

2.68 The team reviewed the partnership agreement, the due diligence process and the associated paperwork relating to the partnership with Rotherham College of Arts and Technology. At the review, the team questioned relevant staff about the working relationship with Rotherham College of Arts and Technology.

2.69 Responses at the meetings verified that due diligence checks had taken place and course information and external examiner reports from the HNC/D Computing are reported to the Higher Education Quality and Standards Group. Evidence reviewed demonstrated that the College maintains clear overview of the provision at Rotherham College of Arts and Technology. The team confirmed that the Director of Quality retains responsibility for overseeing the HNC/D Computing and ensures quality processes are followed correctly. Where necessary and appropriate, relevant cross-college managers provide specialist advice and support to staff at Rotherham College of Arts and Technology. The HNC/D Computing programme is regularly monitored and reports feed back to the Higher Education Quality and Standards Group. This enables Dearne Valley College to maintain an overview of the quality of provision at Rotherham College of Arts and Technology. In 2012-13 staff from the College visited Rotherham College of Arts and Technology to analyse resources and quality files in order to confirm Pearson requirements are being met and informally observed teaching. The review team found all quality checks to date have provided high

levels of assurance for the College, that standards are being met, and that quality systems are being suitably employed.

2.70 The evidence provided to the review team confirms that the management and quality assurance of HNC/D Computing at Rotherham College of Arts and Technology is well managed by Dearne Valley College. The relationship with Rotherham College of Art and Technology works efficiently and effectively and there are clear quality structures and processes in place for Dearne Valley College to ensure the Quality of learning for students on the HNC/D Computing.

2.71 The College undertakes its responsibilities for the HNC/D Computing programme at Rotherham College of Arts and Technology well. There are efficient and effective structures and processes in place to ensure the quality of learning for students is implemented securely and managed effectively. Therefore, the review team concludes the Expectation in *Chapter B10: Managing higher education provision with others* is met in both design and operation 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

2.72 The College does not offer research degrees.

Quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.73 In reaching its judgement about quality of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

2.74 All Expectations in this area are met and the associated level of risk is low. There are four features of good practice and one affirmation in this area. Deliberate steps are taken to exceed the awarding body requirements. The admissions procedure is highly effective. The approach to quality improvement in learning and teaching is systematic and holistic. The support mechanisms that enable student development and achievement are excellent and wide-ranging. The review team affirms the steps being taken to strengthen students as partners in quality assurance and to formalise their representation on committees. There are no recommendations. A key priority for the provider is improving the quality of student learning opportunities. Student engagement in the management of this area is widespread and supported. Managing the needs of the students is a clear focus of the provider's strategies and policies in this area.

2.75 The review team concludes therefore, that the quality of student learning opportunities is **commended**.

3 Judgement: Quality of the information produced about its provision

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

Quality Code, Part C: Information about higher education provision

Findings

3.1 The College's mission and core values are set out on its public website. The higher education section is prominent and is a key link on each main page. Information from the Key Information Set is available on the website. Detailed information about programmes and support services is available to potential applicants through the website (see Expectation B2) and to current students through the virtual learning environment which is accessible both on and off campus. The College's Quality Framework, including policies, procedures and guidance, is held on the staff intranet. As well as programme-specific sections, the virtual learning environment includes a general information section for higher education students and this houses external examiner reports. College policy is set out in the relevant working practice document. The Director of Quality is ultimately responsible for approving definitive versions of documents and other information. Students receive a transcript on completion of their studies which sets out information about their studies and achievement.

3.2 College protocols secure version control of definitive documents. Information for prospective students is reviewed and audited to ensure consistency. Programme content is approved by programme teams before release. The structures in place ensure that the information provided by the College is accurate and fit for purpose.

3.3 The team tested the appropriateness of the information made available by the College. This included following trails through its public website, examining programme documentation including academic support services information, attending a demonstration of the intranet and the virtual learning environment, discussing with staff their input to the process and discussing with students the trustworthiness of the information.

3.4 Students who met the team confirmed that they had received appropriate information before applying for their course, including at interview (see Expectation B2), and that it is generally accurate and helpful. This includes the Student Charter and information about support services. Website information about support services is supplemented by short videos. Students receive a printed programme handbook at induction and see the handbook as a valued source of information. Further information is also available in detailed module handbooks. Students confirmed they know who their awarding body or awarding organisation is, where to find information about learning and other support services and how they can make a complaint. Some students were less aware that external examiner reports had been made available to them.

3.5 Staff told the team that programme handbooks follow the template of the awarding body or awarding organisation. However, with the change in validating university, the College took the opportunity to develop a fuller, more informative template than the minimum specified by Teesside University. The team found programme handbooks based on this template to be comprehensive and clear, although it noted that the Pearson handbook follows a previous template. The team considers that the development of the College handbook template is one of the deliberate steps taken to consistently exceed

awarding body requirements and therefore contributes to this feature of good practice (see Expectations A4, B1, B8, and Enhancement).

3.6 The team was told by students that the resources held on the virtual learning environment are extremely useful and are accessible from anywhere across multiple platforms. The team learned that the virtual learning environment is regularly developed in response to staff and student suggestions. The team saw how it is used in a variety of ways, both as a simple repository for documents and for other interactive teaching and learning activities. It is used for electronic submission of work for assessment and subsequent electronic feedback. Assessment submissions include documents and also video material. The College demonstrated to the team how it makes good use of the virtual learning environment to support student learning. It is currently in the process of upgrading the system to enable students to submit more interactive forms of assessments electronically. The College understands the various technologies used by students and has put arrangements in place to allow for the use of different platforms. This meets the information needs of students which is much appreciated. The College uses display screens around the campus to include information about the current availability of computer spaces. Staff use tablet computers in teaching and good practice is shared between tutors on how to use new technologies. The team concludes that the College's clear commitment to developing and enhancing interactive technologies is **good practice** and contributes to the development of student independent learning and their wider skill set (see also Enhancement).

3.7 Overall, the information produced about the College's provision is comprehensive, accurate and well received by students. Procedures and policies are in place to ensure information is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation in *Chapter C: Information about higher education provision* is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

3.8 In reaching its judgement about the quality of information produced about its provision, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The Expectation has been met. There are two features of good practice in this area. Student engagement in the management of this area is not widespread. It is for these reasons that the team concludes that the quality of information produced by the College about its provision **meets** UK expectations.

4 Judgement: Enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1 The College promotes an ethos which expects and encourages the enhancement of student learning opportunities at all levels of the organisation. The College maintains enhancement initiatives in a systematic and planned manner through the oversight provided by the Higher Education Quality and Standards Group. This ethos is apparent in the Higher Education Strategy especially in relation to embedding employability opportunities through work-related learning in the newly developed foundation degrees with Teesside University. The College has a comprehensive Learner Involvement Strategy which clearly shows how the College is able to take deliberate steps to enhance the learning opportunities for their higher education students. The Higher Education Quality and Standards Group along with the Student Council is strategically placed to provide oversight of all higher education and thus enable the College to take deliberate steps to enhance the quality of learning opportunities.

4.2 The College has a quality improvement planning process that operates through the Higher Education Annual Quality Cycle. At programme level information from external examiner reports feeds directly into annual programme monitoring and actions from this are used to inform the programme level quality improvement plans. Cross-college actions as determined by the Higher Education Quality and Strategy Group and the Higher Education Strategy Group feed into a Higher Education Quality Improvement Plan which is a live online document. Higher education actions feed into a quality improvement plan for the whole College. The Director of Quality presents an annual report based on the Quality Improvement Plan to the Governors Standards Committee. Staff also have individual quality improvement plans for learning and teaching.

4.3 The College is committed to continuing professional development and scholarly activity for staff, particularly as a means to enhance learning opportunities for students. The clear synergy between the observation of teaching, learning and assessment and continuing professional development ensure that areas of need are addressed. The College has run higher education development workshops and staff have attended teaching and learning conferences at Teesside University.

4.4 The College has developed an online forum to promote the sharing of good practice for higher education scholarship. The continued focus on improving teaching, learning and assessment at the College has resulted in Public Services and Travel and Tourism using a range of teaching and learning strategies such as reflective blogs to support employability and work related learning.

4.5 The Learner Involvement Strategy identifies ways in which students are involved in discussions to enhance their learning experience. For example, the Student Association was consulted on virtual learning environment developments and the Student Council discussions raised an issue about access to journals in the higher education study room. Further evidence of the College's commitment to enhancing learning opportunities is provided through the employment of a Study Skills Advisor to further improve support for higher education students. The cross-college student services undergo self-assessment and quality improvement planning to ensure continuous enhancements to provision for all students across the College.

4.6 The streamlining of the management structure and meetings for higher education quality assurance provides a framework to formalise communications between management levels, quality assurance and programme boards. This strategic overview allows the College to take deliberate steps to enhance the learning opportunities of its higher education students.

4.7 The review team conducted a comprehensive review of a range of cross-college strategic documents and terms of reference from higher education strategic committees. The review team questioned the Principal and senior staff about the College's commitment to enhancement. By reviewing committee minutes, the review team considered how the College takes deliberate steps to enhance its quality processes and procedures and the learning experience of its higher education students.

4.8 The documentation reviewed provides many examples of enhancement activity on the ground and the College's response can be seen through the planned and systematic approach of the Higher Education Quality and Standards Group who maintain the oversight of the quality of higher education. The review team found that the comprehensive Learner Involvement Strategy, both in design and operation, clearly shows how the College takes deliberate steps to listen to students and feed their comments into the Higher Education Student Council and the Higher Education Quality and Standards Group. This oversight of the student voice has bolstered the way the College takes deliberate steps to enhance the quality of learning for higher education students.

4.9 Teesside University programmes are informed by the Higher Education Strategy. The review team confirmed that the College involved local employers and students on existing foundation degree programmes in the design and development of the new foundation degrees. The relationship with Teesside University has given the College a new direction for their higher education provision and provides new opportunities for them to enhance student learning opportunities. For example, the new handbooks exceed the minimum requirements of the awarding body. The College was also proactive in organising and running pre-approval events for its new foundation degree programmes with Teesside University over and above the requirements of the awarding body. This demonstrates how the College has taken deliberate steps to enhance the learning opportunities of students and contributes to this feature of **good practice** (see also Expectations A4, B1, B1 and B8.)

4.10 The team confirmed that the remit of the Higher Education Quality and Standards Group is to provide strategic overview of all of the higher education provision and bring the provision closer to the quality processes at the College. The Higher Education Quality and Standards Group considers the summary of all external examiner reports, minutes from programme boards, student survey results and minutes from Student Council. The provision at Rotherham College of Art and Technology is a standing agenda item. The team found that this group is highly effective in reviewing this information, identifying areas for development, setting and monitoring actions and implementing initiatives from provider level. Therefore, the review team concludes that the effective oversight of academic standards and of the quality and enhancement of learning opportunities provided by the Higher Education Standards and Quality Group is **good practice** (see also Expectation A4).

4.11 The review team found that the College actively supports professional development and scholarly activity. Staff undergo regular lesson observations that result in an individual quality improvement plan. The official observation process is complimented by peer observations where staff share good practice. Individual quality improvement plans are discussed with a manager and lead to staff development opportunities designed to enhance teaching and learning. At a College staff development day, staff take part in a rolling carousel of learning and teaching activities to support their development. Staff appreciate not only the College staff development days but also the opportunity to attend the teaching and

learning conference at the Teesside University. Scholarly activity remains a high priority at the College as does the support for tutors delivering higher education to undertake higher level study. Over half the staff teaching higher education have been supported to achieve additional qualifications. The College is in the process of developing an online forum to promote the sharing of good practice for higher education scholarship, however at the time of the review this was still under construction. The team finds that this contributes to the feature of **good practice**, the systematic and holistic approach to quality improvement in learning and teaching (see also B3).

4.12 The review team found the virtual learning environment is actively used by staff and students as a mechanism for supporting learning and teaching and assessment. Students are positive about using the virtual learning environment and feel that it is a useful source of information. Programme handbooks and teaching materials are on the virtual learning environment. The virtual learning environment is considered to be an effective mechanism for improving the quality of learning opportunities. The team concludes that this contributes to the feature of **good practice** found in Expectation C, the College's clear commitment to developing and enhancing interactive technologies.

4.13 Overall, the College has a strong commitment to enhancement. The Higher Education Standards and Quality group is effective in its remit. Awarding body requirements are exceeded. There is a college-wide approach to improving learning and teaching. Interactive learning technologies contribute to improved learning opportunities. Therefore, the review concludes that the Expectation in Enhancement is met in both design and operation and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.14 In reaching its judgement about the enhancement of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

4.15 The Expectation in Enhancement has been met. There are four features of good practice in this area, no recommendations and no affirmations. The provider has plans to continue developing mechanisms to improve the quality of learning opportunities. Student engagement in this area is widespread and well supported. Managing the needs of students is a clear focus of the provider's strategies and policies in this area.

4.16 It is for these reasons that the team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities is **commended**.

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1 The College is committed to serving the needs of its local population which has traditionally low levels of participation and aspiration. It also seeks to support local employers in developing the local economy. Both student employability and employer engagement are prominent in College strategies.

Innovations in promoting the employability of students

5.2 All programmes are vocational in nature and include work-related modules. The development of both general and specific employability skills is embedded in the curriculum; skills are assessed through personal development planning modules. Students are enabled to consider possibilities for future study and employment through a variety of events such as employer talks, workplace experiences, residential trips and university visits. These are often programme-specific and inform students about future careers in that area. Others are more general and are aimed at presenting other possibilities and raising aspirations. The team noted the positive comments about the development of employability that have been made in external examiner reports, validation reports and in other external reviews.

5.3 The College's tutorial programme encourages student self-reflection and discussion of skills development. It also includes what the College refers to as 'next steps', which may be progression to a top-up degree or to employment. As part of the College's support services, the Job Zone is signposted from the main website and programme handbooks. Along with an online Career Coach database, which is linked to information about local job opportunities, it is supported by a Progression Advisor and a Careers Coach. Although students are not as familiar with the term 'careers' as with 'next steps' they are well aware of the College's careers provision. Other local employability support comes from a European Research Development Fund Enterprise Advisor and the Enterprising Young People scheme. The College's Job Centre also supports its graduates.

5.4 The College has a very strong commitment to developing employability skills and one measure of success is the high level of employment for students not progressing to top-up degrees.

How employers are involved in the delivery and development of the curriculum

5.5 There are strong links between the College and local employers, including work experience providers. Given the vocational nature of its programmes, the College involved employers in detailed discussions about both content and skills in the development of its recently validated programmes in order to ensure currency and fitness for purpose. Work experience and other work-related activities are supported by mentors in the workplace environment as well as by College tutors. Employer talks and industrial visits are frequently programme-specific although some are open to all students.

5.6 Regular ongoing discussions with employers take place to ensure that staff knowledge is updated and programmes reflect changes in their industry sectors. Programme-level staff have good relationships with local employers in both public and private sectors and place great value on these links which also assist with staff development. Employers confirm the importance to them of being involved in partnership with the College. They also confirm the commitment of the College to employer engagement.

Glossary

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

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

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

Academic standards

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

Award

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

Blended learning

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

Credit(s)

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

Degree-awarding body

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

Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

Dual award or double award

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

e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning

Enhancement

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

Expectations

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

Flexible and distributed learning

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

See also **distance learning**.

Framework

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

Framework for higher education qualifications

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

Good practice

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

Learning opportunities

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

Learning outcomes

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

Multiple awards

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

Operational definition

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

Programme (of study)

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

Programme specifications

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

Public information

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

Quality Code

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

Reference points

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

Subject benchmark statement

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

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)

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

Threshold academic standard

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

Virtual learning environment (virtual learning environment)

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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