Higher Education Review of Riverside College

May 2014

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Riverside College from 20-22 May 2014 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Sally Bentley
- Dr Andrew Eadie
- Miss Caroline Dangerfield (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Riverside 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 6.

In reviewing Riverside 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#.U8U94HhwY-J.
[3] QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus.
[4] Higher Education Review web pages: www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/types-of-review/higher-education-review.

Amended judgement October 2015

Introduction

In May 2014, Riverside College underwent a Higher Education Review, which resulted in judgements that its maintenance of threshold academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisations met UK expectations; that the quality of student learning opportunities met UK expectations; and that the enhancement of student learning opportunities met UK expectations; but that the quality of the information produced about its provision did not meet UK expectations.

Negative judgements are subject to a formal follow-up by QAA, which involves the monitoring of an action plan produced by the College in response to the report findings.

The College published an action plan in July 2014 describing how it intended to address the recommendations, affirmations and good practice identified in the review, and has been working over the last 13 months to demonstrate how it has implemented that plan.

The follow-up process included three progress updates and culminated in the review team's scrutiny of the College's progress reports and the supporting documentary evidence, along with a one-day visit on 2 September 2015 with two reviewers. During the visit the team met senior staff at the College, staff teaching on the College higher education provision, staff involved in the College's Higher Education Learning Community, and key support staff. The team discussed with the staff key aspects of the action plan and progress and used the discussions to triangulate the evidence base received over the preceding months.

The desk-based analysis and visit confirmed that the recommendations relating to the judgement of 'does not meet UK expectations' for the quality of the information produced about the College provision had been successfully addressed. Actions against recommendations, affirmations and good practice relating to the maintenance of threshold academic standards, the quality of learning opportunities and the enhancement of student learning opportunities, which received positive judgements, had also been completed on schedule and contributed to the progress against the judgement for the quality of the information produced about the College provision.

QAA Board decision and amended judgement

The review team concluded that the College had made sufficient progress to recommend that the judgement be amended. The QAA Board accepted the team's recommendation and the judgement is now formally amended. The College's judgements are now as follows.

- The maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information produced about its provision **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

The review can be considered to be signed off as complete.

Findings from the follow-up process

The team found that the College had made progress against the recommendations as follows.

Ensure that all student handbooks are accessible, fit for purpose and trustworthy (Expectations C and A3)

The College now has in place clear expectations for the minimum requirements of a higher education student handbook, including reference to assessment methods, Subject Benchmark Statements and programme specifications. This is in the context of a commitment to publish accurate and comprehensive programme delivery materials in its new Code of Practice for Accuracy and Completeness of Information.

Ensure that titles of programmes accurately specify the qualifications being offered (Expectations C and A1)

The College's systematic review of its published information embraced programme and qualification titles for its higher education provision to ensure they accurately reflect the level and content of courses currently approved and offered by the College, and that they differentiate accurately between Higher National and degree programmes.

Ensure that all information is consistent, accurate, fit for purpose and trustworthy (Expectations C and A3)

An initial systematic review of all public and student-facing information was undertaken before the start of the 2014-15 academic year. This included specific checks on the programme and qualification titles, programme handbooks, definitive documentation, the website and the virtual learning environment. At the same time, a new Code of Practice for Accuracy and Completeness of Information was approved by the Senior Management Team. The Code of Practice articulates the College's commitment to and process for checking published information. It was revised in spring 2015, adding in more frequent central checks on published information. A system to involve students in the evaluation of information at course level was put in place through the HE Student Forum.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Riverside College

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

- The maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and other awarding organisations **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information produced about its provision **does not meet** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

Good practice

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

- The extensive and consistent use across all programmes of the College virtual learning environment (Expectation B3).
- The effective integration of all student support services including the use of the student tracking and achievement record system in order to enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential (Expectations B4 and B6).

Recommendations

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

By September 2014:

- ensure that all student handbooks are accessible, fit for purpose and trustworthy (Expectations C and A3)
- ensure that titles of programmes accurately specify the qualifications being offered (Expectations C and A1).

By December 2014:

- develop and implement a systematic approach to ensuring that staff are familiar with and use subject and qualification benchmark statements to inform the delivery of programmes (Expectation A2)
- strengthen the internal programme approval process to ensure that programmes have appropriate learning, teaching and assessment strategies in place prior to commencement of delivery (Expectations A4 and B1)
- ensure that staff who teach on new programmes have suitable staff development to enable them to design and implement an appropriate assessment strategy (Expectations B3 and B6)
- ensure that systems are in place to prevent assessment overload both in terms of timing and volume (Expectations B6 and B1)
- ensure that all information is consistent, accurate, fit for purpose and trustworthy (Expectations C and A3).

By July 2015:

- develop and implement a periodic review process for the higher education provision (Expectations A4 and B8).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The introduction by October 2014 of an annual monitoring process for the College's Pearson provision which mirrors that of its awarding bodies (Expectation A4).
- The actions being taken by the Academic Board to review, evaluate and ensure that external examiners' reports are responded to (Expectation B7).

Theme: Student Employability

Staff and students at the College believe employability is a key feature and strength at all levels of learning and for all students. This view is made explicit in its design of learning opportunities with many of their programmes including mandatory work placements. The College has responded to a prompt by one awarding body, Staffordshire University, and to the previous Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) to strengthen its work-based learning, by introducing new higher national and foundation degree qualifications and focusing its courses on employability.

The College has a Destination Data and Employment Strategy which applies to all students at the College. There are three strands to the College's approach to employability. The first strand focuses on classroom practice to teach and assess employability skills. The second focuses on links and partnership between curriculum areas, and the third focuses on work placements, work experience and work preparation activity.

Programmes have been systematically developed to respond to local employment needs. They are adapted and designed in response to employer feedback and both facilities and programme development involves liaison with local businesses or employers. Higher education programmes build on the vocational orientation of lower level programmes. Employers contribute to the development and approval of programmes, aided by the Skills and Enterprise Team. Programmes routinely and systematically develop employability skills through the direct involvement of employers as guest speakers, visits to employers, the inclusion of modules or units to develop employability and/or the use of placements.

The College provides a range of in-house careers advice and support. The Higher Education Pastoral Support Worker supports recruitment and admissions to ensure that students take programmes that lead to their chosen careers. There is guidance from the Advice, Careers and Employability (ACE) team. The ACE team provide generic stand-alone events, as well as embedded sessions tailored to programme needs. The National Careers Service is on site and students on programmes validated by Staffordshire University have access to their careers service.

In conclusion, the College is aware of the importance of embedding employability in their programmes. It uses a range of mechanisms to achieve this, effectively supporting students through placements and on into employment.

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

About Riverside College

Riverside College (the College) is a medium-sized general further education college located in Merseyside. It was formed in August 2006 following the merger of Halton College and Widnes and Runcorn Sixth Form College. The College serves the towns of Widnes and Runcorn, which have a combined population of 125,700 (Census 2012), as well as attracting learners from outside of the borough. It operates on three main centres: Kingsway, Cronton and Astmoor. All but one of its higher education programmes run on the Kingsway site, the exception being the higher national diploma (HND) in Sport, which runs on the Cronton site due to the need for specialist facilities only available on that site.

The College offers courses in all 15 further education and skills sector subject areas. The most significant subject areas of the College's work are in: preparation for life and work; health, public services and care; hairdressing and beauty therapy; science; and mathematics. The College offers higher education courses in health and social care; counselling; early years; sport; teacher education; business; information technology; and, in partnership with Preston Training Centre, engineering. In 2012-13 there were 406 students studying higher education programmes at the College.

The College recruits a high proportion of learners from areas of high social and economic deprivation. According to the Department for Education's index of multiple deprivation, the College operates in Band 1, meaning it is in the lowest 10 per cent nationally.

The College has three higher education awarding bodies: Edge Hill University, Liverpool John Moores University and Staffordshire University. However, due to changes in government policy and within the awarding bodies, both Edge Hill University and Liverpool John Moores University withdrew franchised numbers from the College and the courses are in 'teach-out'. The College has since run some HNDs with Pearson and the partnership with Staffordshire University has continued to develop.

Major changes since the last review include:

- a new Head of HE based at the Kingsway Campus, where the majority of higher education provision is delivered
- provision has been transferred from the Runcorn/Bridgewater Campus to Kingsway Widnes, and Cronton Sixth Form College
- partner universities Liverpool John Moores and Edge Hill University withdrew student numbers in response to the introduction of the Student Number Control; these courses are now in teach-out
- the curriculum offer has changed significantly with a number of courses closed or in teach-out, some Pearson higher national programmes introduced and new courses developed with Staffordshire University, including two top-ups being validated for a September 2014 start.

Key challenges faced by the College are: the development of any further Pearson higher national programmes; the development of the partnership with Staffordshire University; continuing the process of bringing the provision currently delivered in Preston to employees of BAE Systems back into Halton; and the closing of the partnerships with Edge Hill University and Liverpool John Moores University, both of which are in their final year.

In general the College has responded appropriately to the recommendations from the last IQER. However, the review team found that the College had not responded fully to the recommendations relating to increasing familiarity with external reference points, such as *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*

(FHEQ), subject benchmark statements and the Academic Infrastructure (as it was then) and this has led to recommendations in this review. Similarly, the review team found that the College had not fully responded to the recommendations relating to the consistency of programme handbooks which has also led to a recommendation.

Explanation of the findings about Riverside 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 delivers programmes designed and approved by its awarding bodies and Pearson, who are responsible for allocating each qualification to the appropriate level on the FHEQ. The College's policies and procedures allow the Expectation A1 to be met.

1.2   The team reviewed documentation including the collaborative agreements and programme-level definitive documentation, and discussed this Expectation with staff at the College.

1.3   The College is aware of its duty to maintain standards and exercises this duty in accordance with the procedures of its awarding bodies and Pearson. The College's Senior Management Team (SMT) has full delegated responsibility from its Board of Governors. It has an Academic Board, which reports to SMT, to oversee its higher education provision and ensure standards are maintained.

1.4   Programme and module/unit specifications are designed by the awarding bodies and Pearson and some make explicit reference to the FHEQ. External examiners and verifiers confirm that the teaching and assessment of the programmes is at the required standard. Edge Hill University annual monitoring indicates that there has been an explicit check on standards through cross-reference to the FHEQ.

1.5   While the definitive documentation and meetings with staff and students indicate no issue with the volume of teaching, students raised issues about the volume and timing of assessment across its new Pearson programmes (HNDs in Sport and Business), where the College has responsibility for designing the assessment. Staff and students linked this to a very poor retention rate in these groups. The College worked with Pearson, as well as with students, to review programme delivery to ensure this was resolved. This is discussed further in Expectations A4 and B1 and has led to recommendations in these sections.

1.6   The College has an internal approval process before it progresses with any awarding body or organisation approval, but this does not include any discussion of the FHEQ in relation to the proposed award. The College has engaged with awarding bodies' Pearson's approval and re-approval processes, though in all cases the awarding bodies and Pearson have been responsible for the design of the programme and for the allocation of the programme to the appropriate level in the FHEQ.

1.7   The 2010 IQER advised the College to 'introduce further measures to enhance understanding of Academic Infrastructure by programme teams'. Staff have been alerted to the Quality Code through HE cluster sessions as part of preparation for the HER, and through the HE Learning Community, which has considered assessment, but otherwise there is no evidence of staff development on other aspects of the former Academic Infrastructure, including the FHEQ. Staff showed little awareness of the FHEQ, providing no examples of how they engage with it.

1.8   Students are informed of the level of study in their programme handbooks, though in all public and student-facing information (webpages, prospectus, Unistats, handbooks), as noted in Expectations A3 and C, the College regularly and inaccurately uses the word 'degree' or the qualification title 'BA (Hons)' to describe higher national programmes. This has led to a recommendation under Expectation C.

1.9   There have been some issues with the volume of study (assessment) and this is discussed more fully in Expectations A4 and B1. There are significant problems associated with the accuracy of the use of programme and qualification titles, which is discussed more fully under Expectation C. However, since the awarding bodies and Pearson are responsible for the allocation of qualifications to the appropriate level on the FHEQ, the review team concludes that Expectation A1 is **met** with a low risk.

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

1.10   The College delivers programmes designed and approved by its awarding bodies and Pearson. These are responsible for ensuring that programme design takes account of relevant subject and qualification benchmark statements. The College is responsible for ensuring that programme delivery takes account of relevant benchmark statements. These arrangements allow Expectation A2 to be met.

1.11   The team reviewed documentation and discussed arrangements with staff at the College to explore the College's use of benchmark statements in the delivery of their programmes.

1.12   Staff see their use as being limited to informing programme design, which is the responsibility of the awarding bodies and Pearson. Explicit reference to benchmark statements in definitive documentation is limited and there is no consideration of benchmark statements as part of the internal development and approval process.

1.13   The College focuses exclusively on subject rather than qualification benchmark statements. There is no awareness of the foundation degree statement and no understanding of its relevance to the delivery of foundation degrees. This is despite the 2010 IQER making a desirable recommendation that the College 'seeks further development of work-based learning to benefit foundation degree students'.

1.14   There is no evidence that the College has undertaken staff development and training on the subject and qualification benchmark statements, although the 2010 IQER advised them to 'introduce further measures to enhance understanding of Academic Infrastructure by programme teams'. The review team **recommends** that by December 2014 the College develop and implement a systematic approach to ensuring that staff are familiar with, and use, subject and qualification benchmark statements to inform the delivery of programmes.

1.15   The College is not accredited or recognised by any professional statutory or regulatory bodies (PSRBs). The FdSc in Counselling has been designed to assist students in later application to the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP). The HND Advanced Practice in Early Years provides holders of the qualification with a nationally recognised, vocationally-specific qualification which awards qualified practitioner status, but there is no separate PSRB associated with this status.

1.16   Since its awarding bodies and Pearson are responsible for using subject benchmark and qualification statements to inform programme design and for monitoring the effective delivery of the programmes, the review team concludes that Expectation A2 is **met**. However, because the College, which is responsible for ensuring benchmark statements inform programme delivery, demonstrated a general lack of awareness and understanding of subject and qualification benchmark statements, the risk is moderate and there is a recommendation in this area.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

1.17   The College delivers programmes whose definitive documentation is designed and approved by its awarding bodies and Pearson according to their requirements. The College is responsible for ensuring that this information is disseminated, maintained and updated, working within the expectations of the awarding bodies and Pearson.

1.18   The College uses its website to disseminate high level definitive information to the public and its virtual learning environment (VLE) to share fuller definitive information, including programme specifications and module/unit specifications (together with programme handbooks) with current staff and students. The College follows the procedures of its awarding bodies and Pearson if it needs to request a change to the definitive information. While its strategy to disseminate information through the website and VLE is sound and allows the Expectation A3 to be met, the lack of clarity about the procedures relating its implementation creates the potential for inconsistent and inaccurate information to be disseminated.

1.19   The team reviewed documentation, examined the website and VLE, and discussed arrangements with staff at the College to evaluate how effective the College is in ensuring its definitive information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements for a programme of study is made available.

1.20   Although students note that the website has the information that they need, it does not hold full programme specifications, containing a general overview of the programmes. Information is paraphrased from approved definitive information.

1.21   High level definitive programme information is not fully consistent or accurate on the website; in the Adult Course Guide; on Unistats; in the programme handbooks; and in other supporting documentation, with variations in award and programme titles. The name of the sport programmes vary and the word degree is repeatedly used to describe higher national programmes in a range of information for students.

1.22   There is currently no definitive information available in a prospectus as it is under review, though the Adult Course Guide on the website contains both out-of-date and, at the time, inaccurate definitive information. See Expectation C for further discussion of this topic and its associated recommendation.

1.23   The College's VLE contains programme specifications, some of which are embedded or partly embedded in programme handbooks, and students comment that they find the information on the VLE helpful.

1.24   The 2010 IQER advised the College to 'take measures to ensure all handbooks provide consistent and accurate advice and guidance to students'. Handbooks were available for all programmes and contained useful, but inconsistent and incomplete information. Guidance has recently been drafted for staff on the required content for programme handbooks and on how to ensure programme specification information is embedded within them. This is discussed further in Expectation C and has led to a recommendation in this section.

1.25   The College follows the procedure of its awarding bodies when it wishes to modify a programme post-approval and changes are made in response to student feedback.

1.26   The review team concludes that Expectation A3 is **not met** because of the repeated use of factually inaccurate programme and award titles, and because handbooks remain inconsistent and variable in quality despite a previous recommendation in this area. The risk is moderate because the problems identified are focused in two specific areas.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

1.27   The College delivers programmes designed and approved by its awarding bodies and Pearson It has an internal approval process which looks at predominantly business-related matters and is signed-off by relevant College staff, before an awarding body or Pearson approval process commences. This internal process is relatively limited in scope and creates the potential for academic-related matters to receive insufficient consideration.

1.28   The College has no system for periodically reviewing its portfolio. While this is appropriate with regard to its current programmes, because they are relatively new, its programmes will need reviewing in the next few years. While the awarding bodies will carry out a periodic review of their provision on behalf of the College, Pearson does not undertake periodic review on behalf of its providers and so the review team **recommends** that by July 2015 the College develops and implements a periodic review process for its higher education provision. This is discussed further in Expectation B8.

1.29   While the current policies and procedures currently allows Expectation A4 to be met, these need further strengthening if they are to be fully effective.

1.30   The team reviewed documentation and met with staff in order to evaluate whether the College has effective processes to internally approve and periodically review the validity and relevance of programmes.

1.31   The College's portfolio emerges from its outline strategic plan for higher education and this plan is reviewed annually. Staff have the opportunity to contribute portfolio development ideas to the SMT, both informally and then by completing an internal approval form The internal approval process completed for new higher education programmes includes a rationale in addition to a consideration of viability and resources. However, this internal approval process does not consider academic-related matters in any detail. This has caused problems with the effective design and development of appropriate assessment strategies on some of its new higher national programmes, leading to poor retention. The College has worked with its Pearson and its students to put plans in place to improve the specific issues. The review team **recommends** that by December 2014 the College strengthen the internal programme approval process to ensure that programmes have appropriate learning, teaching and assessment strategies in place prior to commencement of delivery (see Expectation B1).

1.32   The College embeds the monitoring of its higher education provision within normal College processes and undertakes an internal annual self-assessment review Regular SMT monitoring meetings review key performance indicators ensuring issues are addressed. The College also follows awarding body/Pearson guidance on how to respond to issues raised about its provision Annual monitoring reports are undertaken for its provision with its university partners, but a similar process is not in place for its Pearson provision. However, the College is intending to introduce a similar process for its Pearson provision for the 2014-15 academic year. The team **affirms** the introduction by October 2014 of an annual monitoring process for the College's Pearson provision, which mirrors that of its awarding bodies.

1.33   Responsibility for ensuring it has in place effective and appropriate processes to approve, and periodically review, the validity and relevance of its programmes rests predominantly with its awarding bodies and Pearson. Therefore, although the College's systems are under-developed in this area, Expectation A4 is **met**. The risk is moderate because a number of its programmes have faced significant issues related to poorly designed initial assessment strategies, leading to associated poor retention. There is also no process in place for the periodic review of its Pearson provision and plans for a systematic approach to annual monitoring across its Pearson provision are not yet implemented. A strengthening of the College's internal programme approval process and of its internal annual monitoring process, as well as the development of an internal periodic review process would improve this area of activity.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

Quality Code, *Chapter A5: Externality*

Findings

1.34   The College delivers programmes designed and approved by its awarding bodies and Pearson and works with external experts identified by them. In addition, it seeks to draw on independent external expertise whenever it believes it is helpful. These arrangements allow Expectation A5 to be met.

1.35   The team reviewed documentation and met with staff in order to evaluate how effective the College is at involving independent external participation in the management of threshold standards.

1.36   The College routinely draws on the expertise of its awarding bodies and Pearson. It finds its collaboration with Staffordshire University to be particularly helpful. Following the recommendation in the 2010 IQER, the College has established an effective and responsive relationship with its awarding bodies' link tutors. For its Pearson provision, there is productive dialogue with Senior External Verifiers for each subject area and staff make use of the Ask the Expert facility to ensure the effective management of threshold standards.

1.37   The College uses external partners (such as employers, awarding body experts or national experts) to assist in programme development, though their role in monitoring and review is limited. Examples of this include the use of an external consultant in its development of engineering programmes and facilities, and the routine engagement with local professional practitioners to ensure its practice-based programmes are informed by the latest standards.

1.38   The College draws on national speakers when reviewing aspects of its activities related to student support, as it did recently in relation to equality training. This training was then used to inform student support and assessment practices to enable all students, including those with disabilities, to have the opportunity to achieve the threshold standards.

1.39   Responsibility for ensuring independent external participation in the management of threshold standards predominantly rests with its awarding bodies and Pearson, but where appropriate, the College draws on external expertise. The review team thus concludes that Expectation A5 is **met** with a low risk.

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

1.40   The College delivers programmes whose assessment is overseen by its awarding bodies and Pearson and satisfy themselves that the assessment of students is robust, valid and reliable. The College is responsible for ensuring that their internal processes meet awarding body/Pearson requirements.

1.41   To fulfil these responsibilities, the College has a range of internal systems in place. There are assessment policies and guidance, some of which are specific to the College's higher education provision. To support the external examining/verifying systems of the awarding bodies and Pearson, there is an established system of internal moderation/verification. The College has an internal system of assessment boards which meet termly to receive moderated/verified marks and track progression with students being informed by letter of the outcomes.

1.42   The Teaching, Learning and Standards Team lead a process for the consideration of and response to external examiner/verifier reports. There is a system, drawing on the expertise of the Additional Learning Support Team, for making reasonable adjustments for those with specific learning needs and other disabilities.

1.43   The College is committed to a programme of related staff development to support the implementation of assessment processes. The higher education assessment policy contains guidance on the avoidance of malpractice. These assessment-related policies and procedures allow Expectation A5 to be met.

1.44   The team reviewed documentation and met with staff and students in order to evaluate how effectively the College's internal systems are implemented to ensure that assessment is robust, valid and reliable.

1.45   Assessment policies and guidance are familiar to staff and, as the evidence below indicates, are appropriately implemented. The College makes assessment policies, regulations, process and criteria clear to students through handbooks, assignment briefs on the VLE and feedback with their results, though as noted in Expectations A3 and C, some handbooks lack an overview of assessment information.

1.46   The Teaching, Learning and Standards Team effectively manage assessment-related processes Internal marking, moderation and standardisation processes work well and integrate with the procedures required by the awarding bodies and Pearson. The assessment boards are effective and their outcomes are discussed at HE cluster meetings, which provide the opportunity to pick up on individual cases and trends.

1.47   The process for the consideration of and response to external examiner/verifier reports is effective, as described in Expectation B7. HE catch-up meetings between the Head of HE and the Heads of School provide a routine vehicle for the management of external examiner and verifier visits.

1.48   There is a clear responsiveness to advice or issues raised by the awarding bodies or Pearson. Some issues have been raised by external examiners and verifiers relating to marking and the College has been working with its awarding bodies and Pearson to address these. External examiner and verifier reports are normally made available to students

through the VLE or by email, and some students have had the opportunity to meet external examiners.

1.49   The College prides itself on its diverse assessment and feedback practices, which are grounded in academic theory and are tailored to assess the learning outcomes. Practice is shared and developed through the Learning Community and Learning Matters events, as well as virtually.

1.50   The previous IQER advised the College to 'ensure consistent implementation of the policy on assessment deadlines' Students on several new programmes have identified significant problems with the volume and timing of assessment, and progression has been poor on these programmes with a very high withdrawal rate. The College has been working with the students, as well as their awarding bodies and Pearson to change the type, number and deployment of assignments to resolve the problem. See Expectations A4, B1 and B6 where the College is recommended to strengthen the internal approval process and to ensure systems are in place to prevent assessment overload both in terms of timing and volume to avoid a repetition of these initial problems.

1.51   The College is aware that the new types of programme associated with its Pearson provision needs careful staff development and has invoked a range of training to ensure that good practice from its university-validated programmes is applied to its new Pearson programmes. Training has been provided through the HE learning community, with staff from new subject areas joining in with continuous professional development (CPD) a year in advance of a programme running. Staff have also benefitted from engaging with national Pearson training, changing their practice as a result. However, given the significant problem experienced by the College in the area of assessment on some of its new programmes, the need for further staff development is discussed in Expectation B3, leading to a recommendation.

1.52   Training on equality and diversity issues in relation to assessment has been provided to all College staff. Programmes explicitly consider accessibility in relation to assessment through the routine HE catch-up meetings between the Head of HE and the Heads of School. The Additional Learning Support Team provides a helpful service to students with disabilities who need reasonable adjustments to be made to assessment processes. Programmes delivered in partnership with Staffordshire University benefit from an additional disability support service.

1.53   The College uses online assignment submission whenever practical and all electronic submissions are passed through plagiarism detection software, which students can also access to self-evaluate their own work. Students are aware that the College takes academic malpractice seriously and have benefitted from advice shared at induction and during the course.

1.54   The College has clear internal processes to ensure that 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. Where issues have been drawn to the attention of the College by students or the awarding bodies and Pearson, effective action has been taken to resolve them. The team thus concludes that Expectation A6 is **met** with a low risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Maintenance of the threshold academic standards: Summary of findings

1.55   In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook. Five of the six expectations for this judgement area were met, though in two cases the risk was judged to be moderate. One Expectation was not met and the risk was judged to be moderate. The issues identified in Expectation A2 has led to a recommendation. In addition there are two further recommendations in this section under Expectation A4. All three of the recommendations given in Expectation C are also relevant to this section. There is one affirmation in this section, located in Expectation A4. There are no areas of good practice in this section.

1.56   The review team note that the primary responsibility for much of this section lies not with the College but with its awarding bodies and Pearson. The College has good relationships with its awarding bodies and Pearson and responds appropriately to their requirements. The College has internal policies and systems to ensure that it can meet the requirements of the awarding bodies and Pearson, and systems are effectively implemented. There remain a few areas where the College could strengthen its staff development and the management and review of its systems to ensure that programme delivery is improved. The recommendations relate to a lack of understanding of external reference points and some poor practice when new Pearson programmes are introduced.

1.57   On balance therefore, the team concludes that the maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its awarding bodies and Pearson **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 Riverside College does not have responsibility for the design and approval of programmes. In all cases the responsibility for design and approval lies with the College's awarding bodies and Pearson. The College's portfolio is designed within the context of an annually refreshed strategic plan, which balances internal resources with market demand. The strategic plan is aimed at meeting the educational needs of the local district and its residents. The Higher Education Teaching and Learning and Assessment Strategy and the College-wide Principles of Teaching, Learning and Assessment, and Support provide a framework for the design of programme pedagogy. The College has an internal approval process before progressing with any awarding body/Pearson processes. This is a College-wide process which involves a series of checks and approvals at a high level relating predominantly to the business case for the new programme, any resource implications and a check by the Teaching, Learning and Standards Department in relation to these matters.

2.2 At present the College is engaged with one awarding body, Staffordshire University for degree-level awards and one awarding organisation, Pearson for higher national provision. It also has relationships with two other awarding bodies, Edge Hill University and Liverpool John Moores University, with whom the College did have franchised provision but both of these relationships are now closed and the College is in the final year of 'teach-out' of the programmes.

2.3 The policies and procedures of the College allows Expectation B1 to be met.

2.4 The review team examined how the processes outlined above operate in practice by considering the examples provided by the College and through discussions with staff. In the case of awarding body approval, an approval process takes place in which the University considers whether the College is able to undertake delivery of the degree from the viewpoint of pedagogical and physical resources. This process culminates in a validation event in which both the University and the College participate. In the case of the higher national provision, the approval process involves the production of standardised documentation by the College, which is then considered by Pearson.

2.5 The review team noted that in some recently approved programmes the performance of students in the first year of the delivery of the programme was disappointing, with a high level of non-completion. College staff acknowledge that the main contributing factor to the poor performance was the absence of a coherent assessment strategy and the associated volume and timing of the assignments. In light of this, the review team has made two recommendations both located primarily in other expectations. Firstly a recommendation in Expectation A4 to strengthen the internal approval process for new provision and secondly a recommendation in Expectation B6 to prevent assessment overload.

2.6 In light of the above, the review team concludes that Expectation B1 is **met** with a moderate level of risk. The expectation is met because in the main, the College's procedures are effective. The level of risk is moderate because of the potential for students to drop out of newly developed programmes due to poor assessment strategies if the problems are not addressed.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B2: Admissions*

Findings

2.7 The College has responsibility for admitting students to the higher education programmes it provides. All applications are made directly to the College and each applicant is individually interviewed. The Head of HE has responsibility for all admission decisions and this authority is delegated to the Higher Education Pastoral Support Worker, who frequently consults the appropriate Head of School. All outcomes of the application process are communicated in writing to applicants. The College's approach to its admissions process allows Expectation B2 to be met.

2.8 The review team tested the College's practice in relation to admissions by reviewing anonymised application forms and interview records, browsing information provided for potential students and discussing the overall admissions process with students and staff.

2.9 The College is aware of its responsibility to ensure that its procedures used to admit students are clear, fair explicit and consistently applied. Staff involved in the admissions process are aware of the relevant Quality Code chapter and how it applies to their area of work The College does not have an admissions policy, but staff are currently devising one based on current sector good practice.

2.10 While the College's website simply states that potential applicants should apply directly to the College and not through UCAS, the online higher education prospectus provides applicants with brief information regarding the admissions process.

2.11 The higher education section of the College's website provides a satisfactory amount of information in order for applicants to make an informed choice. Students with whom the team met were particularly positive about the personalised and timely information they received prior to commencing their programme. Students reported that the College had been supportive when making the transition from applicant to higher education student The College runs an annual New Student Day for students who have been accepted onto a higher education programme in the summer before commencing their studies, in order to facilitate students' early induction and to provide further information about the College These days were found to be particularly helpful and very much welcomed by the students who met the review team.

2.12 While the full programme specifications are not available to applicants, there is a brief overview including topics and modules covered for each programme offered. Entry requirements for each programme are clearly articulated and the progression routes available to students who successfully complete each programme are referred to However, some programmes advertised on the College's website and some information on the application form, and in formal correspondence with applicants, do not use the correct award or programme title, including incorrectly referring to degree programmes on a number of occasions. This is explored further and is the subject of a recommendation in Expectation C.

2.13 The College interviews all higher education applicants to ensure their suitability for the programme. Staff with responsibility for making admissions decisions are experienced and are provided with appropriate guidance and trained in the College's admissions processes A significant number of the College's higher education applicants are students who are progressing internally from the College's further education provision and therefore,

the College is able to make a well informed decision as to the applicants' suitability for the particular programme. Where applicants are new to the College, references are sought.

2.14   The College's admissions process is reviewed annually as part of the College's self-assessment reporting process However, the College would benefit from strengthening this process by ensuring the annual review looks objectively at the overall admissions processes rather than predominantly focusing on recruitment targets.

2.15   Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation B2 is **met** as the College is operating its admissions processes fairly and consistently. However, the risk is moderate because there are significant issues associated with the use of programme and qualification titles and these are discussed more fully in Expectation C.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and teaching*

Findings

2.16   The College's strategic goal for its higher education provision, as articulated in its overall Strategic Plan, involves providing a responsive higher education curriculum that meets the needs of the local community and employers While applicable to the entirety of their provision (both further and higher education), the College's Principles of Learning, Teaching, Assessment and Support for Students Manual demonstrates the considerable focus on learning and teaching, and the College takes pride in the potentially transformational effect of its higher education provision. The brief Higher Education Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy articulates the varied approaches to be taken as students progress through their programme of study and develop into independent learners. This, coupled with a clear commitment to learning and teaching from staff at all levels of the organisational structure, enables Expectation B3 to be met.

2.17   The review team evaluated the effectiveness of the College's approach to learning and teaching by: consulting documentation including the Strategic Plan, the Principles of Learning, Teaching, Assessment and Support for Students Manual and minutes of relevant meetings; browsing the VLE; reviewing staff CVs; discussing learning and teaching with senior management, teaching staff and support staff; and discussing with students and student representatives their experience of learning and teaching at the College.

2.18   The majority of teaching staff are qualified to at least the level at which they are teaching Staff CVs are submitted to the awarding bodies and Pearson as part of the validation and approval process to ensure they are appropriately qualified and/or experienced. Students report that they are knowledgeable and bring expertise from the relevant workplace. The College supports staff in achieving a qualification at the level higher at which they teach, and therefore a number of staff are currently or have recently studied at postgraduate level New staff report to have been appropriately supported by the College throughout the induction period.

2.19   There is a College-wide programme of staff development which takes place throughout the year with staff development for the College's higher education programmes focused on the monthly HE learning community meetings These meetings include sessions on information dissemination (predominantly in preparation for this HER) and facilitate the sharing of good learning and teaching practice between staff In order to facilitate the sharing of good practice, staff make use of 'Wonder Walls', a process of highlighting to other members of staff where an aspect of learning and teaching has gone particularly well. Staff report a high level of engagement in this process and find it very useful.

2.20   While it is evident the College has a focus on staff development, the review team found evidence of a number of new higher national programmes for which assessment had not been fully designed before teaching on the programme commenced. This had resulted in students becoming overloaded due to the volume and timing of assessment. The College has sole responsibility assessment strategy design for all of its Pearson provision whereas for its university-validated programmes, this is done in consultation with the awarding body. Therefore the review team **recommends** the College ensure that staff who teach on new

programmes have suitable staff development to enable them to design and implement an appropriate assessment strategy.

2.21   Physical learning resources are provided through the Learning Resource Centre and where students are studying on a programme validated by an awarding university, they also have access to the resources of that institution Students would like to see the Learning Resource Centre open for longer in the evenings The College is currently unable to meet this request in full but has extended opening hours where possible and teaching staff are able to book the use of the Centre for student use beyond the standard opening hours The College is increasingly making use of electronic resources which allow students to access reading material and journals at all times Students are generally positive about the College's learning resources.

2.22   The College has clearly addressed the desirable recommendation of the previous IQER in 2010 to 'seek a wider sharing of good practice in the use of the virtual learning environment to support learning opportunities'. Every programme now makes effective use of the College's VLE Each site includes information on the programme specifications (though these are sometimes incomplete or rudimentary), learning outcomes, assessment methods and criteria, as well as a variety of learning notes and materials. Students are able to submit their assessed work and receive feedback through the VLE. The VLE is regularly audited to ensure its effective use and it is firmly established in the College's learning and teaching culture Students report it to be an integral part of their learning and speak highly of it The extensive and consistent use across all programmes of the College virtual learning environment is considered to be a feature of **good practice**.

2.23   The College has a brief Student Charter which is available via the intranet The Charter sets out what the College is committed to provide for students along with the College's expectations of students. Students are taken through the Charter and what is expected of them at New Student Day and throughout induction It is also reviewed during tutor group sessions.

2.24   Learning and teaching is monitored through regular and thorough one-to-one meetings between the Head of HE and each Head of School, during HE cluster meetings for programme leaders, and at Higher Education Academic Board meetings.

2.25   Staff at all levels conveyed a strong sense of their investment in and commitment to the College's approach to learning and teaching. Overall, the review team concludes that Expectation B3 is **met** with a low level of risk.

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

2.26   The College's Strategic Plan states six strategic goals to develop their quality of learning opportunities and student support. These goals articulate the intention to provide a supportive and caring environment to ensure that all students reach their full potential. The strategy involves continuing to develop the personal tutoring system and utilising the student voice to more fully understand what matters to students in and outside the classroom, in order to support them more effectively Due to the nature of the provision, higher education managers and programme staff are able to know each individual student personally and therefore tailor the support offered by the College appropriately. This enables Expectation B4 to be met.

2.27   The review team evaluated the arrangements and resources the College has in place to enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential by scrutinising documentation, including the Strategic Plan, appropriate policies such as the Tutorial Policy and Attendance, Retention and Achievement Policy, self-assessment reports, minutes of relevant meetings and external examiner reports. The review team discussed the arrangements with staff at all levels of the organisation, including student support staff and discussed with students the ways in which the College enables them to develop and achieve through their studies.

2.28   All accepted applicants are invited to attend the New Student Day the summer before their programme starts These days are designed to provide an early induction and assist with student transition to higher education study. The schedule for the day includes both team building activities and information-giving sessions and are facilitated by the Central Higher Education Team and programme teams as appropriate. Programme teams are responsible for designing induction programmes once each programme commences and these are signed off by the Head of HE and the relevant Head of School. While some students found induction a little slow, as they were keen to begin looking into the programme content, the majority of students were positive about their induction experience and felt it prepared them for higher education study. They were also able to identify where their feedback had led to a change in the induction programme for subsequent cohorts.

2.29   Academic skills development sessions are built into programmes and delivered by teaching staff through the curriculum, and this is supported by support service teams such as careers advisers and additional learning support workers delivering tailored sessions for each programme.

2.30   The College has an Equality and Diversity Policy, use of which is embedded in the curriculum. Activities undertaken to promote equality and diversity are monitored and considered as part of the action plans which form the annual self-assessment report which is completed for every subject area The College held an all-staff development session focusing on equality and diversity in December 2013, which was run by an external facilitator and assisted staff in developing their practice in this area.

2.31   Support for students with specific learning needs or disabilities is provided by the Additional Learning Support Team and the Higher Education Pastoral Support Worker. Students are asked at interview, and again once they enrol, if they have a specific need so that the College can arrange for the appropriate arrangements to support their learning.

2.32   The College supports individual students with external funding applications, such as DSA, and monitors students who have a declared disability but have not opted to apply for any support Students are very positive about the support for students with specific learning needs or disabilities that the College provides.

2.33   Personal tutors play a key role in supporting and developing students in their learning As stated in the Tutorial Policy, every student has a named personal tutor with the aim of supporting and developing students and regularly reviewing and monitoring their progress, and these received positive comments from standards verifiers As part of the Attendance, Punctuality and Retention Policy, personal tutors are required to work with their students and the appropriate programme team to address any areas of concern.

2.34   The Higher Education Pastoral Support Worker also plays a key role in supporting students The Higher Education Pastoral Support Worker, in conjunction with the Head of HE, monitors the progress of all students in a rigorous and purposeful way. Individual students are discussed in weekly one-to-one meetings with appropriate actions and interventions identified The progress of individual students is also monitored at the Higher Education Assessment Board in order to support students in successfully completing their studies Students are well supported academically and pastorally, and are positive about the consistent availability of staff.

2.35   Students are encouraged to reflect on their learning throughout their studies and to set goals for the year ahead. These, along with notes of every personal tutorial, are recorded on the College-developed student tracking and achievement record system (STAR) Every student has an individual entry in the comprehensive STAR system. This can be accessed by both the individual student and appropriate staff to record student attendance, results of summative assessment, and notes of relevant meetings with tutors or the Higher Education Pastoral Support Worker, to enable students to monitor their own progress and assist College staff in supporting students. While a minority of students who met the review team did not use the system, the majority of students were very positive and found the system extremely beneficial The effective integration of all student support services, including the use of STAR in order to enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential is considered to be a feature of **good practice**.

2.36   The College provides a personalised approach to supporting students which is delivered by both teaching and support staff and is embedded into students' programmes of study. Overall, the review team concludes Expectation B4 is **met** with a low level of risk.

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

2.37   Since the College's IQER in 2010, students have become increasingly engaged in the quality assurance and delivery of higher education. The College has a Learner Involvement Policy and students are members of the higher education Academic Board and attend programme team meetings, student focus groups and student representative meetings.

2.38   The College is committed to extending the involvement of higher education students in policy and practice and developing appropriate strategies for student engagement, and there is a student representative system in place The College values the student contribution and employs a variety of mechanisms to collect student views. These include themed student focus groups, end of module surveys and classroom 'walkthroughs' The policies and procedures of the College enables Expectation B5 to be met.

2.39   The review team evaluated the deliberate steps taken by the College to engage all students as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience by reviewing documentation including: the Learner Involvement Policy; minutes of student focus groups; minutes of Academic Board meetings; 'You said we did' documents; and information provided to student representatives to support them in their role. The team discussed student engagement with students and staff at all levels of the organisational structure and the extent to which students and student representatives felt they were able to contribute to quality assurance and enhancement in a meaningful way.

2.40   The College has a student representative system for all its higher education provision. Students undertaking this role are provided with a job description and are supported by the Higher Education Pastoral Support Worker The College does not provide any specific training for student representatives, but the representatives who met the review team indicated they were content with this situation as they have a number of commitments outside of the College and would be unable to find the time to attend an extra session.

2.41   Student representatives attend monthly themed meetings, facilitated by the Higher Education Pastoral Support Worker, where they are able to contribute the views of the student body around a particular topic such as employability, equality and diversity or learning and teaching Action notes are taken and the College responds to every issue raised by student representatives, explaining the reasons for no action where appropriate. Student representatives also attend programme management meetings, with part-time students reporting these are arranged at convenient times especially to facilitate student attendance.

2.42   Student representatives are given time in class to feed back to their peers what action has or has not been taken as a result of student comments Students who are not student representatives know who their representative is, but note that because class sizes are relatively small, there is not always the need to raise an issue with their representative as they are in direct communication with staff themselves.

2.43   The College communicates changes made as a result of student feedback to the student body via email, announcements on the VLE and via 'You said, we did' comments at the front of module handbooks Students were able to identify changes made as a direct result of student feedback These included changes in assessment design, an increase in

dedicated social and IT provision for higher education students, and an increased number of workshops on a programme.

2.44   There is a commitment from staff at all levels of the organisational structure to listen to students and to ensure they are at the heart of everything the College does All staff were able to identify changes made as a result of student feedback These included a change in teaching delivery style, inviting external speakers to address certain areas and skills, and an increase in the number of staff and sessions offered by the Additional Learning Support Team.

2.45   The Learner Involvement Policy makes specific reference to students playing a role in the recruitment of teaching staff through the use of micro teach sessions. Students had recently been involved in this process, were very positive about their experience and were pleased to have direct involvement in the College in this way.

2.46   The College demonstrates a commitment to engaging with their students as partners and responding to their feedback in order to enhance the quality of learning opportunities. Overall the review team concludes that Expectation B5 is **met** with a low level of risk.

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

2.47   The College has developed clear principles for assessment grounded in theory and articulated in policy and practice. The College is committed to assessment, which supports student learning Diverse types of assessment including self and peer assessment are encouraged through staff development sessions and are deliberately used to support the development of skills. Staff share their practice with each other through the HE learning communities.

2.48   The policies and procedures of the College allows Expectation B6 to be met.

2.49   The review team examined how the processes outlined operate in practice by considering the examples provided by the College and through discussions with staff and students.

2.50   Feedback to students on assessment is effective and its quality valued by students. The HE learning community provides a useful vehicle for staff development and has recently shared a number of sessions relating to assessment including the opportunity for staff to engage in action research on the topic.

2.51   The College in all cases adheres to the regulations of their awarding bodies and organisation. There is no PSRB involvement in College programmes. Marking and grading is commented on under Expectation A6.

2.52   There is clear guidance in the handbooks and the College Assessment Policy about student conduct during assessment, including malpractice, and students are well aware of the rules regarding plagiarism.

2.53   The College has a system of clear and careful record keeping in relation to assessment and also has a system in place for the assessment of prior learning (APL).

2.54   In addition to the support of a personal tutor, students have access to their own information on the College's STAR software, which enables them to check, understand and engage with their progress including assessment. The effective integration of all student support services including the use of STAR has led to a feature of good practice as detailed in Expectation B4.

2.55   As noted in Expectation B1, the review team found that in some recent approved programmes that volume and timing of the assessments caused problems. The performance of students in the first year of the delivery of new programmes was disappointing with a high level of non-completion. College staff acknowledge that the main contributing factor to the poor performance was the absence of a coherent assessment strategy and the associated volume and timing of the assignments. In light of this, the review team **recommends** that by July 2015 the College ensures that systems are in place to prevent assessment overload, both in terms of timing and volume. In addition there is a recommendation in Expectation B3 concerning staff development for staff who teach on new programmes.

2.56   The review tem concludes that Expectation B6 is **met** with a moderate level of risk. The Expectation is met because in the main the College procedures are effective. The level

of risk is moderate because of the potential risk to students if the problems are not addressed.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External examining*

Findings

2.57   The College conforms to the policies and procedures of its awarding bodies and Pearson in terms of external examining and has a good understanding and appropriate procedures to support the process. External examiners/verifiers are nominated, appointed and prepared for their role by the awarding bodies and Pearson. They use the procedure of the awarding body or Pearson to report on serious concerns. The College is aware of its own responsibilities, as well as those of the awarding bodies and Pearson. The College indicates that actions in response to external reports are taken immediately if the external expresses concerns, and are monitored via the Head of School, Head of HE and Head of Quality and Standards.

2.58   The policies and procedures of the College allows Expectation B7 to be met.

2.59   The review team considered how the processes outlined above operate in practice by considering the examples provided by the College and through discussions with staff and students.

2.60   The review team found that a clear and efficient system is in place for responding promptly and efficiently to external examiner/verifier reports. All reports are considered initially by the Head of Quality who then progresses the report to the head of the relevant school, who is required to produce an action plan. The action plans are fed back to the Head of Quality for approval who produces a summary report for consideration by the College SMT.

2.61   In the case of University collaborations, responding to the external is the responsibility of the University. The response is however prepared by the link tutor in collaboration with the College. If an external raised any serious concerns in a report then actions are taken immediately.

2.62   The College has recently decided that the newly constituted Academic Board should also consider the external reports for higher education. The review team therefore **affirms** the actions being taken by the Academic Board to review, evaluate and ensure that external examiners' reports are responded to.

2.63   External examiners' reports are shared within the HE learning community and feed into the College's self-assessment process. In some cases students meet with the external examiners/verifiers and they all have access to their reports through the College's VLE.

2.64   In light of the evidence described the review team considers that the provider makes scrupulous use of externals reports. The review team thus concludes that Expectation B7 is **met** with an associated low level of risk.

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

2.65   Following a commitment in the College 2013 Strategic Plan to 'develop rigorous and robust internal monitoring mirroring external quality processes in our own practices' where relevant, the College has established a new Academic Board (higher education only), which began in May 2013. This offers a systematic process for monitoring programmes via reports on each programme to each Board meeting, which include some key performance indicators (retention, progression and attendance) and feedback from students. Actions to improve provision are also identified. There are annual School self-assessment reports and a consolidated higher education self-assessment report, which feed into the College's self-assessment report. Annual monitoring reports are also produced for higher education programmes.

2.66   The policies and procedures of the College allow Expectation B8 to be met.

2.67   The review team considered examples of how the processes outlined above operate in practice by considering the examples provided by the College and through discussions with staff and students. The relatively new Academic Board is operating effectively and has identified issues, for example poor retention, and follows through on the matters by requesting follow up information and actions.

2.68   The self-assessment process includes consideration of key performance indicators relating to success, retention and achievement (including by particular student groups), employability, staff observation and teaching quality and student satisfaction. The process also includes a detailed improvement plan. The higher education Quality Improvement Plan contains actions relating to retention, student support and programme development. Academic Board receives updates on retention and progression from Head of School reports; and staff development on retention and progression has been undertaken in the HE learning community. Regular HE catch-up meetings between the Head of HE and Heads of School routinely discuss and monitor students who are a 'cause for concern'. self-assessment reports analyse and plan improvements to retention, progression and achievement. Annual monitoring reports include explicit evaluation of retention and include actions to address identified weaknesses.

2.69   The College effectively follows the monitoring, reviewing and reporting procedures expected by its awarding bodies, including detailed annual monitoring reports for its awarding body validating partners, which covers all relevant areas and makes use of appropriate statistics to enable analysis and evaluation.

2.70   In light of the above evidence the review team considers that the annual monitoring processes in use by the College are effective and robust.

2.71   The College at present does not have any process in place for any periodic review of its higher education provision. This is in partly due to the fact that the current portfolio has been in place for less than three years (apart from programmes in teach-out). The review team therefore **recommends** that by July 2015 that the College develops and implements a periodic review process for the higher education provision. This will allow the College to gain a strategic overview of the effectiveness and efficiency of the offerings. This will be particularly beneficial for the Pearson higher national provision.

2.72   The review tem concludes that the Expectation B8 is **met** with a moderate level of risk. The Expectation is met because, for the most part, the College's procedures are effective. The level of risk is moderate because of current absence of a periodic review process.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

2.73   The College has complaints and appeals processes in place but these are superseded by those of awarding bodies as appropriate. Internal procedures, parallel to university approaches, have been put in place for the Pearson higher national provision.

2.74   The policies and procedures of the College allows Expectation B9 to be met.

2.75   The review team considered how the processes outlined above operate in practice by considering the examples provided by the College and meeting with staff and students.

2.76   All complaints and appeals are routinely monitored by the SMT, the Governors' Quality and Standards Committee and annually through the self-assessment report for Teaching, Learning and Standards. The College's Internal and External Assessment Policy details the appeals procedure in relation to assessed work The appeals procedure is shared with students during the induction process and is summarised in the student handbooks. The student body have expressed satisfaction with both processes.

2.77   The review team concludes that Expectation B9 is **met** with a low level of risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B10: Managing higher education provision with others*

Findings

2.78   The College is not a degree-awarding body. The focus of this section is therefore the arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with other organisations. In this case this will limit the consideration to placement providers and organisations providing work based learning opportunities.

2.79   The College is committed to providing placements and work-based learning opportunities in the majority of its programmes. In all cases the role of the employer providing the opportunities is limited to providing the College with information on attendance. The providers have no role in assessment. Providers are visited by the University prior to students attending, to undertake a risk assessment of the placement and to check that the placement will provide suitable learning opportunities and allow learning outcomes to be met.

2.80   The policies and procedures of the College allow Expectation B10 to be met.

2.81   The review team considered how the processes outlined operate in practice by considering the examples provided by the College and through discussions with staff.

2.82   During the placement or work-based learning opportunity the student is supported by regular visits from their personal tutor. Students and external assessors/verifiers are happy with the provision of work-based learning and placements. The monitoring process addresses the success of placements on an annual basis.

2.83   The review team concludes that Expectation B10 is **met** with a low level of risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research degrees*

Findings

2.84 This expectation is not relevant to this provider as the College does not offer research degrees.

Expectation: Not applicable
Level of risk: Not applicable

Quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.85   In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook.

2.86   All of the applicable expectations (B11 is not applicable to this provider) for this judgement area were met although the associated risk level in three cases was judged as moderate. This is mainly due to the potential risk to students if the College does not alter some processes, mainly around the development of new courses. The associated level of risk in the other seven expectations was judged to be low.

2.87   There are two areas of good practice identified in this section, relating to Expectations B3 and B4. There is one affirmation relating to Expectation B7. There are two recommendations in this section relating to Expectations B3 and B6 and the two recommendations in Expectation A4 also relate to this section.

2.88   Given that all applicable expectations are met and the recommendations do not present serious risks at this time the review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

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 states that it publishes a Key Information Set (KIS) for each eligible programme; that detailed programme information for each qualification offered is on the College website; hard copy programme leaflets are also available; there is a prospectus for higher education at the College produced by the Marketing Department from information supplied by the Curriculum Teams; and that any material which is produced about University programmes is forwarded to the University for approval before it is published.

3.2 In each case the material is produced by the Head of School in cooperation with the Head of HE before final sign-off by the Senior Management Team (SMT).

3.3 The College also states that programme handbooks are now all electronic (other formats available if requested) and available on the VLE; handbooks are reviewed annually to ensure accuracy; programme teams share their handbooks to ensure that they are consistent across the higher education programme; any changes in information are updated as they occur. Students in general are happy with the information they receive and a Student Charter is available.

3.4 The review team considered how the processes outlined operate in practice by considering the examples provided by the College and through discussions with staff and students.

3.5 The review team found that after consideration of the policies and procedures of the College and the evidence provided that Expectation C is not met.

3.6 High-level definitive programme information is not fully consistent or accurate on the website, in the Adult Course Guide, on Unistats, in the programme handbooks or in other supporting documentation, with variations in award and programme titles. The name of the sport programmes vary and the word 'degree' is repeatedly used to describe higher national programmes in a range of information for students.

3.7 There is currently no definitive information available in a prospectus as it is under review, though the Adult Course Guide on the website contains both out-of-date and, at the time, inaccurate definitive information.

3.8 The 2010 IQER advised the College to 'take measures to ensure all handbooks provide consistent and accurate advice and guidance to students'. Recently the College has produced a template for programme handbooks, which all programme teams will be expected to use as noted in Expectation A3.

3.9 The review team considered a sample of programme handbooks and found that they vary in format and detail. Handbooks contain useful, but inconsistent and incomplete information.

3.10   Foundation degree handbooks contain programme specifications (aims, outcomes and modules) but no information on assessment. Pearson higher national handbooks are more diffuse and less explicit in their definitive documentation containing information about units and poorly titled assessment criteria, but providing little information about the programme as a whole in terms of aims and outcomes. One of the handbooks provided is not fit for purpose as it does not contain any of the information which would be expected. The handbook in question is for a HND programme but has a BA title and is therefore misleading to the students currently on the programme. In addition, the BA progression route from this HND has not yet been approved by the awarding body.

3.11   In light of the above, the review team **recommends** that by September 2014 the College ensures that all student handbooks are accessible, fit for purpose and trustworthy.

3.12   The review team found inconsistent use of programme titles and levels in the College's documentation. For example, higher nation programmes being described as BAs; the review team found that on the College website, in the College prospectus and on the Unistats website a programme is described as a BA when in fact the programme is a higher national diploma The review team questioned the College staff concerning the inconsistencies in programme title and were informed that because their potential students did not understand what a higher national diploma was but did understand the word 'degree' the College, as a branding exercise, described their HNDs as BAs. The review team were told that students at enrolment were clearly informed they were enrolling for a HND and that is what is shown on the College records. However, neither the staff nor the students who met with the review team were aware of this inaccurate and misleading information and all referred to the BA when in fact the programme is a HND. The same programme is inconsistently named and none of the names reflect the name that staff responsible for the programme used in a meeting with the review team.

3.13   The review team found that the information on the Unistats web site was incomplete. KIS information is provided on most programmes, but not all.

3.14   In light of the above, the review team **recommends** that by September 2014 the College ensures the titles of programmes accurately specify the qualifications being offered. The review team also **recommends** that by December 2014 the College ensures that all information is consistent, accurate, fit for purpose and trustworthy.

3.15   The review team concludes that the Expectation C is **not met** and the level of risk is serious. The level is serious because of the risk of continuing to mislead students and the public.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Serious

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

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

3.17   The Expectation for this judgement area was not met and the associated level of risk was judged to be serious.

3.18   There were three recommendations for this judgment area, no affirmations and no features of good practice. All of the recommendations relate to serious matters and one recommendation mirrors the language of the expectation to ensure that all information is consistent, accurate, fit for purpose and accessible.

3.19   The College policies and procedures currently present serious risks in this judgment area; the College has not recognised that it has major problems and has limited understanding of the responsibilities associated with key areas of this expectation. The review team therefore concludes that the quality of the information produced about its provision does **not meet** 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's higher education Academic Board, chaired by the Principal, and the HE cluster meetings, chaired by the Vice-Principal, facilitate a provider-level approach to the enhancement of learning opportunities. Although both committees are relatively recent developments, they both include the consideration of enhancement within their terms of reference The monthly HE community meetings facilitate the sharing of good practice among staff and regular meetings between the Head of HE and programme teams, and with the Vice-Principal ensures there is a provider-level approach to enhancement This enables the Enhancement Expectation to be met.

4.2　The review team analysed documentation such as higher education Academic Board minutes, annual self-assessment reports, minutes of higher education one-to-ones and outputs from the HE learning community. The review team discussed the College's approach to enhancement with staff from all levels of the organisation and discussed the College's approach to the enhancement of learning opportunities with both students and student representatives.

4.3　The higher education Academic Board comprises of College senior managers, higher education managers, student representatives and Heads of Schools from relevant curriculum areas. The Board considers strategic issues relating to the College's higher education provision and receives regular curriculum reports from all higher education curriculum areas These reports, while relatively brief, include updates on in-year student retention and success, explain how good practice is being shared within the teaching team, areas of concern and highlight priorities for the upcoming term.

4.4　Each programme area completes an annual self-assessment report, including a Quality Improvement Plan for the following academic year While these reports cover the entirety of the College's provision (further and higher education), the process of self-assessment reporting ensures there is a formal mechanism for enhancement at the provider level.

4.5　Monthly HE learning community meetings facilitate the sharing of good practice between staff across the College Staff make use of 'Wonder Walls', a process of highlighting to other members of staff where an aspect of learning and teaching has gone particularly well. Staff report a high level of engagement in this process and find it very useful When good practice has been identified, the members of staff involved are encouraged to undertake some action research in the area and to report the findings to colleagues at a subsequent meeting.

4.6　The College also organises relevant staff-development sessions, sometimes facilitated by externals, in order that staff are informed of recent and innovative developments within the sector.

4.7　Senior staff at the College are committed to enhancing the quality of the higher education provision and work to ensure all staff have ownership of the agenda as opposed to a direct top-down approach. There is a clear commitment from staff to continually enhance the quality of learning opportunities for students. However, there was some confusion between deliberate steps taken at a provider level to enhance the quality of

learning opportunities and good programme design, development and review Course approval and assessment design are the subjects of recommendations in Expectations A4 and B6 for example.

4.8   Examples of deliberate steps taken to enhance the quality of learning opportunities at the College include the development of e-learning resources and journal searching software, the development of the VLE, the development of the STAR system, peer assessment and lesson observation The consistent use of the VLE and the use of STAR have been highlighted as good practice in Expectations B3 and B4.

4.9   Students are content that there is an ethos of continual improvement at the College and provided examples of changes made as a result of their feedback, as described in Expectation B5.

4.10   Overall, the review team concludes that the Expectation is **met** with a low level of risk. While it could be more explicit in strategic documentation, there is commitment to enhancement from senior members of staff, teaching and support staff, and students confirmed there is an ethos of continual improvement at the College. Quality assurance processes identify opportunities for enhancement and the sharing of good practice is facilitated at provider level.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

Enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.11   In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published Handbook.

4.12   The Expectation was met with a low risk rating. There are no recommendations, affirmations or areas of good practice in this section. The review team therefore concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

5   Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1   Staff and students at the College believe employability is a key feature and strength at all levels of learning and for all students. This view is made explicit in its design of learning opportunities with many of their programmes including mandatory work placements. The College has responded to a prompt by Staffordshire University and to the previous IQER to strengthen its work-based learning, by introducing new higher national and foundation degree qualifications and focusing its courses on employability.

5.2   The College has a Destination Data and Employment Strategy which applies to all students at the College There are three strands to the College's approach to employability. The first strand focuses on classroom practice to teach and assess employability skills. The second focuses on links and partnership between curriculum areas and the third focuses on work placements, work experience and work preparation activity. The team heard about effective examples of activity from each strand. Academic Board receives updates on employability as part of heads of school reports and Academic Standards Committee receives updates about the destinations of all College students.

5.3   Programmes have been systematically developed to respond to local employment needs. They are adapted and designed in response to employer feedback and both facilities and programme development involves liaison with local businesses or employers. Higher education programmes build on the vocational orientation of lower level programmes. Where expected, the College aligns its documentation to the employability frameworks of its awarding bodies and Pearson. Employers contribute to the development and approval of programmes, aided by the Skills and Enterprise Team.

5.4   Staff, students and local employers commented that programmes routinely and systematically develop employability skills through the direct involvement of employers as guest speakers, visits to employers, the inclusion of modules or units to develop employability and/or the use of placements. One of the College meetings held with student representatives prompted students to evaluate the employability dimension of their programme The College does not offer students the opportunity to receive a Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR).

5.5   The College uses the words placement and work-based learning interchangeably, normally referring to work-based learning as a placement. Being able to distinguish between the two is a requirement for the Key Information Set returns. Placement, as defined by staff, is an integral part of the majority of programmes: Health and Social Care, Early Years, Counselling and Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (DTTLS). Placements undertaken by students explicitly develop professional attributes.

5.6   Programme tutors and/or mentors are assigned to support students in the work place Where assessment is undertaken in the workplace, this is carried out by College tutors.

5.7   Placements are managed at the level of the programme with some having specific placement handbooks. There is no over-arching policy for students on placement or work-based learning. The College's oversight that minimum expectations are being met is through HE catch-up meetings between the Head of HE and Heads of School and as part of normal internal monitoring processes.

5.8   The College provides a range of in-house careers advice and support. The Higher Education Pastoral Support Worker supports recruitment and admissions to ensure that

students take programmes that lead to their chosen careers. There is guidance from the Advice, Careers and Employability Team on both Kingsway and Cronton campuses. The Team provide generic stand-alone events, as well as embedded sessions tailored to programme needs. The National Careers Service is on site and students on programmes validated by Staffordshire University have access to the University careers service.

5.9   In conclusion, the College is aware of the importance of embedding employability in their programmes. It uses a range of mechanisms to achieve this, effectively supporting students through placements and on into employment.

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/aboutus/glossary.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

e-learning
See technology enhanced or enabled learning

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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