Higher Education Review of Brooksby Melton College

October 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 Brooksby Melton College. The review took place from 28 to 30 October 2014 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Christopher McIntyre
- Daphne Rowlands
- Joshua Lay (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review the QAA review team:

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

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

In reviewing Brooksby Melton 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 2014-15 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.

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[1] The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code.
[2] Higher Education Review themes: www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106.
[3] QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus.
[4] Higher Education Review web pages: www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Brooksby Melton College

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

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

Good practice

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

- The rigorous programme approval processes in place to ensure that higher national qualifications fit with the strategic plans of the College (Expectation B1).
- The support provided for staff members to complete scholarly activity (Expectation B3).

Recommendations

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

By May 2015:

- ensure that the procedures for student complaints are easily accessible (Expectations B9 and C).
- ensure that all public-facing course information consistently includes reference to the relevant awarding body (Expectation C).

By July 2015:

- routinely make external examiner reports available to students (Expectations B7 and C).

By September 2015:

- implement a more rigorous method of measuring the effectiveness of its higher education teaching on a regular basis (Expectation B3)
- implement arrangements for student representation at all levels to promote partnership in quality assurance and enhancement (Expectation B5)
- ensure the effective oversight of students' work-based learning including the provision of appropriate support and information for employers (Expectations B10 and C).

Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team makes no affirmations of actions being taken.

Theme: Student Employability

Part of the key strategic aims of the College relate to employability and to provide 'students with the knowledge and employability skills to support them into employment or Higher Education'. Students are provided with support including careers advice to enable them to make informed choices and prepare for future employment.

Work-based placements are part of some higher education programmes at the College and these enable students to make links between theory and practice and develop appropriate skills. Although employers do provide placement experience, their role could be developed further through more extensive involvement with College programmes as a source of external expertise.

The College makes effective use of guest speakers and the industry links of teaching staff across the higher education programmes. These contributions to the programmes are valued by students who are reassured that they are being given information that is current and relevant to their chosen professions.

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

About Brooksby Melton College

Brooksby Melton College (the College) regards itself as a high-quality provider of specialist further and higher vocational education and training. The College identifies its mission to 'seek to add value to the social, economic and physical well-being of the community we serve, by attracting students and training them successfully in accordance with our core values, so that they themselves, by virtue of that successful training, are in turn able to benefit the community'.

The College offers both further and higher education provision. There are approximately 1,600 students at the College and 180 of these are studying on higher education courses. It operates on two main sites: the rurally based Brooksby Campus, and the Melton campus in the market town of Melton Mowbray. The Brooksby Campus is a 350-hectare estate which includes a working farm, with a range of commercial activity including a banqueting and conference centre, a fishing lake and an equestrian centre. There are also residential facilities for up to 35 students on this site. The Melton campus includes hair and beauty salons and a theatre.

The College aims to fully integrate commercial activity into the curriculum to add value to the student experience. The College serves the Melton Mowbray area and beyond and attracts a wide range of students with varying levels of economic and social status.

Shortly after the last QAA review in 2011, the College was notified by both its higher education institution partners (De Montfort University and the University of Lincoln) that all franchise agreements would be coming to an end due to changes within the wider higher education environment. The College responded by developing and launching, in September 2010, a range of full-cost HND programmes in performing arts, business, creative media production, equine management and animal management.

The College was successful in bidding for Higher Education Funding Council For England (HEFCE) numbers and in 2011-12 became a directly funded provider of higher education programmes, offering a range of HND, degree and top-up degree provision.

The College sought further partnerships with higher education institutions and in 2012 agreed a validation partnership with the University of Bolton for a range of BA and BSc top-up degrees in Digital Film Technology, Animal Management, Equine Performance Management and a full three-year BA (Hons) Performing Arts degree. It also has a validation arrangement for a three-year (Hons) degree in Performing Arts. The College has since developed further higher education programmes in childcare, engineering and horticulture. The number of students on higher education programmes has increased by around 30 per cent over the last five years.

Since the last QAA review, the College has increased its higher education student numbers and been required to develop processes and procedures further to ensure the management of this provision. The College has therefore moved from the original limited-franchise arrangement to a position of having much greater control of its offer.

The College has a franchise agreement using Brooksby Melton College HEFCE numbers for the delivery of the Post Graduate Certificate in Education teacher training programme.

The College also has a validation agreement with Pearson to HNC and HND programmes. It currently runs a range of these as full-time courses with progression to the University of Bolton top-up programmes. In addition to this, the College is starting a new relationship with the Scottish Qualifications Authority for a January 2015 intake onto an HNC and HND in Childhood Studies.

The College received five features of good practice, one advisable recommendation and four desirable recommendations in the last QAA review of 2011. The College has further developed or embedded the good practice that was previously identified. The mapping document, for example, has been updated in response to developments in the Quality Code.

The College has also responded to the advisable recommendation by introducing a higher education self-assessment report (HE SAR) process to monitor and evaluate provision. It modified the lesson observation process to make more reference to learning and teaching in higher education and established a thorough scholarly activity programme. The College also removed obsolete material from the website and introduced more standardised handbooks.

Explanation of the findings about Brooksby Melton 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.

Explanation of the findings about Brooksby Melton College

1 Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisations

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

1.1 The College delivers programmes validated and franchised by the University of Bolton (the University), plus some Edexcel qualifications designed by Pearson Education Limited. The awarding body and organisation are responsible for the allocation of qualifications to the appropriate level in the FHEQ.

1.2 Programmes are assessed for relevance and appropriateness through the College's internal validation process. The College is responsible for working within the guidelines from the awarding body or organisation. The College does not design the content of the Pearson programmes although it is responsible for the design of assessment briefs. The College has mapped its responsibilities to the Quality Code. The approaches taken enable the Expectation in Chapter A1 to be met in design.

1.3 The team tested the operation of this Expectation by talking to a range of staff and examining documentation that sets out the quality framework that informs programme approval and monitoring procedures. The team also tested this by reviewing programme information.

1.4   All University programmes have been through a rigorous validation process which assesses content and resourcing. Directly funded franchise and validated agreements set out the parameters in which each partner operates and describe the responsibilities for each institution. Validation summaries set out details of programmes and credit amendments are listed before full validation. The review team found that the College adheres to the guidance within its franchise and validation agreements.

1.5   The content of the Higher National programmes is prescribed by the awarding organisation, Pearson. However, the College contributes to ensuring provision is aligned to relevant frameworks in its selection of units and also considers progression and local employability requirements. The programme and units go through the College's internal programme approval process and are finally ratified by the Academic Board. The College uses this system to ensure that any changes required are recorded and there is the opportunity for a programme to be resubmitted for approval when the points have been addressed. An example of this is the new HND sports programme which was approved following a resubmission incorporating required changes.

1.6   Module information is given to students on the College intranet site and in handbooks which explicitly outline the number of credits needed. Where appropriate, handbooks make reference to the awarding body or organisation's website for further information. Assessment criteria within handbooks reflect the relevant level of the FHEQ. Assignment briefs outline the number of credits and the marking criteria and students confirm that they understand what they have to do to achieve their qualification.

1.7   Programme specifications for degree top-ups and Higher Nationals are referenced to the FHEQ and Quality Code. Programme specifications are available on the website and external examiner reports confirm that standards are appropriate.

1.8   The team concludes that the ultimate responsibility for the allocation of qualifications to the appropriate level in the FHEQ rests with the associated awarding body or organisation. However, the College also fulfils its requirements to work within the parameters and guidelines of its partners. Therefore, this Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.9   The College does not itself award qualifications. It works with the University to deliver a range of degree and top-up courses and the Post Graduate Certificate in Education. The College also works with Pearson for its Edexcel qualifications.

1.10   The College has agreements with its awarding body and organisation and clear guidelines for its responsibilities. Assessment regulations are set out by the awarding institution and representatives from the awarding body or organisation attend examination boards. The approach of the College with the awarding body and organisation enables Expectation A2.1 to be met in design.

1.11   The team tested the Expectation by talking to a range of staff and by examining documentation including guidelines setting out responsibilities and assessment regulations issued by the awarding body and organisation.

1.12   The College works within the guidelines of the awarding body and organisation and responsibilities are set out clearly. The University's programmes are governed by the franchise and validation agreements with the College. Approval is also given by Pearson to run a number of programmes. The College follows the relevant awarding body's or organisation's regulations for assessment and external examiner reports confirm that assessment is appropriate. External examiners appointed by the University and Pearson make annual visits which assess the suitability of the centre to continue running individual programmes. In addition to this, an annual review of partner operations is conducted by the University.

1.13   There is a clear committee structure that outlines reporting procedures and each committee has its terms of reference. Responsibility for academic standards in the College rests ultimately with the Assistant Principal who is a member of the Quality and Standards Board which receives reports on higher education, including the Quality Improvement Plan, from the Director of Curriculum. The Quality Improvement Plan outlines areas for improvement in learning and teaching which have been extrapolated from the College's mechanisms for self-assessment.

1.14   College staff are made aware of their responsibilities for higher education issues, including reference points, through the higher education handbook and guidelines issued by Pearson and the University. Liaison with the University is made at course level by the course tutors and through the link tutor. University programme quality issues are dealt with through the University partnership manager. Any quality issues on Pearson programmes are noted within external examiner reports and dealt with by the College.

1.15   The review team concludes that the College adheres to the frameworks and regulations of the awarding body and organisation to secure academic standards. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.16   As the College is not a degree-awarding body, it takes responsibility for using reference points provided to maintain standards in delivery and assessment. The exact responsibilities delegated to the College by the awarding body and organisation are laid down in responsibilities checklists. The College uses both programme specifications and course handbooks as reference points for programme delivery and assessment. The processes used by the College enable Expectation A2.2 to be met in design.

1.17   In testing this Expectation, the review team scrutinised documentation such as course handbooks and programme specifications. The team also met College staff and representatives from the University.

1.18   Programme specifications contain up-to-date information for each course and can be accessed on the College website. This information is supplemented by course handbooks which provide an extensive overview of the aims of each programme including delivery and assessment.

1.19   The review team concludes that the definitive course documentation including programme specifications maintained by the College is complete and consistent. This, along with the College's use of reference points, allows the Expectation to be met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.20   The College currently works with the University and Pearson and conforms to their requirements and regulations. There are two contractual arrangements with the University, a franchise agreement and a validation arrangement, and agreement documents note the University responsibility for quality and standards. There is an arrangement with Pearson to deliver HNC and HND programmes. The University and Pearson take responsibility for this Expectation, and the College works within the associated guidelines in each case. The University's qualifications have recently been validated and the assessment of outcomes is governed by the relevant awarding body or organisation.

1.21   All programmes of study have been through the validation process specified by the awarding body or organisation, and programmes are revalidated at the end of the validation period, which is normally five years. An annual review may lead to a consideration of major or minor modifications to programmes through the awarding body's processes. There is institutional guidance produced by the College to ensure clarity on the process. Programmes are monitored annually through a combination of surveys, module evaluations, focus groups and the annual Programme Review and these feed into the higher education self-assessment report.

1.22   To take ownership of the academic provision, the College has established a committee, the Curriculum and Quality Group, which undertakes pre-validation scrutiny of new course proposals to test the relevance of these to the institution's strategic directions and to consider the details from an academic quality perspective. This is supported by an Operational Planning Group, which is responsible for the planning, monitoring and delivery of the College's curriculum offer. Therefore, the processes in place enable Expectation A3.1 to be met in design.

1.23   The review team tested the effectiveness of the College's processes in line with awarding body or organisation requirements by undertaking a review of the partnership agreements, papers relating to programme proposals and approval events and Curriculum and Quality Group (CQG) Minutes. The team also met senior staff, representatives from the University, teaching staff and students.

1.24   The College works closely with the awarding body and organisation and uses their and its own processes effectively. There is clear evidence that course approval documentation makes appropriate reference to the FHEQ in defining the structure, learning outcomes and assessment strategies of programmes. Staff the team met demonstrated a clear understanding of the awarding body or organisation and College processes. Senior staff were able to detail the interface of College and awarding body or organisation processes, and academic staff discussed their work in selecting units for Pearson programmes, developing new programmes with the support of the University and in using external partners to contribute to programme design.

1.25   The processes and mechanisms specified by the awarding body and organisation for the approval and review of taught programmes are used effectively and also supported by College processes in the approval of awards. These processes are supported by clear guidelines from the awarding body and organisation, set out in partnership agreements, and the evidence confirms that the College adheres to these. External approval is complemented by the internal work of the Curriculum Quality Group and the Operational Planning Group, and external examiner reports confirm that the programmes continue to align to the correct level.

1.26   The team concludes that the College is fulfilling its responsibilities in meeting this Expectation through adherence to awarding body and organisation policies and procedures and through staff who understand these and the level of the qualifications. The Expectation is therefore met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.27   The College is responsible for marking and internally moderating student work for its higher education programmes and follows the policies and procedures of the awarding body or organisation. These policies and procedures are supported by the College's own Teaching Learning and Assessment Policy. All assessment and grading of students' work is carried out in line with awarding body, organisation or College policies, national subject and higher education-level benchmarks. There are policies, informed by the appropriate awarding body or organisation requirements, on double marking, internal validation and malpractice. The approach to securing academic standards enables Expectation A3.2 to be met in design.

1.28   To test the Expectation, the team reviewed programme specifications, assessment reports sheets for individual students and external examiner reports, and met staff and students to explore the operation of assessment in practice.

1.29   The review team found that the College ensures that the learning outcomes and associated assessment strategies are clearly defined at the programme level. Programme specifications and assessment briefs include detailed information on the learning outcomes and assessment tasks required of students. Processes for the design and implementation of assignment briefs are transparent and robust and staff are clear about all aspects of the process including the responsibilities of the College and the awarding body or organisation.

1.30   The College follows the awarding body or organisation regulations and guidelines in its assessment of work, and aims to enhance practice as outlined in the Teaching Learning, Training and Assessment Improvement Strategy. Formal assessment strategies are embedded in programme specifications, and common summaries for example of assessment items are the same across different awarding body or organisation programme documentation. The double-marking and verification processes used are supported by clear guidance and staff have a clear understanding of the processes, and there are standardised marking approaches within departments. Grades and assessment activity are moderated by external examiners and reviewed and confirmed at final assessment board meetings before final awards are released to students.

1.31   Evidence from external examiner reports confirms that staff are effectively fulfilling their responsibilities through the design of assessment tasks and the formal assessment of the outcomes. Students also confirm the effective operation of assessment processes.

1.32   Overall, the team found the processes for managing assessment to be robust, valid and reliable, that assessment is conducted with rigour and that the award of qualifications

and credit is based on the achievement of the intended learning outcomes. Therefore, the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.33   The College has a range of processes of review to assist in ensuring that academic standards are maintained and that awarding body or awarding organisation processes and procedures are followed. It works within the regulations of its awarding body and organisation for programme review and also has its own monitoring and review processes supported by guidance and templates.

1.34   The Operational Planning Group (OPG) reports to the College Management Team and principally monitors the College's annual self-assessment processes and all other elements and groups that relate to the quality assurance systems. It does this by receiving and interpreting data and outcomes from both the higher education Curriculum Quality Group (CQG) and HE Marketing and Student Services Group (MSS), and by monitoring and reviewing both further and higher education quality improvement plans. The OPG also completes an annual review to ensure that the College's higher education policies and procedures remain current and effective.

1.35   The College highlights the role of the HE Academic Review Board (ARB) in ensuring that the academic rigour of College higher education programmes is maintained and that assessment activity is robust, valid and reliable. This board is the internal validating panel for all new validation proposals and minor modifications. All decisions made by the Academic Review Board are monitored by the Operational Planning Group through reports given by the Director of Curriculum (GFE and HE).

1.36   The CQG reports to the OPG and is chaired by the HE Quality and Development Manager. The CQG monitors, shares and reviews each department's external examiner reports and student semester reviews. Any curriculum delivery changes are presented to the CQG and consideration is made as to whether teams need to formalise requests for change through the College's minor modification processes, or pursue a major modification through the validation process. All minor modification processes ensure compliance with the requirements of the validating body or organisation and the FHEQ, Quality Code and Subject Benchmark Statements. Student and employer feedback is an essential element of consideration of any changes. Through the minor or major modification processes the College makes sure that all of its programmes remain relevant to employers.

1.37   The College's programmes are reviewed annually through the Programme Leader Review which operates each semester with a range of inputs, is summarised annually in the Programme Area Self-Assessment Report, and feeds into the Self-Assessment Report for higher education. Student feedback is central to the monitoring process, through module and/or semester reviews and through the evaluation of data by programme leaders. The annual review can lead to minor or major programme modifications, and there is a supportive proposal form for minor modifications to programmes and major modifications to modules.

1.38   The details and actions highlighted within the self-assessment report are incorporated in the wider College Teaching and Learning Strategy and the Learning and Assessment Improvement Plan. These documents are also monitored by the Operational Planning Group, College Management Team and Quality and Standards Committee of the Board. The processes in place enable Expectation A3.3 to be met in design.

1.39   The review team tested the Expectation through scrutiny of the guidance and templates used for review processes and through consideration of a range of outcomes including specific course and module reviews and the HE Audit Report. The team also met staff from the College, the University and students.

1.40   The team confirmed that each programme area produces a draft self-assessment report (SAR) that summarises information and areas for improvement drawn from in-year reviews, external examiner reports and internal performance reports. This programme area SAR provides the detail of the areas for action and improvement which can include feedback from external examiner reports. Draft area self-assessment reports undergo a validation process in the autumn term where findings are scrutinised and grades challenged. Recommendations made are incorporated by programme leaders into a final version. During this period the draft overarching College SAR is produced and used by the Assistant Principal to feed into the main College SAR and into institutional committees and processes.

1.41   The team saw an example of the main College-level HE Quality Improvement and Development Plan (QDIP) in which actions related to increasing access to IT in Bakewell Hall and in learning centres. This action is consistent with the Animal Management SAR and shows the effective recording and monitoring of points for action. Similarly, the Business SAR identifies use of scholarly activity to develop distance-learning materials and this is reflected in the QDIP.

1.42   Staff the team met fully understood the relationship between the various review activities and their purpose and were also clear about the use of review information and data in planning. Academic staff were clear about the process and purpose of the SAR method and its use, for instance in the minor modification process and how this related to the awarding body. External examiner reports confirm that standards are appropriate and these are shared with programme teams and the CQG.

1.43   The team regards the processes the College follows on its own behalf and on behalf of its awarding body and organisation as reliable, fit for purpose and well understood by staff. Therefore the Expectation is met, and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.44   The College does not itself award qualifications. It works in partnership with the University for a range of degree, top-up and teacher training qualifications and with Pearson for its Edexcel qualifications. The College has agreements with its awarding body and organisation and clear guidelines for its associated responsibilities.

1.45   The College has recently undergone validations with the University. All programmes required employer engagement to ensure the relevance and currency of programme content. Minor modifications to a programme may be suggested by the University's Course Committee prior to validation. The College identifies that all Pearson provision has already been endorsed by industry experts.

1.46   External examiners are appointed by the awarding body or awarding organisation for each programme of study. These external examiners contribute towards maintaining quality through attendance at programme boards and through written reports. The use of external and independent expertise enables Expectation A3.4 to be met in design.

1.47   The team tested the Expectation by meeting with staff from the College, employers and the University. The team also examined documentation that informs the programme approval process and scrutinised external examiner reports.

1.48   The team confirmed that each programme has an external examiner appointed by the University, or by Pearson for their respective programmes. Programmes are examined to ensure parity with similar provision elsewhere and the assessment of learning outcomes is scrutinised to ensure standards are maintained. External examiner reports seen by the team confirm that standards and assessment decisions are good and in line with national standards.

1.49   The College has a programme approval process which ensures that standards are appropriate and that the proposed course fits with its strategic objectives. The choice of units on higher national programmes is informed by the local employment market. A recently approved HND in sport was informed by talks with employers and it has developed links with industry that will facilitate student placements.

1.50   The team is satisfied that the College uses independent expertise through the processes of the awarding body and organisation for the academic standards to be appropriately set and maintained. The Expectation is therefore met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

1.52   The College has different responsibilities for its franchised and validated University provision and for the programmes associated with Pearson. The College uses the processes of its awarding body and organisation effectively for academic standards to be maintained. These processes are also supported by College procedures and staff members demonstrate an understanding of the College's responsibilities.

1.53   All seven Expectations is this area are met and the level of risk is low. Therefore, the review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards at the College **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1 The College has processes for the design and approval of its entire undergraduate-level provision and programmes are developed taking account of feedback from staff and students and in consultation with employers.

2.2 All higher education-approved provision is developed in line with the FHEQ and programmes offered through the University and Pearson have been validated and approved, taking into account relevant subject and quality benchmarks. Details of the University's validation and partnership arrangement ensure that quality will not be compromised throughout the five-year validation period.

2.3 The College works with the University for degree awards and Pearson to ensure that all provision is governed by Quality Code Expectations. This includes input from students, employers and industry experts in the design of programmes using explicit guidelines enshrined in the HE Academic Handbook.

2.4 The College, through the awarding body and organisation, provides effective processes for the design and approval of all undergraduate provision. All programmes have also been developed using feedback from students, staff and employers.

2.5 Provision associated with the University has gone through a rigorous validation process supported by online guidance including pre-validation meetings, institutional visits, resource checks, consultations and link tutor quality checks in advance of the validation event. There is also a robust approval process for all new and Pearson provision through an internal validation process. The processes in place enable the Expectation in Chapter B1 to be met in design.

2.6 The review team tested the response to this Expectation by scrutinising agreement documents related to the design, development and review of programmes, institutional checklists, the validation and review policy, guidelines, papers and committee minutes. The team also met staff from the College and the University as well as students.

2.7 The review team found that all validation processes are appropriate and fit for purpose. The outcomes including reports, programme specifications and handbooks are also appropriate and conform to external guidance and expectations. The College delivers a number of Pearson programmes and it has no responsibility for the design of these but does select the units to form a coherent programme appropriate for the College. There is a robust approval process for Pearson programmes and the HE Curriculum Validation Policy sets out the process by which new programmes must be approved.

2.8 There is a rationale for the provision of higher education related to future funding changes, demographic issues and local needs. There is also a recognition of the need for a more diverse approach to higher education and the HE Strategy 2013-16 provides detail on

themes, aims and objectives for higher education. It also details how this informs the process of course selection and development through the executive and senior committees such as the Operational Planning Group, the HE Academic Review Board and the HE Curriculum Quality Group. The HE Quality Improvement and Development Plan 2013-14 indicates an intention to grow the number of undergraduate programmes, and diversify delivery models, modes and progression routes into work or further study.

2.9   The review team also found that senior staff were formally engaged in improving the input of employers to programme design, acknowledging that a more formal approach might be necessary. Academic staff also had a clear grasp of the principles and practice of programme design and validation. They were therefore able to evidence effective operation of the processes of unit selection in the case of the HND in Equine Management where student and employer input had provided support to the process. The team were also able to access evidence of the effectiveness of the internal process for programme design in the case of the proposed HND Sport in which the initial programme proposal was referred back by the HE Academic Review Board before being amended for approval.

2.10   The review team is satisfied that the College has in place effective processes for programme approval and design and regards the rigorous programme approval processes in place to ensure that higher national qualifications fit with the strategic plans of the College as **good practice**.

2.11   The team therefore concludes that this Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission*

Findings

2.12   The College has a clearly set out admissions policy, including details of the application process for all courses. Undergraduate applications are made, processed and monitored through UCAS, with applications for the PGCE and HND courses made directly through the College. Applications are referred by the admissions team to the relevant course tutors, who then examine each application and decide on an offer. The processes in place enable the Expectation in Chapter B2 to be met in design.

2.13   In testing this Expectation, the review team scrutinised the admissions policy and associated documents along with the College prospectus and website. The team also met students and staff to discuss the process.

2.14   The HE Marketing and Student Services Group (MSS) monitors and reviews student recruitment, as is evidenced by meeting minutes. Meetings with College staff confirm that undergraduate applications are made through UCAS, with PGCE applications made directly to the College. Tutors make decisions on giving offers before informing the marketing and admissions team who process these. The entry requirements for each course are clearly listed on the College website, as well as in the College higher education prospectus. Once a student has made an application to the College, they are sent a welcome pack containing a wealth of information relating to the institution and the admissions process. The admissions policy itself is also accessible through the College website.

2.15   The College has an annually reviewed Widening Participation Strategy, with clearly defined goals and methods for achieving these. The accompanying Interim Widening Participation Strategy Statement annual report demonstrates that the College is meeting its targets for increasing the mature learner population and internal progression from HND courses to top-ups. The College has a detailed and up-to-date marketing plan, which it uses to review and improve the recruitment process of the College in line with its strategy. The entire admissions process is overseen effectively using a bespoke software suite and the Marketing and Admissions Manager is responsible for oversight.

2.16   The review team concludes that the College operates a clear and transparent policy and process for admission of students and that it has effective oversight and control of the process. Therefore the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.17   The College's approach to teaching and learning is defined in its Teaching, Learning, Training and Assessment Improvement Strategy. It outlines the expectations for tutors and teachers and supports the quality of teaching and learning. The Higher Education Academic Handbook given to staff also outlines the requirements for those teaching on higher education programmes.

2.18   A teaching and learning improvement plan lists the actions needed to improve teaching and is monitored. It has clear objectives, timescales and accountability. The higher education QIDP also outlines actions needed to improve teaching. The HE Curriculum Quality Group (CQG) meets each semester to ensure parity of delivery across higher education courses at the College and to facilitate the sharing of good practice and scholarly activity that has taken place. The group reports to the Academic Review Board which has responsibility for academic matters.

2.19   The College has a professional development policy which states how staff can apply. There is also a scholarly activity policy which describes how it differs from the usual professional development activities. There is a clear application process for staff who wish to have hours funded for an activity.

2.20   Lesson observations are conducted through an external company and there is a comprehensive observation policy for teaching and learning. This process differs from its further education counterpart in that it is more developmental. A range of classes is observed including group and individual tutorials. Observations are graded and observation sheets are comprehensive and include actions for improvement. The College's approach to learning and teaching enables the Expectation in Chapter B3 to be met in design.

2.21   The review team tested this Expectation by examining the evidence provided, including staff qualifications, observation reports and minutes of meetings. In addition the team met a range of teaching and senior staff, and students.

2.22   The College has a lesson observation policy which outlines the rationale for observing lessons and the ultimate aim to improve teaching. Programme team managers are trained to do observations, as are Advanced Practitioners. These formative observations and 'Learning Walks' are conducted throughout the year and are developmental: constructive feedback is given, but no grade is allocated. Underperforming staff may be allocated support with teaching and later re-observed. The College has recently appointed lead practitioners whose remit is to support teaching.

2.23   The review team found that observations feed into staff annual performance objectives which are monitored by one-to-one meetings with managers. Guidelines and the rationale for appraisals are identified within the College's Employee Development Policy and Procedure Management Policy. Staff members are appropriately qualified or completing qualifications and professional development is recorded on their career histories which are updated annually.

2.24 Good practice is identified in programme leader reviews and a summary collated through lead practitioners together with biannual sharing good practice events. Much good practice is also shared informally as staff are located near to each other. In addition, there is an area within the intranet that is used to identify good practice. Agendas and minutes of the CQG also clearly show that good practice and feedback are discussed.

2.25 The College measures the effectiveness of teaching through retention and success rates and external examiner reports. Formal summative observations are also conducted annually by an external agency who observe a sample of staff and provide a written report. Observations are graded and if necessary, staff are re-observed later in the year. The external observation team meet with the Director of Curriculum prior to observing staff to agree themes. The College lesson observation policy states that staff teaching predominantly on higher education courses will be observed taking a higher education session. Those who teach across higher and further education will have their observations alternated between the two. The most recent report documented the observations of relatively few higher education classes and all of these were from the same department. This report is the main formal mechanism for measuring teaching and is received by the Quality and Standards Committee. The observation system is an important measure of teaching as other ways in which the College measures its teaching are less proactive and reliant on good retention and success rates. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College implement a more rigorous method of measuring the effectiveness of its higher education teaching on a regular basis.

2.26 External examiner reports are positive about the standard of higher education teaching and students confirm that staff are knowledgeable, teaching is good and students understand assessment mechanisms. Students give feedback on individual programmes and focus groups are also used to inform the provision of future learning opportunities. The higher education student forum also provides an effective opportunity for students to voice opinions.

2.27 The College has a staff development policy which outlines application procedures. Staff development is aggregated from the performance management system for appraisals. Staff development requirements are noted during the appraisal system and these requests are then aggregated into a staff development programme. Programme managers maintain records of continuous professional development which is reflected in appraisal records. Some staff development is delivered through lead practitioner projects which have been effective and included staff training on higher education study skills. The College has a clear and systematic policy on the application of scholarly activity remission and support and staff may apply for support in differing categories. For example, one lead practitioner produced a referencing guide to help students which complements documentation produced by the University. Other examples include a request to write the first two years of an existing top-up degree and support for a part-time doctorate. Another member of staff, as part of his approved scholarly activity, is implementing a digital questionnaire to enhance his teaching. The team therefore consider that the support provided for staff members to complete scholarly activity is **good practice**.

2.28 The evidence presented to the review team confirms that the College's basis for learning and teaching is effective. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement*

Findings

2.29   The College has a high proportion of students who have progressed internally from further education in addition to students who have been out of education for some time. Its support mechanisms are therefore tailored to reflect a diverse student population.

2.30   The College ensures that all programmes are appropriately resourced at validation. This is a prerequisite of running Pearson programmes. Resources including staffing, subject-specific and information technology requirements are looked at as part of the process of agreement with the University. As a result, the College invested more in key texts and online journals.

2.31   A new higher education centre has been developed and is for the exclusive use of higher education students. The College also has plans to invest further with the aid of a grant it has obtained and proposed developments include a new sports centre. Resources are overseen by the Quality and Standards Committee that considers requests from course teams made via the College Management Team. The arrangements in place enable Expectation B4 to be met in design.

2.32   The review team tested the Expectation of resourcing and support for students by examining evidence including the higher education Additional Learning Support Policy and programme handbooks. The team also met a range of staff and students, including two student alumni.

2.33   The review team found a range of support offered to students at each stage of their College experience. Students receive an induction at the beginning of their course, helping with their transition from lower academic-level courses. During this induction, tutors go through handbooks outlining the support available to students and library and support staff also outline services available. This includes signposting additional learning support opportunities, in line with the Additional Support Policy. Additional learning support is available to students identified as needing it. Referral may be either self-referral on admission or by tutors. This support is effective in enabling students to complete their studies. Careers advice is also available to students through the College's careers and employability service which is available to all students.

2.34   There is no specific written tutorial policy, but there is an expectation that all students will have tutorials. Support is available to students on a weekly basis through the tutorial system and additional support is available to students requiring specific services. Students confirm that they do have tutorials and are very positive about the support and accessibility of tutors and their sensitivity to individual needs. Students gave examples of support given that enabled them to complete their studies. Details of the support available is given in student handbooks. Timetabled group or individual tutorials are provided to discuss students' progress. Discussion opportunities are also provided in relation to assignment work where face-to-face meetings may be arranged as an alternative to audio feedback and in addition to written feedback on assignments.

2.35   A pilot study is being carried out in the Media department as part of a staff member's doctoral work. A digital critical incident questionnaire is used which provides a

forum for students to give anonymous feedback on curriculum issues. Lecturers can then adapt the delivery of the curriculum accordingly.

2.36   Programmes are adequately resourced. Resources are scrutinised at validation and annually during programme reviews. A template sets out the areas for scrutiny by programme teams each semester and this includes resources and additional learner support delivered. The College Management Team meets weekly and has oversight of resources. Resources are also discussed in the higher education forum and ultimately within the Quality and Standards Committee. Staff in the Learning Resource Centre work closely with programme staff to ensure library stock is sufficient. An annual resources report is sent to the Director of Curriculum summarising resource requests and actions. Capital items are requested through the Resource Management Group as the need arises and decisions are made on how the resource request fits with the College's strategic plans. Students are positive about the resources available and the higher education centre has been commended in external examiner reports.

2.37   The team is satisfied that the College has appropriate arrangements in place to enable student development and achievement. This is accomplished through easily accessed support mechanisms, supportive staff and a thorough system for ensuring sufficient resources. The Expectation is therefore met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B5: Student Engagement*

Findings

2.38   The College provides a number of opportunities for students to engage in their educational experience such as Student Voice meetings, learner surveys and a students' union, as are outlined in the higher education Student Engagement Report. Student handbooks also provide information on how students can be involved in their own learning experience. Student representatives are also used to provide regular feedback to College staff. The deliberate steps taken by the College to engage students enable Expectation B5 to be met in design.

2.39   In testing this Expectation, the review team scrutinised the student submission, student handbooks and programme reviews. The team also held meetings with staff and students.

2.40   Students state that the College responds well to their views, with the addition of lights to the car park given as one example. A documented response to student meetings provides further evidence of this. Students' views on academic matters are sought and they are encouraged to review courses using a report template. Course leaders then analyse student engagement as part of the annual programme review process. Students state that they are able to provide feedback through student representatives, tutorials, regular questionnaires and student forums. Student representatives are provided with training for their role by the Student Engagement Officer.

2.41   Student forums provide an opportunity for all students to be engaged in their educational experience, and the outcomes of these forums are discussed at Curriculum Quality Group meetings. Student feedback states that they are involved in programme design through validation panels and termly virtual learning environment (VLE) questionnaires. Despite this, meetings with staff and students confirm that validation panels involving students are not currently in place and as such student representation at all organisational levels could be improved. Minutes from meetings of the Marketing and Learner Services Committee and the Curriculum Quality Group demonstrate that students are not represented at these levels. Students are also not actively involved in the Self-Assessment Report process. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College should implement arrangements for student representation at all levels to promote partnership in quality assurance and enhancement.

2.42   The review team concludes that the College operates a number of effective processes to engage students in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience, with a clear demonstration of how the College responds to student views. Therefore the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.43   The College has a strategic commitment to being a provider with effective teaching support and assessment and has a senior committee and HE Academic Review Board whose purposes include ensuring that assessment activity is robust, valid and reliable.

2.44   The College is responsible for designing assessments for Pearson and for the University's programmes, following awarding organisation and body regulations. There is a double-marking policy and a malpractice policy which provide guidelines for staff assessing work.

2.45   The College is responsible for marking and internally moderating its programmes and follows the requirements of the awarding body or organisation, though it has its own Teaching Learning and Assessment Policy that supports enhancement in assessment practice. It also has clear guidance material for staff on assessment in the HE Academic Handbook and in a wide range of programme specifications. Programme and module handbooks contain information about assessment methodology and examination boards for University programmes are held following prescribed procedures. A procedure exists for appeals on internal assessment decisions.

2.46   Students are provided with information about the nature and weighting of assessment through programme specifications and assignment briefs. The College follows the University's regulations for assessment, including those governing conduct, and these are documented in the Higher Education Academic Handbook. The College follows the Pearson guidance for the associated programmes. The processes in place allow the Expectation in Chapter B6 to be met in design.

2.47   The review team tested this Expectation by reviewing a range of documents including samples of assessment information provided to students, assessment regulations and Examination Board minutes. The team also met staff and students to understand their experiences of assessment.

2.48   It is clear from programme specifications and handbooks that the College works within the regulations of the awarding body and organisation. The responsibilities checklist is explicit about the institution's commitment to 'Work within Pearson regulations' using a range of College documentation.

2.49   The College gives students appropriate opportunities to achieve the intended learning outcomes in a variety of ways and it has a comprehensive Accreditation or Recognition of Prior Learning Policy which describes the ways in which credits can be obtained through prior work and experience. There are lead practitioners who work on good practice and in 2013-14 broad areas of work were improvements in the quality of teaching and learning, formative and summative assessment and the use of individual learning plans (ILPs). Other areas included the tutorial process to stretch and challenge and work to embed the use of ILPs in teaching sessions. The lead practitioners use the VLE as the main

platform for session delivery. Lead practitioners undertook specific projects in support of these themes including peer review, study skills and assessment/feedback.

2.50   There is a significant focus on diverse assessment and associated processes evidenced in a range of documentation. This documentation includes programme specifications, guidance material, assessment reports and briefs. There is also evidence of positive feedback regarding assessment processes in the external examiner reports.

2.51   Regulations are in place regarding the late submission of work in all programmes and for the consideration of serious adverse circumstances. In relation to the turnaround time for assessment work, procedures stipulate that students should receive marks and feedback within four weeks of submission.

2.52   The assessment information in programme specifications, handbooks and assignment briefs is clear and detailed. Students the review team met confirmed that assessment processes are clear and well communicated and confirmed that the assessment activities were varied and the workload expected of them is reasonable in terms of volume and timing. Students also confirmed that they receive clear, timely, constructive written and verbal feedback on their work that enables them to identify potential improvements. Most students the team met agreed that feedback on their work is returned promptly, and frequently well within the four-week timescale.

2.53   Overall, the review team considers that the College's arrangements for assessment are reliable. The College ensures that students have appropriate opportunities to demonstrate the achievement of the intended learning outcomes for the award of the qualification. Therefore, this Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B7: External Examining*

Findings

2.54   The College works with the University and Pearson and has a mix of franchised and validated programmes. External examiners are appointed for each programme by the relevant awarding body or awarding organisation.

2.55   The University appoints external examiners who are approved by a subcommittee of the University Senate. The University is responsible for inducting these examiners and examination boards at the College are chaired by a member of the University. External examiner reports are sent to the University as well as to the College who respond to the report. Pearson appoints external examiners to make annual visits for their programmes. The use of external examiners allows Expectation B7 to be met in design.

2.56   The review team tested the Expectation by scrutinising external examiner reports and supporting assessment documentation. The team also held meetings with a range of staff and students.

2.57   The Double and Second Marking Policy sets out the role of the external examiner from the College's point of view and outlines the policy internally for ensuring standards by means of double marking. Internal verifiers ensure that there is a systematic sample of assignments to monitor the consistency and accuracy of marking and grading. University examiners are required to attend the final award board at the College and provide a written report. Standards on higher national programmes are monitored by the relevant external examiner who also provides a sampling report. These documents are shared with programme teams and the Curriculum Quality Group which has oversight of standards and external examiner reports and in turn feeds into the Academic Review Board. In every case, the College responds to the report produced.

2.58   College staff comment favourably on the support given by external examiners. For example, developmental feedback was given on an examination written by College staff. In the Equine Department the external verifier has helped with writing assignments. Most external examiners see students and talk to them and students confirm they find this a rewarding experience. However, reports are not generally shared with students although general feedback may be given to students and some positive information arising from external examiner reports is made available on the VLE after the reports are approved by the HE Academic Review Board. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College should routinely make external examiner reports available to students.

2.59   External examiner reports confirm that standards are comparable with other programmes nationally and that assessment is fair and appropriate. Programme teams respond to external examiner reports by outlining the actions they will implement to address any points raised. Teams also use feedback identified in external examiner reports to inform their programme self-assessment report and programme leader reviews. The programme's self-assessment report is then amalgamated into an area self-assessment which is validated and ultimately incorporated into a quality improvement plan ratified by the Quality and Standards Committee. The final quality plan incorporates improvement actions and aims, for example targets around increasing information technology access as mentioned in the minimal process management report and the use of scholarly activity to develop distance-learning materials in business.

2.60   From the examination of documentation and meetings with staff and students, the review team concludes that there is evidence of scrupulous use of external examiners. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review*

Findings

2.61   The College uses a self-assessment review (SAR) method augmented by a range of monitoring processes including student views and end-of-module evaluations for the review of all programme areas. This method also covers services and the operation of the whole College. Each programme leader produces an annual area Programme Review and a higher education SAR which assesses how the provision meets the Quality Code Expectations. Programme area self-assessment reports contain grades in four areas to determine whether the College fulfils its responsibilities for maintaining the threshold academic standards set by its awarding body and organisation, the quality of students' learning opportunities, the quality of information produced for students and applicants, and the enhancement of students' learning opportunities. Each area of assessment has detailed levels of consideration that reflect the Quality Code. Programme areas are assessed for strengths and targets for improvement with reference to explicit evidence and this consideration leads to a summary of findings which justifies the grade and overall level of assessment. It also includes explicit statements on areas of good practice and opportunity and areas in which the provision needs to improve.

2.62   These programme area self-assessments are collated to produce an overarching higher education report that includes an annual Quality Improvement Plan. The College's higher education annual quality improvement plan identifies the key areas for development within teaching and learning, student enhancement and engagement, widening participation and student opportunity. The details and actions highlighted within the self-assessment report are also incorporated in the wider College Teaching and Learning Strategy and Learning and Assessment Improvement Plan.

2.63   Annually, the College Management Team (CMT) determines the specific areas that are scheduled for Internal Audit by the external audit team which forms an additional level of monitoring and review. During 2013-14 higher education was selected for an audit for which it was reported as being robust and requiring only a few minor recommendations.

2.64   The operation of the SAR and the quality improvement plan is monitored by the Operational Planning Group, CMT and Quality and Standards Committee of the board, to ensure that targets are met and appropriate resources are prioritised. The CQG reports to the OPG and monitors, shares and reviews each department's external examiner reports and student semester reviews.

2.65   During the year the College gathers a range of feedback which is used to enhance the programmes on offer. This feedback is gathered in a range of ways including an induction survey, the National Student Survey, student forums, semester and module reviews, programme reviews, annual self-assessment, tutorials, industry links and external examiners. By collecting this information the departments are able to review and consider changes to programmes of study annually. These proposed changes are then discussed at the end-of-year CQG.

2.66   In 2013-14 the CQG agreed to review how the College could strengthen this enhancement process to ensure that changes to programmes were fair, transparent, accurate and consistent. The annual review of the programme and all modules may lead to

consideration for minor or major modifications to programmes. Student and employer feedback are essential elements of consideration of any changes. A minor modifications process has been added for 2014-15 HNC/D programmes ensuring that these, along with University minor modifications, are initially approved through the Academic Review Board.

2.67 Student feedback is gathered through module and/or semester reviews and through the evaluation of such data by programme leaders in the Programme Review and the higher education SAR. Some courses also collate feedback from in-person or online focus groups, surveys and blogs, as well as through the College's higher education forums and wider College surveys. The recent University validations all required employer engagement and the College invited three employers per course to feed into this process. The processes in place enable the Expectation in Chapter B8 to be met in design.

2.68 The review team tested this Expectation by assessing the effectiveness of the SAR process in practice. This was done by looking at a range of programme area self-assessment reports, College summary reports and the minutes of committees that review the outcomes. The review team also discussed the operation of the SAR process and other feedback mechanisms with staff and students.

2.69 The review team was able to see evidence of effective monitoring of all areas of provision using the SAR process, which at a programme level assesses all areas covered by the Quality Code. Evidence is gathered from a range of sources, including external examiner reports, and strengths and areas of good practice are noted. Areas for improvement are set out in detail and feed into programme area improvement plans.

2.70 At the institutional level the evidence and analysis that contribute to the SAR come together to present a clear picture of the operation of higher education in the College and overarching action plans. The team was able to see an effective analysis of the current College higher education position, including the analysis of learning outcomes, teaching, learning and assessment and leadership and management. This includes analysis of the learning environment, learning technology, assessment, personal learning plans and student support reports. The team was also able to see evidence of the consideration of these outcomes at College committees, and it is clear that the SAR process leads to effective input in institutional planning and management.

2.71 Senior staff the team met were able to explain with confidence the contribution the self-assessment process makes to College planning and management. Academic staff confirmed that the SAR process feeds up from each course team and captures information at all levels to contribute to an institutional view. They were also able to evidence actions that had arisen from the process including the establishment of mid-semester reviews for students and the change of a module in response to student views through the minor modifications process.

2.72 Outcomes of review activity feed up to the College Executive and to academic and governance committees. In 2013-14 an independent audit of higher education provision was also conducted. Financial matters are covered by this audit but the auditors were also commissioned to give an external view of higher education operation at the College. This audit revealed that the area was robust, requiring only a few minor recommendations. The audit identified that course proposal documents did not include information regarding the viability of the course. It therefore recommended amending it to include market research on local competitors, sensitivity analysis on student numbers, research regarding the popularity of the provision at open days, and market needs and links with the Leicestershire Learning and Employment Partnership (LLEP), which the College undertook to do. This audit has therefore led to some amendments in templates and guidance and also the further development of institutional processes.

2.73   The review team concludes that the programme monitoring and review processes in place are robust, effective and contribute to improvements at programme and College level. The Expectation is therefore met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints*

Findings

2.74   The College has a clear complaints policy and additional documents for appeals and mitigating circumstances. The College cites that the majority of complaints are resolved informally, with only one formal complaint made in the past year. For informal complaints, students can contact any member of College staff who will then forward the issue on to the appropriate manager or tutor who will respond within five working days. For formal complaints, a form is provided within the policy itself with instructions on the process. The procedures in place enable Expectation B9 to be met in design.

2.75   To test this Expectation, the review team scrutinised policies and the College website. Meetings were also held with College staff, representatives from the University and students.

2.76   The College has a clear mitigating circumstances policy and the review team also saw examples of letters sent to students. The College keeps track of mitigating circumstances. The Appeals Policy is also clear, including details of the various stages of the appeals process. Students state that they make complaints either through tutors or student representatives and feel comfortable doing so. The complaints process was verified by the review team's meeting with staff, and procedures for making complaints are outlined in the student handbooks.

2.77   The student submission highlights the effectiveness of informal procedures, citing the accessibility of tutors in particular. However, currently there is no simple channel for accessing the College complaints procedure through the website or through the VLE. Thus, the review team **recommends** that the College should ensure that the procedures for student complaints are easily accessible. The review team concludes that the College procedures for dealing with student complaints are fair and timely. Therefore the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.78   The College does not have degree awarding powers and so ultimately the responsibility for its higher education provision is with the awarding body and organisation. The College is, however, responsible for managing and implementing procedures effectively in line with partnership agreements. The College has programmes where work-based learning is an integral part of the course or where contributions from employers in the form of verified statements are part of the assessment.

2.79   The HND Equine and Animal Management courses have aspects of work placements and the database of employers can be used to find these opportunities. PGCE students are expected to have teaching hours within a placement. The College states that the assessment of units is conducted by lecturing staff and the College ensures that each employer has appropriate insurance and conducts health and safety checks on all courses. The College provides some generic rather than course-specific information for employers and formal systems for the oversight of work placements are lacking. Therefore, the College needs to further develop its management and oversight of work-based learning to meet Expectation B10 in design.

2.80   The review team tested the Expectation by examining work-based documentation. Meetings were also held with support staff, students, employers and graduate students.

2.81   A member of Student Services supports students on work experience in addition to the health and safety checks that are conducted. Although not all courses have compulsory placements, the majority have some work experience. The College states that two courses involve employers. The BSc Digital Film Technology top-up includes in its assessment strategy 'employer verification statements which verify that you have negotiated, agreed and conducted work-based activities'.

2.82   Students on the PGCE course are allocated mentors who are issued with a mentor guide from the University. The University is responsible for training mentors and online updating has taken place this year. Mentors are also required to complete feedback summary forms at the end of the placement. However, there was some confusion with not all students aware of having been allocated a mentor.

2.83   Documentation shows that there is an induction list for employers together with a placement letter that is given prior to the student taking up placements. These are generic documents with no mention of the course the student is studying. A work placement booklet is given to employers outlining expectations of the student and employer responsibilities. Supervisor feedback forms at the end of the booklet enable the employer to give views on the personal qualities of the student. For example, information can be recorded in relation to timekeeping and reliability, but not for comments on any course-specific aspects or work the student has completed. The College states that students are guided to work with employers but no specific course information is sent by the College as it is the students' responsibility.

2.84   Employers whom the team met had not received any information about the course the student was studying, or the modules or learning outcomes that were to be completed

during the placement. They were not asked to give feedback on the student other than hours completed during the placement, nor were any visits made by College staff during the placement.

2.85   The review team was not presented with any further evidence to support a process for ensuring that employers have a good understanding of what students are required to complete during their work placements to achieve their learning outcomes. There is no evidence that students are formally supported in the workplace or that employers are required to comment on the opportunities for achieving learning outcomes. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College should ensure the effective oversight of students' work-based learning including the provision of appropriate support and information for employers.

2.86   On the basis of the lack of formal oversight of work-based learning for higher education students, the review team concludes that the Expectation is not met and that it represents a moderate level of risk.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

2.87   The College does not award research degrees.

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.88   In reaching its judgement about the quality of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The team identified two features of good practice and two recommendations in this area. A further three recommendations are also linked to Expectation C.

2.89   The College has a clear commitment to supporting students and providing opportunities to widen participation in higher education and works effectively in partnership with the University and Pearson. There are clearly documented processes that work in practice and enable students to be supported in their learning. Programmes are suitably resourced and there are some mechanisms for student engagement.

2.90   The review team concludes that the Expectation relating to managing higher education provision with others is not met and poses a moderate risk. This is due to the lack of oversight of the work placements in addition to the limited information provided for employers.

2.91   Although one Expectation was not met in this area, it was considered to pose a moderate rather than a serious risk. The review team concludes that overall the quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

3   Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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 website acts as a useful source of information to both the public and prospective and current students, with information provided on all courses including entry requirements and how to apply. In addition to the main College website, a dedicated higher education site also exists with further information specific to higher education courses. Upon application, prospective students are also supplied with welcome packs that include useful information about the College. Current students are able to make use of the College's VLE to access course handbooks, College policies, staff feedback and other information. The information produced enables Expectation C to be met in design.

3.2   In testing this Expectation, the review team examined the College website, prospectus, College policies and procedures. The team also met College staff and students.

3.3   The College higher education prospectus includes all relevant course information and is up to date. Meeting with students confirms that both course handbooks and the VLE are valuable sources of information.

3.4   The College website is a useful source of information, with all course details accessible and easy to understand. The College VLE contains extensive course materials, and is cited by students as a useful and timely portal for providing and receiving feedback. However, the College Complaints Policy is not easily accessed through the College website or VLE, and this finding is also linked to the recommendation under Expectation B9.

3.5   Course information is not currently provided to employers involved in work-based learning at the College, and this finding is linked to the recommendation under Expectation B10. As part of Expectation C, higher education providers are expected to produce information to enable those with responsibility for setting and maintaining standards and assuring and enhancing quality, both internally and externally, to discharge their duties effectively. The failure to provide employers with the necessary course information may affect their ability to discharge their duties effectively.

3.6   Meetings with staff reveal that external examiner reports are not routinely made accessible to current students. It is expected that this information should be made accessible to students and this finding is linked to the recommendation under Expectation B7.

3.7   Although a number of courses are validated by the University, the main College website makes no explicit mention of this. In addition, PGCE interview and offer letters make no mention of the awarding body. As part of this Expectation it is important to ensure that all information provided by the College is correct, accessible and trustworthy. The omission of the University from the aforementioned course documentation could lead to the intended audience, namely prospective students, being unaware of the University's involvement prior to applying for, or starting, such a course. As such, the review team **recommends** that the College should ensure that all public-facing information consistently includes reference to the relevant awarding body.

3.8   The review team concludes that other than the exceptions named above, the College produces information for all audiences that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. Therefore the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

3.9　　In reaching its judgement relating to the quality of information about learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The team identified one recommendation in this area relating to the provision of relevant information about the awarding body or awarding organisation associated with programmes. A further three recommendations are also linked to the quality of learning opportunities. These recommendations relate to the accessibility of the complaints policy, the provision of external examiner reports and the information provided for employers supporting work placements.

3.10　　The College does provide stakeholders with a range of relevant information on the main website and on a higher education site. In addition to any paper-based information, students are able to access course details such as programme specifications and handbooks on the main College sites and on the VLE. The College has established effective processes to monitor the information it produces.

3.11　　Recommendations in this area relate to the need to amend or update details in documentation, and to ensure consistent access to information.

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

4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1 The College is committed to enhancing learning opportunities for its students and its strategic approach in this area has specific higher education objectives in Improvement, Investment, Innovation and Development. These objectives prioritise key themes related to plans to be a high-quality higher education provider. The focus is on the provision of effective teaching, support, assessment and learning resources, to create a positive student experience. The College is committed to building on and extending established specialisms by developing a robust and relevant range of undergraduate-level courses at higher education Levels 4, 5 and 6 and increasing the number and types of students from diverse backgrounds. There is also an overarching commitment to enhancing the College's reputation and to ensure the higher education offer is publicly available and accurate in line with QAA requirements.

4.2 The College's strategic approach to the enhancement of student learning is outlined in its Strategic Plan and HE Strategy and in other formal institutional documentation such as the Teaching and Learning Improvement Plan. The College aims to involve students in the enhancement of their learning opportunities using mechanisms such as the HE Student Forum.

4.3 The College works with its staff, students and other stakeholders to review the provision of its learning opportunities and teaching practices to ensure that opportunities for enhancement are made available throughout the academic year. This is facilitated through one-to-one and small group conversations and through module and semester review processes. The self-assessment reports, the Higher Education Improvement Plan and the minor modifications process further contribute to the enhancement environment.

4.4 The College takes deliberate steps to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities at a strategic level to enhance the higher education experience for its students. It has taken positive action on the enhancement-related advisable and desirable recommendations from the previous QAA review. Class sizes are small, students have high levels of contact with tutors and effective and comprehensive mechanisms are in place to ensure the specific needs of individuals are met. A significant year-on-year investment has been made in the amount of support given through Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) funds, resulting in high achievement rates for those receiving support. Capital development enhancements linked to higher education provision are designed to provide students with high-quality, industry-standard resources.

4.5 The Student Handbook gives clear guidelines on how students can contribute to enhancing the higher education provision and Higher Education Student Forums allow them to contribute to enhancement of their programmes.

4.6 The College higher education annual Teaching, Learning and Assessment Improvement Plan identifies key areas for development and enhancement and this is supported by a Teaching, Learning, Training and Assessment Improvement Strategy, and key performance indicators for improvement. The deliberate steps taken at provider level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities enables this Expectation to be met in design.

4.7   The review team tested the College's strategic approach to taking deliberate steps to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities through a review of College strategies, material related to the self-assessment review process and the committees that manage it, the HE Student Forum minutes and minutes of relevant meetings. The team also met the Principal, staff and students to understand the College's strategic approach to enhancement.

4.8   The review team found that the College takes a strategically led approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities, and uses a range of mechanisms to plan action and involve academic staff and students in the process. Enhancement activities have led to recent clear improvements in the higher education environment. A separate higher education resource area within the learning centres has added to the discrete higher education student experience. The recently developed higher education students' union has encouraged the involvement of students in their learning experience.

4.9   A range of visits, trips and guest speakers make positive and valued contributions to higher education programmes. Support for students has been improved and investment made to increase student achievement rates. Quality processes including the SAR procedure and course reviews are used to improve students' experience. These have, for example, resulted in developments such as extra-curricular activities, competitions and guest speakers. An Independent Project module has also provided a greater work-based focus.

4.10   The Teaching, Learning and Assessment Improvement Strategy supports staff in developing their teaching skills. This also promotes and enables staff development and scholarly activity.

4.11   Staff and students the review team met confirmed that students have informal input at every level and on their whole experience. Student forums allow them to discuss their overall experience and programme-level course and module review outcomes contribute to feedback on delivery and resources. Students confirmed the value of the HE Student Forum as a mechanism for improvements. Senior staff confirmed the processes used to contribute to enhancement including teaching and learning forums and the SAR process. Staff are also able to contribute to the annual review of College strategy.

4.12   Academic staff were able to discuss the use of the minor modifications process and gave an example of amendment to a Level 6 module that both staff and students were unhappy with. After considering graduate feedback, two modules were amalgamated to create a revised module.

4.13   Changes have also been made to the project process for Equine students where they felt that pressure to decide on their project came too early. Agreement was reached that the module could come later to benefit from ideas gained from the first semester module. This was effectively managed through a minor modifications process.

4.14   Overall, the review team concludes that the College has taken deliberate steps to improve the quality of student learning opportunities. Therefore the Expectation is met and the level of risk low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.15   In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. There are no features of good practice, recommendations or affirmations in this area.

4.16   The College has a strategic commitment to enhancing student learning opportunities. There is a shared ethos of enhancement and staff and students provided evidence of positive developments resulting from different feedback mechanisms. Staff members share good practice in a variety of ways and quality assurance systems are also used effectively to identify, action and monitor improvements across the higher education provision.

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

5   Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

Innovations in promoting the employability of students

5.1   The College's Higher Education Strategy and its Strategic Plan both state that increased employability is a priority within the College. The Teaching and Learning Improvement Plan lists actions to improve employability skills within programmes. This has been signed off as completed. Similarly the Marketing and Student Services Focus group also prioritises closer employability links. The College created an employability service in the 2013-14 academic year and has plans to expand this service to further enhance the employability of students. The College has several commercial arms which can provide useful and meaningful employment opportunities.

5.2   The College has increased its focus on employability by developing direct links to programmes. Examples given include links with industry, work experience and trips taken. The use of guest speakers has increased students' employability skills and students confirm that they give added value to the programme. Examples were given of horticulture speakers and projects with the Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust. A booklet of employment opportunities gives examples of work placements, visits and speakers.

5.3   An employability action plan sets out steps to be taken to further improve students' work skills. Students on dance programmes are encouraged to get involved with competitions. For example, in commercial dance students have to sell a product through dance or performance. Media students have also taken part in a film competition. Students are positive about the contribution made by staff who liaise with industry, particularly in agricultural courses, which keeps students up to date with changes. External examiner reports recognise some industry-related work.

5.4   Additional learning support is available for students who either self-refer on application or who are identified as possible beneficiaries by tutors. This support contributes towards the students' employability status by ensuring they are able to complete their course. Students believe their courses prepare them well for their chosen careers.

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

5.5   The new HND sports course due to start in September 2015 has had considerable input from employers. It will include work placements for students and close links with employers such as Leicester Tigers and Mansfield Town FC.

5.6   Employers that the team met do not contribute towards the delivery of the curriculum other than providing work placements. They do not play a part in the development of the curriculum. They do provide a key opportunity for getting the students work-ready by introducing them to the world of work and one gave an example of help to judge within a riding academy. Employment requirements inform the curriculum at the College, including the choice of units for an HND. Programme specifications make reference to the aim of courses to prepare students for industry; for example, the Final Validation Proposal for HND Horticulture and Conservation Management, the HND in Equine Performance Management and the specifications for BScs in Animal Management Top-up and Digital Film Technology. The College intends to involve employers more formally in the development of programmes.

5.7   The College could be more proactive in its work with employers and its use of them as a source of external expertise. However, students are positive about the external contributions made to their courses by employers providing placements and guest speakers, and the inherent enhanced employability skills these give them.

Glossary

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

e-learning
See technology enhanced or enabled learning

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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