



# Higher Education Review of Moulton College

October 2015

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## About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Moulton College. The review took place from 13 to 15 October 2015 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Anya Perera
- Ms Daphne Rowlands
- Mr Mark Napier (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Moulton 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)<sup>1</sup> 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 5.

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

The [themes](#) for the academic year 2015-16 are Student Employability and Digital Literacy,<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> A dedicated section explains the method for [Higher Education Review](#)<sup>4</sup> 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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<sup>1</sup> The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at:  
[www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code).

<sup>2</sup> Higher Education Review themes:  
[www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2859](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2859).

<sup>3</sup> QAA website: [www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us).

<sup>4</sup> Higher Education Review web pages:  
[www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review).

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about Moulton College

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

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

- The emphasis that the College places on employability skills to enable students to progress into industry (Expectation B4).

### Recommendations

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

By March 2016:

- ensure that students receive timely feedback in accordance with the College's guidelines (Expectation B6)
- introduce a more systematic approach to the management of work placements to more effectively deliver learning opportunities (Expectation B10).

By June 2016:

- implement a more rigorous method of establishing effective oversight of higher education teaching and learning that measures and continually improves its effectiveness (Expectation B3).

### Theme: Student Employability

Student employability is a priority for Moulton College. Its focus on vocational, land-based provision, and the use of external expertise in both programme design and review, enables it to maintain the vocational currency of its higher education courses. This approach is consolidated by the prominence of work placements in all its higher education courses. Integral to the College's approach is its operation of six commercial enterprises, which are operated as businesses but are linked to higher education programmes. These provide opportunities for work-based education. This approach to student employability is appreciated by both employers and students.

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

## About Moulton College

The mission of Moulton College (the College) is 'To provide outstanding education and training opportunities in land based, construction and sports studies for everyone who will benefit from them'. The College is an established further education college with a speciality in land-based subjects. There are around 730 students enrolled on higher education programmes, with 500 full-time and 230 part-time students. The College's higher education provision is available in all three of its subject specialism: land-based studies, sports studies, and construction studies. The provision consists of foundation degrees with associated top-ups to full honours degrees, honours degrees, taught master's degrees, and postgraduate research degrees, both at PhD and MPhil levels. There is also a Higher Level Apprenticeship in Construction and the Built Environment, with a part-time Higher National Diploma as its academic aim. Almost all the College's higher education provision is validated by the University of Northampton, with some courses now validated by Pearson.

The College was established as a college in 1921, starting out as the Northamptonshire Institute of Agriculture. Following incorporation in 1992, the College has expanded significantly. This growth is reflected in the development of a separate higher education Strategic Plan. This incorporates a number of priorities:

- to grow the number of students studying higher education at the College
- to improve higher education students' perceptions of the quality of their experience at the College by achieving an overall rating of 85 per cent in the National Student Survey (NSS)
- to continue to attract funding from external sources to underpin the College's research activities
- to improve the employability prospects of higher education students by the achievement of 95 per cent of former students in employment and/or education, as identified in the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education Survey
- to continue the focus on widening participation, as set out in the targets for the College's agreement with the Office for Fair Access, to charge a fee higher than £6,000
- to support staff and research students to be published in peer-reviewed journals.

Since the last QAA review in 2011 the College has made changes to its management structure and the bodies that have responsibility for discharging its higher education responsibilities. For instance, the College has developed a Higher Education Academic Board, which oversees how higher education is planned, delivered and reviewed. This is chaired by the Principal and has two subcommittees: the Higher Education Student Experience Committee and the Research Group.

The Principal also chairs the Higher Education Student Experience Committee and meets formally with students at least three times a year to hear their feedback. Additionally, the College has developed a Research Group, which is chaired by the Deputy Principal, who is also a member of the Senior Leadership Team. The Board of Governors receives termly reports on matters pertaining to higher education, and there is one governor, identified by the Board, who takes a particular interest in higher education, and meets regularly with senior staff responsible for it.

The Senior Leadership Team has identified the following key challenges for higher education at the College.

- Student recruitment in light of the removal of the cap on student numbers.
- Maintenance of a higher education ethos in a further education college where the majority of students are studying at level 3 and below.
- The attraction and retention of suitably qualified staff.
- The progression of students from levels 4 to 5.

In response to these challenges the College has invested in facilities to support its higher education students, and has developed learning and teaching facilities including a new Sports Therapy and Rehabilitation Centre. In addition, a project is underway to refurbish the existing laboratories that facilitate higher education study to create two specific laboratories: a bio-science laboratory and a materials laboratory. This is being partly funded by capital funding from the Higher Education Funding Council for England.

The College's last engagement with QAA was in January 2011, with the Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER). This review identified two areas of good practice and made three recommendations.

The first area of good practice identified concerned the management structure. This has since been developed as a result of changes in the College as a whole. The second area was the strong relationship with the University of Northampton that enhances the learning opportunities for students.

There was one advisable recommendation concerning students having sight of external examiner reports, and two desirable recommendations. The first concerned relationships with employers who provide placements for students as part of their programme, and the second was to consider the development of a higher education staff handbook.

All these recommendations have been addressed and the good practice has been further embedded.

## Explanation of the findings about Moulton College

This section explains the review findings in more detail. Terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers have been included in a [brief glossary](#) at the end of this report.

A fuller [glossary of terms](#) is available on the QAA website, and formal definitions of certain terms may be found in the operational description and handbook for the [review method](#), also on the QAA website.

# **1 Judgement: The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Findings**

1.1 The College does not hold degree awarding powers. The University of Northampton validates most of the College's higher education courses, while Pearson validates its teacher training courses and Higher Level Apprenticeship in Construction and the Built Environment. The College has been in partnership with the University since 1999, while the relationship with Pearson is more recent, starting in 2014-15. The College engages with the validation and approval process as prescribed by the University and Pearson. While the validating bodies retain responsibility for standards, the College is responsible for resourcing and delivering the higher education provision. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.2 In testing this arrangement, the review team assessed a variety of documentation including the Memorandum of Cooperation with the University. Furthermore, the review team carried out a number of meetings with senior staff, teaching staff and students.

1.3 An Operational Handbook is used to support the day-to-day delivery of programmes validated by the University, including details of policies and procedures. The University has assigned a Partnership Manager to the College to coordinate, monitor and manage the University's partnership with the College. University of Northampton programmes are validated under the University's guidelines.

1.4 To ensure that the delivery of University awards is appropriate, the College undergoes institutional and periodic subject reviews every five years. Furthermore, the University requires the College to undertake an annual review of the University provision.

1.5 The academic standards for Pearson awards are set out in the approval documents, and the College is responsible for maintaining these standards, and evaluating and reviewing the students' learning experiences. This is ensured and assessed through external examiners appointed by Pearson for the College. Furthermore, the Higher Education Academic Board completes and monitors the progress of the annual review for all higher education provision, which feeds into the annual Quality Improvement Plan.

1.6 Programme specifications clearly outline programme aims, teaching and assessment strategies, and benchmarks. Any changes to programmes must go through the appropriate validation processes. Both students and staff demonstrated an awareness of their requirements.

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

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



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

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

**Findings**

1.8 The College works with the University and Pearson's academic frameworks to govern how it awards their higher education qualifications. The validation processes of the University are outlined in the Validation Handbook and require the College to design programmes with reference to the relevant subject and qualification benchmarks. The Pearson specifications are designed with reference to the subject and qualification benchmarks, and the College's ability to deliver programmes at the appropriate standard. Comprehension of the Subject Benchmark Statements is tested during the validation process, as described in the BTEC Centre Guide to Managing Quality. This approach would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.9 To test the effectiveness of the approach the review team assessed a variety of documentation, including the Memorandum of Cooperation with the University, the Northampton Quality Assurance Framework and the BTEC Centre Guide to Managing Quality, and conducted meetings with staff and students.

1.10 The University Modular Framework defines University awards and their standards, which are communicated to both staff and students through programme specifications. Following a similar process, the standards of the College's Pearson provision are communicated in the relevant programme specifications.

1.11 The College's toolkit for higher education teachers communicates the role of programme specifications and assessment regulations to higher education teachers. The College also ensures that all new higher education staff undergo a teacher training diploma within their first two years at the College, which ensures that staff are prepared to deliver at an appropriate level.

1.12 Through meeting with staff and students, the review team confirmed that there is a strong working understanding of Subject Benchmark Statements and reference points for academic standards. Staff and students confirmed their understanding of where to find, and how to use, programme specifications for their intended purposes.

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

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.14 The College adheres to the regulations laid down by its awarding partners, which are set out in the University quality assurance handbook and Pearson's guide to quality. It is the University's responsibility to maintain programme specifications, and the College's responsibility to ensure they are available to students and used as a reference point for delivery. The University's Partnership Manager has a remit to ensure that operational matters are in line with the University's regulations. The processes used by the College would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.15 In testing this Expectation, the review team scrutinised relevant documentation, which included programme specifications and handbooks. The team also met staff from the College and representatives from the University.

1.16 Higher education programmes are overseen by the Higher Education Academic Board, chaired by the Principal and attended by the Director of Higher Education and academic staff involved in the delivery of higher education programmes. Responsibilities delegated to the College by the awarding body and organisation are laid out in the relevant policy documents.

1.17 The University provides specifications for all of its programmes delivered within the College and ensures that relevant Subject Benchmark Statements are addressed at validation. Changes to programme specifications must go through the University change-of-approval process. The College ensures that staff teaching on these programmes are aware of Subject Benchmark Statements through staff development. Programme and module specifications contain all relevant and up-to-date information relating to the qualification. An overview of courses is available on the website. The College has made the decision to implement the same system for programme specifications with Pearson programmes, which go through an internal programme approval process and are ultimately approved by the Higher Education Academic Board.

1.18 Course handbooks contain information on the programme structure, including its aims, outcomes, descriptions of modules, specifications and assessment methodology. Students stated to the review team that they know where to find this information. Students on University-validated courses have access to an online portal where programme specifications are available. Course handbook information is uploaded onto the College's virtual learning environment (VLE).

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

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.20 Course design follows the University's Modular Framework, and validations adhere to the University's Validation Handbook. The College must hold centre approval to deliver Pearson courses and follow the Pearson's guide to managing quality, although some of the requirements of the quality model are not required for level 4 and 5 courses. Pearson has standard specifications for their awards.

1.21 The respective responsibilities of the College and University are clearly defined and well understood. Internal scrutiny by the Higher Education Academic Board, which includes representation from the validating institute, precedes approval for development by the awarding body. The Higher Education Academic Board, chaired by the Principal, holds a central role in ensuring academic standards are maintained internally, and the school-level Quality Standards and Enhancement Committee, and Academic Quality and Standards Committee (AQSC) at the University are responsible for assuring the Senate that the standards and quality are maintained. The three senior lecturers have overall responsibility for adherence to benchmarks, which are used as reference point in the validation events, and the College has membership of AQSC. Similarly, the College adheres to validation processes detailed in the BTEC Centre Guide to Managing Quality and accompanying frameworks.

1.22 Validations and approval systems follow the prescribed processes of the validating partner and awarding body and there is externality in these systems. The University is responsible for the validation process of its courses, and reference to *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* and relevant subject and qualification benchmarks is intrinsic to the validation process, periodic subject review and the design of the Pearson awards. The University's Modular Framework is used. The Higher Education Academic Board plays a central role in approving the development of new courses from initial approval to recruitment. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.23 To test this approach the review team explored the programme approval process with senior staff at the College and the University, including the Partnership Manager, and scrutinised validation reports. This confirmed use of the relevant Subject Benchmark Statements, compliance with qualification frameworks and consideration of academic standards. Staff confirmed their understanding of the process, and reports on the academic standards for each programme are received annually from University-appointed external examiners.

1.24 New programmes are developed in accordance with the University guidelines and frameworks, with internal oversight afforded by the Higher Education Academic Board. Higher education-specific briefings are used to inform staff of the Quality Code, Subject Benchmark Statements and assessment, and the University provides support for staff developing new programmes. The College is an approved Pearson centre and adheres to the Pearson Centre Guide to Managing Quality; specifications are provided by Pearson

and standards, and quality assurance processes are reported on by Pearson-appointed external examiners.

1.25 All programmes validated by the University are required to undertake a University periodic subject review every five years. The Director of Quality Improvement and Student Support has responsibility for higher education quality in the College and reports to the Higher Education Academic Board, and a representative from the College sits on the University's Academic Quality and Standards Committee, which makes recommendations to the Senate. As part of the management of the partnership, the University undertakes an institutional re-approval process, which considers academic quality and standards via the Academic Audit and Review Committee, which also considers all external examiners' reports.

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

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

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.27 The College operates its own assessment code of practice, which is designed to complement those of both the University and Pearson to ensure assessments are subjected both to internal and external scrutiny. The BTEC Centre Guide to Assessment provides guidance for Pearson awards at levels 4 and 5. The College assessment strategies for other programmes are scrutinised during the validation and periodic subject reviews process, ensuring proposals align with the University's Assessment and Feedback Policy.

1.28 Regulations of the validating partner and awarding body are followed, and College staff are charged with ensuring assessments comply with the programme module specification and assessment policy for the appropriate school. The programme specifications give an overview of the assessment strategy, and the College uses the University's Modular Framework Staff Handbook document for module design, specification and assessment. Course handbooks and module specifications document the intended learning outcomes. All assessments must comply with the programme/module specification and the assessment policy for the relevant school. Assessments of University awards are made following the University's Assessment and Feedback Policy, and the BTEC Centre Guide to Assessment levels 4 to 7.

1.29 External examiners have oversight of the assessments. The College has its own principles of assessment that assure internal and external moderation, and this is also documented in the toolkit for higher education teachers, supported by staff development events. The template for assessments provides clear guidance for the students and indicates that internal scrutiny has taken place.

1.30 Assessment boards are organised and chaired by the University to ensure that decisions conform to the University's regulations. The College has approved the establishment of a Higher Education Assessment Board for Pearson awards.

1.31 The front sheet of the Pearson assessment, and the sample assignment front cover and moderation form, make explicit the specific objectives and what is being assessed, giving the candidates an opportunity to comment on the feedback received.

1.32 The Expectation was tested through meetings with staff and students, and the examination of external examiners' reports. Students were aware of the marking process and were satisfied with the quality of feedback, although feedback times do vary considerably.

1.33 Policies, procedures and regulations are clearly documented, and staff receive training and information on assessment to assure there is consistency. Learning outcomes are clearly articulated in module, programme specifications and assessment cover sheets. Assessment criteria and general grading criteria are published in module and course

handbooks, which are available for students via the VLE. The University organises all assessment boards for its awards. It is responsible for chairing these, and modules are reviewed annually. The recently instated Pearson Exam Board has overall scrutiny for the assessment of Pearson awards.

1.34 The review team found that policies are operated consistently to ensure that assessment is reliable and appropriate. Learning outcomes are clearly communicated and credit is awarded on achievement of these. The College adheres to the assessment and award regulations of the validating organisation. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

**Expectation (A3.3): 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**

1.35 The College's higher education provision validated by the University is subject to review every five years in accordance with the University's quality assurance framework. Periodic subject reviews at the University incorporate the College's provision when the selected subject is part of the College's portfolio. The University's approach to annual review requires reflection and analysis of data against institutional targets and sector comparator data to secure continual improvement of the student experience, learning and teaching, quality assurance, quality enhancement and standards. Institutional review occurs every five years, with the last one taking place in 2010.

1.36 Annual monitoring of all programmes occurs annually, the procedures for which are documented in the University's Annual Review Handbook. The Final Rolling Action Plan (FRAP), authored by the senior lecturer responsible for the area, includes annual module reviews and informs the institutional higher education review and its Quality Improvement Plan. The Director of Quality Improvement and Student Support has oversight of the subject Quality Improvement Plans, and the Higher Education Academic Board identifies College-level institutional actions and monitors progress.

1.37 The processes for programme review are clearly documented in the University guidelines, which are strictly adhered to. Annual monitoring is robust and periodic review occurs every five years. College staff are supported by the University Partnership Manager, who produces an annual report, and operational roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and well understood.

1.38 To test this approach, the review team examined the University's handbook on annual review and examples of annual module reviews, rolling action plans, Partnership Manager annual reports, and FRAPs. The review team also met senior staff, teaching staff and students, including representatives from the University to gain insight into how review processes operated at module, programme and institutional level.

1.39 There is a shared understanding of the monitoring and review processes, which are well established at course and programme level. The rolling action plans introduced in 2013-14 by the University are the main mechanisms for reviewing quality and standards, and feed into the FRAPs for the subject area. The College is adopting a similar annual process for its Pearson programmes. The College's Higher Education Academic Board has oversight of the accompanying Quality Improvement Plans and review of its higher education provision.

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

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

**Expectation (A3.4): 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**

1.41 The awards delivered by the College are validated by Pearson and the University, who are responsible for appointing external examiners under the College's partnership agreements. Under the agreement with the University, the College suggests appropriate subject-specific candidates. The role of externality at the University is clearly articulated in the University Periodic Subject Review Handbook, the University Validation Handbook and the external examiner explanatory notes, and involves external scrutiny of key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards. These processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.42 The review team explored a range of information to test this assertion, including the College's partnership agreements with both the University and Pearson. The team also met teaching staff, employers and senior staff, the latter including representatives from the University. The team also reviewed a number of external examiner reports.

1.43 External expertise is used in programme validation, periodic subject reviews and changes to existing programmes. This was confirmed in discussion with both the University and senior College staff, alongside employers, who all highlighted the use of feasibility studies and employer surveys to ensure commercial demand reflected the nature of their vocational delivery. The University link tutors also confirmed their role in establishing externality at programme level.

1.44 All programmes have external examiners chosen by their awarding body and organisation. External examiner reports seen by the review team were broadly positive and thorough, and included resulting action plans where appropriate, which feed into programme development.

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

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



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

1.46 In reaching its judgements about the maintenance of the academic standards of awards at the College, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.47 Overall, the College is effective in managing its responsibilities, in conjunction with its degree-awarding body and organisation, and is effective in maintaining academic standards.

1.48 From their scrutiny of a wide range of evidence, and through meetings with staff and students, the review team found that effective use is made of relevant subject and qualification benchmarks, and external expertise, in the development of programmes and their subsequent approval and monitoring. Furthermore, the review team confirms that effective use is made of input from external examiners and link tutors from the degree-awarding partners.

1.49 The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or other awarding organisations at the College **meets** UK expectations.

## 2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.1 The College follows the University's guidelines in respect to curriculum design and approval, and College procedures align with those of the University. The University's validation processes are designed against Expectation B1 of the Quality Code. For Pearson provision, the course team is responsible for the development of the documents required by Pearson as part of their validation procedure.

2.2 The University makes explicit its requirements in the Validation Handbook and is responsible for organising all aspects of the validation process. New course approval forms are received by the Higher Education Academic Board at the College, and the University's development approval form is approved by the relevant Dean of School at the University. The latter includes how the proposed course will fit with the University's strategic aims, including 'Raising the Bar'. The Partnership Manager provides a conduit between the University and the College, and is a member of the Higher Education Academic Board.

2.3 The College works closely with local employers and the Enterprise partnership to develop courses that respond to regional priorities and resonate with the College's portfolio and strategic aims. The Senior Leadership Team has strategic oversight for higher education provision at the College, and the Higher Education Academic Board, chaired by the Principal, is responsible for approving new curriculum proposals and reviewing the development of new courses from initial approval onwards. Additionally, the College has incorporated the use of the University's development approval form to ensure compliance with the second stage of the approval process by the University's management team.

2.4 There are clear processes in place for programme design and approval, which are well established and reflect a mature partnership with the University. The University provides support for staff with validation procedures, and roles and responsibilities are clearly defined. Externality is a requirement and there is evidence of employer involvement in curriculum design. New proposals and their underpinning rationale must align with both the College's Strategic Plans and those of the relevant school/University, and the operation of a two-stage approval for development must satisfy both. This approach would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.5 To test the College's approach, the review team met staff involved with programme design and review, including the senior lecturers and programme leader. The review team examined the outline planning document required for the first stage of approval internally via the Academic Board, the University Validation Handbook, validation reports, and the minor and major modification process that are operated.

2.6 An application for outline planning approval to the Academic Board is used in programme approval to ensure that its rationale, including market research and student demand, fit within the Strategic Plan. This form requires commentary on resources and evidence of employer involvement. The second stage for development requires approval by

University management at school level, and this considers the market and business case and alignment with the University's strategic aims. The College ensures there is compliance with this second stage. The University's procedures for validation detailed in the Validation Handbook are followed therein. Comprehensive validation reports, confirming external specialist membership of the panel, show detailed consideration of the proposal, including curriculum design, assessment and resources, with final approval obtained from the Senate.

2.7 The College is responsible for the development of all curriculum documentation, and receives advice and guidance from the University to ensure that the proposal fits with the University requirements. There is nomination of appropriate external advisers and panel members for areas in which the University does not have sufficient subject expertise; additionally, the College nominates a student representative. In subjects that the University does not have expertise, it appoints an external adviser to ensure that the proposal meets Subject Benchmark Statements and external requirements, and this report is scrutinised by the relevant Dean of School and quality officer. The Partnership Manager is responsible for operational support and amending the Operational Handbook.

2.8 Discussions with staff and representatives from the University showed that the respective roles and procedures for validation and programme modification are well understood and effective. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.9 The College has a clear Admissions Policy, which is informed by the College's Equality Policy. Undergraduate applications are made and processed through UCAS. Applications are referred to course tutors, who decide on an offer and communicate the decision to Student Services. Postgraduate students apply directly to the College following the University processes. The processes in place would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.10 In testing this Expectation, the review team scrutinised the Admissions Policy, other related documents and the website. The review team met students and a range of College staff and representatives from the University.

2.11 The College is responsible for recruiting students in accordance with University and Pearson requirements, and responsibilities are clearly outlined in partnership checklists.

2.12 A summary of each course, together with its entry requirements, is clearly set out on the website in the discrete higher education area, which also contains a search by subject facility. Applicants may apply online using the UCAS form, which is accessed through the website. An enquiry portal is available for applicants requiring further information before applying.

2.13 The Admissions Policy is thorough and fair. It is informed by the College's Equality Policy and sets out expectations for prospective students. Meetings with College staff confirmed that undergraduate applications are made through UCAS. Senior lecturers make a decision on giving an offer before informing Student Services, who then process the application. The College Operational Handbook outlines the admissions responsibilities of the College and University. Accreditation and recognition of prior learning are used where appropriate, following the relevant guidelines, and using a template provided by the University. Staff receive admissions training both in-house and externally.

2.14 The College treats all applicants as new students, and students who have progressed internally are subject to the same process as external applicants. Students the review team met stated they had an interview following attendance at an open day. Students reported that the interview was followed up by a verbal offer and a formal written offer. Unsuccessful applicants are sent a letter outlining the reasons for the decision. A central record of applications is held and the Senior Leadership Team monitors applications throughout the year.

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

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

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

### **Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching***

#### **Findings**

2.16 The College operates a broad College-wide Strategic Plan, alongside an higher education-specific Education Strategy, but the documents do not amount to a 'teaching and learning policy', although the College's strategic approach to learning and teaching is articulated in programme specifications. The College operates a number of mechanisms for the review and enhancement of learning opportunities and teaching practices through operations such as the College's Rolling Action Plan (RAP) and Final Rolling Action Plan (FRAP) systems, along with annual module reviews.

2.17 Given the lack of an overt teaching and learning policy it was not clear whether the College met the Expectation of a clear strategic approach to learning and teaching that guaranteed rigour in the pursuit of the enhancement of learning opportunities and teaching practices.

2.18 To explore this, the review team held a number of informative meetings with senior staff, teaching staff, the Principal and students. Furthermore, the team explored a range of external examiner reports, RAPs and FRAPs, alongside a variety of further evidence.

2.19 Given the nature of the College's provision, there is a strong focus on practical learning opportunities in all programmes. Students reflected positively on these opportunities. Employers met by the review team highlighted the good standards they encountered from the College's students. This focus on vocational opportunities is further enhanced by the College's Enterprise scheme, which enable students to learn practical employability skills as part of their learning experience at the College.

2.20 Students are provided with thorough programme handbooks, and programme and module specifications. The College operates a very thorough assessment cover sheet, which, if used promptly and effectively, would allow students to monitor their progress.

2.21 College teaching staff operate an open-door policy for students, and formal slots for individual/group tutorials are timetabled - a culture that both students and staff emphasised and appreciated.

2.22 Through the introduction of the College's Research Group and Research Knowledge Transfer Coordinator, and the strength of the College's relationship to the University, the College provides facilities and supervision for University PhD students. Although registered with the University, it was clear to the review team that these students benefited the College, with several positioned as associate lecturers at the College, and encouraged to use their doctoral research to help inform and enhance the learning of the College's students.

2.23 To evaluate the effectiveness of learning and teaching at the College, module questionnaires are used to inform annual module reviews. Progression statistics, student award outcomes and NSS data are used in the Annual Higher Education Review, which includes planned actions in response to feedback and data.

2.24 The College operates a RAP and FRAP system, the latter of which includes the work of annual module reviews. This system is used to disseminate good practice, and forms a large part of the Annual Higher Education Review. Teaching staff and senior staff were very positive about the benefits of this system and the improvements upon its previous incarnation. However, the review team could not establish how the College systematically monitored and ensured the improvement of teaching and learning at the College, rather than a scattered approach to broad improvement goals, something supported by the recurring themes discussed in the following paragraphs.

2.25 The College ensures that all staff new to higher education teaching undergo a teacher training diploma within their first two years at the College, thus ensuring staff are capable of teaching their subject specialism at the appropriate level.

2.26 The College operates a teachers' toolkit, which provides guidance for teaching staff. The review team was informed that the teachers' toolkit is enhanced through a process by which excellence in teaching is outlined through the weekly teachers' toolkit newsletter. The review team was informed of a number of additional operational measures in which the teacher training team operates, identifying themes for development, alongside both formal and informal observations; however, there appear to be no measures with which to monitor concrete improvements in the quality of teaching.

2.27 Despite these efforts, students highlighted concerns regarding the overuse and reliance of lecture slide software, problems regarding the timeliness of assignment feedback and staff turnover. Although students did identify examples of teaching excellence, it was regarded as variable by students met by the review team. This perception is supported by evidence from external examiner reports.

2.28 Concerns were also raised in the student submission to this report, and are referenced in external examiner reports, over feedback timeliness and thoroughness, including concerns over staff turnover resulting in staff teaching classes without appropriate knowledge. The students the review team spoke to reflected poorly on feedback. While some were informed that work was late and felt staff were working to rectify such occurrences, others reported waiting over two months without any information, despite the College's four-week turnaround promise. Staff recognised this area of concern and reported recent efforts to decrease assessment bunching, although the issue has remained a consistent area of concern in the NSS for the past three years.

2.29 Issues such as course organisation and the promptness of feedback have remained causes for concern across NSS feedback, and were highlighted by the students and the student submission. NSS results for these areas remained below 65 per cent for the last three years, failing to meet targets of 80 per cent with no steady signs of improvement. However, it should be added that overall course satisfaction stands at 75 per cent, a significant improvement on the past two years.

2.30 The review team **recommends** that the College implement a more rigorous method of establishing effective oversight of higher education teaching and learning that measures and continually improves its effectiveness.

2.31 Although the College has demonstrated a number of ways in which it articulates and systematically reviews the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices, there remain recurring issues around feedback to students. The review team concludes that, although the Expectation is met, there is a moderate level of associated risk.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Moderate**

**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**

2.32 The College operate a generic Higher Education Strategy, which prioritises support for students. The College Learning Resource Centre offers library services and IT facilities. Additionally, students undertaking University awards have access to the Careers, Education and Guidance Team at the University, alongside the Centre for Academic Practice, which offers a range of services related to the development and support of academic skills. The processes in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.33 To test the effectiveness of this approach, the review team explored this area through discussion with a range of staff and students, and examined documentation such as course handbooks and the College's Higher Education Strategy.

2.34 ASSIST is the College department responsible for student support. The Higher Education Learning Support Tutor is responsible for providing advice for disabled students, and assisting with disabled students' allowance claims. The College offers counselling, health and chaplain services. In addition to this support for students, College teaching staff operate an open-door policy for students, alongside formal slots for individual/group tutorials, which are timetabled. Both students and staff expressed their enthusiasm and appreciation of these arrangements. Students met by the review team commented particularly on the availability of pastoral support and its contribution to a 'family' environment.

2.35 The review team were informed of induction processes at the College, which included relevant induction for University-validated programmes. The student submission to this report indicated that students are not sufficiently aware of opportunities available to them at the University to be able to fully participate in them. This was particularly evident in the inconsistent participation of students in the University freshers' week activities. However, the review team heard from staff that students are informed verbally and that opportunities are detailed in handbooks.

2.36 Students are provided with thorough programme handbooks, which detail what is expected of them.

2.37 The College is involved in the Annual Student Welfare Conference, sponsored by the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare. The College, and two other colleges with similar animal sciences provision, host an annual conference in turn. Students are expected to present posters and talks with elements of competition, while also hearing from expert speakers. The College has recently implemented its own annual careers fair, featuring talks and workshops aimed at supporting students' personal and professional development.

2.38 The College's e-learning platform offers a variety of support resources, alongside information of the variety of support available at the College. Furthermore, the review team was informed of the broad adoption of electronic resources, including cases of Skype being used for students to receive learning support when attendance in person has not been possible.

2.39 Library services have recently identified focused student support needs and put together a package of academic-focused support services for areas, such as reading lists and referencing support.

2.40 The College operates a local awards scheme for graduates of the College who have demonstrated an additional skill in the completion of their award, both furthering students' personal development and helping in their employability by bringing attention to the range of skills they have developed.

2.41 The College operates a thorough five-year Property Strategy to manage the development of the College's extensive property portfolio, strengthening support services and accommodation, alongside the College's Enterprise scheme, enabling students to engage directly with sector-based learning and training through the College. Students reflected that resourcing for programmes was appropriate and were positive about the benefits of practical learning, a point further emphasised through discussions with employers who highlighted the high level of skills of the College students they encountered.

2.42 Furthermore, the review team was informed of employer involvement in programme design, industry placements and work experience, guest lectures and visits to industry. Employers were keen to highlight the industry readiness of the students they encountered. The review team considers the emphasis that the College places on employability skills to enable students to progress into industry to be a feature of **good practice**.

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

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



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

**Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student Engagement**

**Findings**

2.44 The College provides both formal and informal opportunities for students to engage with the deliberative structure, including student representation on committees and surveys. Student representatives provide feedback to staff and the Principal. The deliberate steps taken by the College to engage students would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.45 In testing this Expectation the review team scrutinised policies that inform student representation and minutes of meetings that include student representatives. The team also met staff from the College, including the Principal, and representatives from the University and students.

2.46 There are a variety of ways in which students engage with the College. Each course has a student representative, and training is given by the College throughout the year starting in October of each academic year. The student submission to this report states that the College encourages student representation, and gives examples of where the student voice has been acted upon. Students the review team met confirm that the College responds effectively to their views. An example was given of a request by students for a social space, which was authorised and improvements in timetables. Information to students is disseminated through student representatives or by email and social media.

2.47 A list of committees that offer student participation demonstrates that students engage throughout the deliberative structure. Staff substantiate that the student voice is important to the College and students are involved in a number of committees. Course handbooks, which all follow the same template, include a section outlining ways in which student engagement is welcomed.

2.48 The College is committed to improving the student experience and has set up a Higher Education Student Experience Committee, chaired by the Principal, which meets three times a year. The terms of reference for the Committee outline overall responsibility for all aspects of the student experience, including enhancement of the student experience. Committee reports are received by the Higher Education Academic Board. Students confirm that these meetings are effective.

2.49 Students are elected to the Higher Education Academic Board, which is chaired by the Principal. Terms of reference describe responsibility for scrutinising new programme proposals, the development of new courses and overall reviewing of academic performance. Minutes of Higher Education Academic Board committee meetings show they are well attended by students.

2.50 Students are involved in module and programme reviews, which are aggregated into Rolling Action Plans (RAPs) and an area Final Rolling Action Plan, which include student feedback. The RAP process is outlined in the University procedure handbook. Students are involved in validation procedures in accordance with University regulations; an example was given of student views being sought for a geographical information system course.

2.51 The College welcomes informal student representation given through the open-door policy of academic staff. Students state staff are helpful and accessible. In addition to the NSS, the College issues surveys. The response level cited in the student submission to this

report is low and does not refer to an induction survey. In response to this degree of engagement, the College acknowledged that it plans to improve student engagement in its Quality Improvement Plan.

2.52 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated 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**

2.53 The College's code of practice for higher education assessment is designed to support the University Assessment and Feedback Policy and the BTEC guidelines on assessment. This code stipulates that assessments for each module must be reviewed each year and amended as necessary. Front sheets to assessment inform students of the learning outcomes and this has been extended to those for Pearson awards. Senior lecturers are responsible for assessments, including marking and moderation, and exams are organised by University staff.

2.54 The University Modular Framework Staff Handbook provides comprehensive information on assessment framework, regulations and grade criteria for levels of study, and the College's assessment code of practice provides information on marking and moderation. Staff are supported by staff development sessions on marking and moderation and have electronic access to these sources of information.

2.55 Assessments are documented in module guides, which detail how grades are awarded and calculated, alongside the expected learning outcomes. Assessment grades are recorded on student trackers maintained by the Curriculum Administration.

2.56 Managers and grades are submitted to the University student administration team within four weeks of the assignment submission date. Clear records of assessment were noted for the level 4 Pearson award.

2.57 There is guidance on the accreditation of prior learning for the University and all decisions on awarding credit for prior learning are made by the University Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL) panel, in accordance with the University's APEL Policy. For the College's other provision, Pearson provides guidance through its recognition of prior learning policy document to support the College's own policy.

2.58 The College operates academic integrity policies for both University and Pearson provision and has its own plagiarism policy, and this is communicated through course handbooks for University-validated courses.

2.59 The College's assessment code of practice provides assessment guidance for students with additional learning needs and consultation with the Higher Education Learning Support Tutor. The Operational Guide offers clarification on respective responsibilities and support for applicants with additional learning needs.

2.60 Assessment Boards for the University-validated awards are constituted and administered in accordance with the published guidance and regulations. For Pearson courses the College has established an examination board with its own regulations that meets the requirements of the awarding bodies.

2.61 The assessment policies, regulations and processes are clear, ensuring assessment is transparent, equitable and fair. The University Modular Framework provides

guidance on hours of study, grade criteria and assessment tariffs to assist assessment design. Marking and moderation are consistently adhered to, and this is endorsed by the external examiner reports. The review team found that this approach would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.62 The review team tested the policies and procedures by scrutinising documentation including the College Operational Handbook, codes of practice, and external examiners' and the Pearson moderator report, and discussed the operation of assessment with staff.

2.63 The assessment processes and documentation ensure that the assessments are reliable and fair, and that policies and regulations governing assessment are published. External examiners have access to moderator files and to the VLE and plagiarism-detection software to scrutinise double-marked assignments. Their report specifically seeks commentary on the assessment strategy and often reports positively on the quality of feedback, which is endorsed by the students the team met. The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy is reflected on annually through the module review process completed by the module leader.

2.64 There is some inconsistency in the detail of the Final Rolling Action Plans for two of the subject areas that review Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategies, and student feedback with reference to NSS data on assessment and feedback in one. Grade return does feature in the Rolling Action Plan for 2014-15 for Applied Animal Studies and Equine, although there is no accompanying action.

2.65 The College operates a four-week working deadline for the return of marked work, but dissatisfaction with the timeliness of student feedback of coursework expressed in the student submission to this report was confirmed in meetings with students during the review. Timeliness of feedback was also highlighted in the NSS task and finish pledges. The review team was unable to find evidence of monitoring progress of this pledge and it was not audited formally; it did not feature in the Quality Improvement Plan for 2014-15. However, students commented favourably on the quality of feedback, which also featured as an NSS pledge.

2.66 The College has recently started to publish assessment schedules, and staff development has focused on assessment design and loading, but it is too early to assess the effectiveness of this on the timeliness of feedback.

2.67 Assessment expectations are transparent and clearly communicated to students with opportunities in the monitoring and review processes to reflect on assessment practices. The effective use of the moderation processes is evident through the external examiners' reports. The review team found that, overall, the approach to assessment is rigorous and robust, and the policies and procedures employed are well understood. However, the published four-week deadline for the return of marked work is not consistently adhered to or systematically monitored. The review team **recommends** that the College ensure that students receive timely feedback in accordance with the College's guidelines.

2.68 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met. However, as the College requires a more formal mechanism to implement guidelines and ensure the return of assessment feedback, the associated level of risk is moderate.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Moderate**

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

**Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining**

**Findings**

2.69 As the College does not have degree awarding powers itself; external examiners are appointed to each higher education programme by either the University or Pearson as per the Memoranda of Cooperation. Due to the nature of provision validated by the University, the College recommends appropriate candidates to the University. The responsibilities of this process are clearly articulated in the external examiner explanatory notes. For Higher National programmes, Pearson's external examiners undertakes annual visits, considering and reviewing the quality of assessment planning, the validity of the assessment decisions and the consistency of the assessment process. A report following a standard template is produced. This approach would enable the College to meet the Expectation.

2.70 To assess this approach the review team reviewed a variety of documentation. Of primary importance were a selection of external examiner reports and the external examiner explanatory notes, alongside meetings with students, senior staff and teaching staff to confirm that the process evidenced was working in practice.

2.71 The University of Northampton Academic Quality and Standards Committee is responsible for ensuring that appropriate systems are in place for the nomination, appointment and reporting of external examiners. The guidelines and expectations for external examiners are clearly communicated in the University external examiner handbook. Pearson Assessment Board regulations outline the role of external examiners.

2.72 All programmes have external examiners chosen by their awarding bodies. The external examiner reports seen by the review team were positive and thorough, including resulting action plans where appropriate. External examiner reports are discussed with students at course level as part of a Rolling Action Plan process and the reports filter into the Higher Education Annual Review.

2.73 Once the College receives external examiner reports, they are disseminated to students via the VLE; this was confirmed by both students and staff. Staff met by the review team reported that students met external examiners; however, none of the students met by the review team had met an external examiner.

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

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.75 The University's Annual Review Handbook details requirements at module, programme and school level. The Final Rolling Action Plan (FRAP) is considered at the University's school Quality Forum, which is attended by College staff. The College has membership on University-level committees, such as the Academic Quality and Standards Committee, and the Academic Audit and Review Committee. This supports communication between the University's Partnership Manager and the College. The University review processes include periodic subject review on a five-yearly cycle, with programmes grouped in subject areas, as identified by the schools. The College has fully adopted the annual monitoring and review processes of the University and has extended it to programmes outside of the University's remit to those awarded by Pearson. External examiner reports received by the University are circulated to College staff, including the Director of Quality Improvement and Student Support, and the higher education programme leader. The senior lecturers are responsible for ensuring these reports are considered by teams, and a response is sent to the Deputy Dean at the relevant University school, who makes a formal response. The Director of Quality Improvement and Student Support also receives external examiner reports for the Pearson awards. This validating body appoints subject-specific experts to sample assessed work and provide judgements on the provision, reporting both to the College and to Pearson.

2.76 Continuous monitoring occurs through Rolling Action Plan (RAPs), with FRAPs forming part of the Higher Education Review. Progress from these and the Quality Improvement Plans is monitored by the Higher Education Academic Board. Quality Improvement plans are initiated at course level, with an overview at Director level and strategic oversight provided by the Higher Education Academic Standards Committee.

2.77 All programmes undergo annual monitoring, and periodic review occurs every five years. The procedures for annual course and periodic review are described in the University's documents and staff handbooks. The Annual Higher Education Review draws on reports and responses to external examiners' reports from the senior lecturer responsible for subject areas (as identified in the IQER action plan) to provide an overview of its provision and identify areas for improvement. This is documented in a higher education Quality Improvement Plan and monitored by the Higher Education Academic Board, and an annual report is submitted to the Quality and Standard Subcommittee of the Governing Body. As part of this annual review, academic standards are assessed by reference to external examiner reports and relevant reports, and data for RAPs is supplied by the University. The Director of Quality Improvement and Student Support, who reports to the Principal, holds an institutional overview of Quality Improvement Plans. This approach would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.78 To test this approach the review team examined a range of documents and policies, including the University's quality assurance framework and the Annual Review Handbook for the School of Science and Technology and the College. In meetings with staff, annual review and monitoring were discussed to assess understanding, and the processes and samples of College RAPs and FRAPs were examined.

2.79 The academic staff that the review team met were familiar with the monitoring and review processes and viewed the practices as important in enhancing quality. The RAPs and FRAPs document set targets for admissions and student performance data, including progression and retention, reviews of learning and teaching, and external examiners' reports. There is evidence of student engagement in meetings considering the RAP including students' union representation from the University. Strategic oversight of the Pearson external examiner reports is held by the Directorship, and the College has recognised the need to incorporate review of these new courses into its overarching Higher Education Annual Review. There are reciprocal arrangements to ensure operational effectiveness, with senior staff attending school and University-level quality committees, attendance at Senate by the College Principal, and University membership on the Governing Body. The Quality and Standards Subcommittee of the Board receives an annual report and strengthens strategic oversight.

2.80 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated 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: Assuring and Enhancing Academic Quality**

**Findings**

2.81 The College has a clear complaints policy, which is available to students and signposted in handbooks, which are uploaded to the VLE. Complaints are initially dealt with informally by College staff. Academic appeals follow the University's appeal processes. Pearson's appeals process is outlined in the Centre Assessment Guide. The procedures in place would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.82 To test this Expectation the review team scrutinised policies and handbooks, and corroborated evidence through meeting College staff and students.

2.83 The College has its own complaints procedure, which is in line with the Quality Code. This deals with non-academic complaints and clearly sets out the procedure to be followed when making a complaint. Students met by the review team verified that they understood how to make a complaint. Complaints are made initially informally through the course tutor or manager. Course handbooks advise that the first point of contact is the course tutor. Students confirm that staff are readily available and helpful. Complaints not settled in this manner become formal complaints and are recorded by the Director of Quality Improvement and Student Support. A log of complaints and associated outcomes is presented to the College's Board of Governors.

2.84 The University publishes its Academic Appeal Policy on its website and this is made available to Company students through the portal on its own website. The College Operational Handbook outlines the basis for appeals. Students may appeal for mitigation but not against the grade. Complainants are informed of the outcome by the College.

2.85 Handbooks signpost appeals procedures. The Pearson Centre Assessment Guide outlines appeals procedures. Students on these programmes follow the College's Academic Appeals Policy, with initial representations made to relevant academic staff on the programme. Students are aware of the appeals procedures and know where to find the relevant information.

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

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



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

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

**Findings**

2.87 The College offers work-based learning on some programmes, which are supported by the provision of a Work Placement Handbook for both students and employers. The College and validating bodies' responsibilities are clearly communicated through the College's partnership agreements with the University and Pearson. Foundation students can undertake a formal work placement as part of their award, and degree students have the opportunity to work at one of the College's commercial enterprises. The College operates a formal work experience and work placement agreement. Employers highlighted the benefits of these placements and the quality of the students they worked with, and the value added to their education. This approach would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.88 To test this approach, the review team held meetings with employers, senior staff, teaching staff and students. The team examined a variety of evidence, including the College's Work Placement Handbook, and Health and Safety Agreement for work-based learning.

2.89 The College operates a clear and strategic relationship with its validating partners, which is firmly secured through the appropriate Memoranda of Cooperation, and was further emphasised during meetings with University representatives, senior staff and the Principal. The clarity of this relationship enables the College to capitalise on the vocational strengths of its provision and support a wide range of work experience opportunities for students.

2.90 Students receive feedback from their employers, which is then filtered into their assessment through the process of reflection on their own development.

2.91 The Work Placement Handbook covers the responsibilities of the College, the employer and the student, and includes a Work Experience Agreement and a Health and Safety Agreement. The documentation for student placements is straightforward, and includes information about health and safety. However, the review team found the information to be generic, with no course-specific focus. The interaction between staff and those employers who offered placements was informal and variable, but despite this, the reports from employers were very positive.

2.92 While the programme leader approves all placements, there was no evidence of how the College ensures the effectiveness of student learning opportunities while on placement. While the review team's meetings with employers were positive, the team could not ensure that this was systematically assured.

2.93 From meetings with employers and students, the review team was not assured that employers understood students' academic needs. The review team **recommends** that the College introduce a more systematic approach to the management of work placements to more effectively deliver learning opportunities.

2.94 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met. However, due to the informality of its arrangements, the associated level of risk is moderate.

**Expectation: 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**

2.95 The College does not itself award research degrees. As part of its relationship with the University, it provides facilities and supervision for research students. The students are registered with the University, and processes relating to their enrolment and supervision follow the University's regulations. Individual programmes of study are approved by the University's Research Degree Committee. This arrangement provides opportunities and the support that research students need to achieve successful academic, personal and professional outcomes from their degrees, and would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.96 In testing this Expectation the review team scrutinised the Research Group terms of reference and other relevant documentation. The review team met staff, including postgraduate students and supervisors to discuss the process.

2.97 The College has emphasised the importance of research within its Higher Education Strategy. It has introduced a Research Group comprising the Principal and other senior staff. This group oversees research within the College and assesses funding opportunities, as well as promoting research within the College.

2.98 Part of the group's remit is to provide supervision for research students. To fulfil its responsibilities, the College has appointed a Research and Knowledge Transfer Coordinator. The post-holder has primary responsibility for developing and promoting research within the College and is also a member of the University Research Degrees Committee.

2.99 There are 12 research students within the College, six of whom are also associate lecturers within the College. This enables them to use their doctoral information to inform their teaching. Doctoral students are appointed a mentor, and meet at the College and at the University. A research degree supervisor toolkit outlines the responsibilities for supervisors. Staff who assume the role of supervisor within the College receive training at the University, and attend development and operational meetings. An amount of remission is available to staff acting as supervisors for research students.

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

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

## The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.101 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.

2.102 Overall, the Expectations in this area are met with low risk, with the exception of Expectations B3 and B10, where the risk posed was judged to be moderate.

2.103 Recommendations associated with Expectations B3 and B10 concern the implementation of a more rigorous method of establishing effective oversight of higher education teaching and learning that measures and continually improves its effectiveness, timely student feedback, and a more formal approach to the management of work placements to build on the effective informal arrangements currently in operation.

2.104 The review team also identified good practice in the emphasis the College places on employability skills to enable students to progress into industry. This was evident throughout the higher education curriculum, and was appreciated by both students and employers.

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

### 3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

**Expectation (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 main sources of information for the public and prospective students are the higher education prospectus and College website. The website is easy to navigate and has a discrete higher education area, and provides useful information for the public. The VLE provides an effective source of information for current students. It is populated with course-related information, including the course handbook. The information produced would enable the Expectation to be met.

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

3.3 The College website is an effective source of information for the public and prospective students, with an overview of courses, entry requirements and progression opportunities. There is a discrete higher education page that outlines the courses on offer, stating they are validated by the University of Northampton. A link is available to the University's website for further information. The Operational Handbook describes procedures for materials using the University's logo. Course-specific pages have links to specifications, which are available for download. Most students the review team met were clear about who awarded their qualification and stated that information received before beginning their course was accurate.

3.4 The prospectus mirrors the information on the website and students were satisfied with the amount of information it contained. There is a clear process for compiling the prospectus. Final decisions about courses are made by December, then the content is confirmed by the Director of Employer Engagement and Marketing, and the Director of Curriculum and Planning. A final draft is sent to the University for approval prior to final sign-off.

3.5 Course handbooks are an effective source of information for current students. Course handbooks follow the University's template and are used for all courses. They are put together by course leaders and overseen by the relevant programme leader before being checked and signed off by the Assistant Director of Curriculum. The College has an effective process for ensuring that information is accurate and has recently produced an updated version of its information protocol to ensure the robustness and accuracy of information provided.

3.6 All students receive a College induction, which includes general College information, including support available and information on the awarding body. Other sources of information include noticeboards, leaflets, tutor dissemination and the Learning Resource Centre, which provides information on learning skills.

3.7 The College's VLE is well used and provides useful information for students, including external examiner reports. It is a central repository for all course-related information. There is a minimum content expectation for uploading course information, which is generally exceeded by staff.

3.8 A Work Placement Handbook and course information is given to employers. Employers the review team met expressed mixed responses to information received.

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

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

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

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

3.11 The review team scrutinised a range of documentation (both published in hard copy and electronic versions) made available to prospective, current and former students and other stakeholders.

3.12 Overall, the review team found that the College has considered the formal requirements, and can demonstrate its compliance with, the Expectation. The College has approval mechanisms in place for ensuring that published information is accurate.

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

## 4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

### Findings

4.1 The College takes deliberate steps to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities. It distinguishes between responsive quality enhancement and developmental enhancement to support its culture of continual improvement, using the student voice to inform its higher education provision. The monitoring and review processes, alongside activities such as peer observation, teaching and learning events and student surveys, support this approach. This would enable the Expectation to be met.

4.2 In testing this approach the review team analysed a range of evidence and met a variety of staff, students and employers.

4.3 There is a strategic aspiration to achieve outstanding learning and teaching across both the College's higher and further education provision. The new management structure, and the appointment of the Director of Quality Improvement and Student Support, are central to this. Staff are expected to obtain teaching qualifications. In the absence of a higher education learning and teaching strategy, teaching observations, using a core team of observers, are important to supporting the College's strategic goal. This is supported by the appointment of teaching and learning coaches, with a specific remit to promote excellence in teaching, learning and assessment practice.

4.4 Approaches to learning and teaching are discussed at the Senior Leadership Team meetings, and the review team gained insight into what the College feels are its priorities. The systems in place facilitate improvement in teaching on an individual basis, and observations, which are developmental in nature and are not graded, are considered within the process of staff appraisal. The further development of the existing software system for recording observations will strengthen the identification of common themes for staff development activities. Good practice within the College is currently identified through peer observation and learning walks, and is discussed at informal, regular meetings between the three senior lecturers and the programme leader. This is linked to cross-institutional training requirements, which draw on the University's training programme. A fortnightly teaching newsletter, managed by the teacher training team, contributes to sharing good practice.

4.5 Through the University's URB@N project, students participate in a pedagogic research project with their tutors. These have focused on flipped learning, student employability and the awareness of environmental sustainability.

4.6 The systematic monitoring and review cycle, and the staff-student liaison at extended rolling plan meetings, provide a clear means of considering the enhancement of learning opportunities. These processes are well embedded, efficient and timely, and institutional actions are captured in an overarching institutional Quality Improvement Plan. However, it is not always clear how these quality assurance processes have led to specific improvements in the student learning opportunities, such as the timeliness of feedback, highlighted in the student submission to this report, at student meetings and through the NSS, and to overall satisfaction.

4.7 Senior staff met during the review showed a clear commitment to improving learning opportunities, citing many examples that reflect consideration of enhancement at a strategic level. Good channels of communication with the University allow the College to

engage with transformational initiatives, such as Creative Aligned Interactive Education Resource Opportunities, and curriculum alignment with the University's Strategic Plan, Raising the Bar.

4.8 Visits, live projects and guest lectures from employers are all used to ensure currency and a sector/industry-relevant curriculum through which students can gain the necessary skills and attributes for employment. The College also operates a compulsory certificate scheme for its graduates, furthering employability and personal development planning. However, based on feedback from students, the certificate will be replaced with emphasis on the more highly valued commercial experience linked to specific course assessment; a commercial experience framework has been agreed. The College's commercial enterprises are valued by both students and staff as a resource to support teaching.

4.9 Research is seen as pivotal to the College's higher education ethos. There is an institutional commitment to build on opportunities for research, consultancy and supporting staff publications, and wider dissemination of research outputs. Oversight is provided by the Research Group, a subcommittee of the Academic Board, and an annual report on research is submitted to the Board.

4.10 Quality enhancement is embedded in the annual quality monitoring review cycle and through course development, which are systematic and well understood. Research is encouraged by the College and the strategic importance of these aspects is evidenced by reports to the Board. The student voice and engagement with initiatives are important to the College's approach to enhancement, and the introduction of the Student Experience Committee is seen by students as being effective. Student engagement with other enhancement initiatives is variable, and students the review team met attribute this to issues with communication.

4.11 Good practice is identified through peer observation of teaching, learning walks, moderation events, annual monitoring and review, and external examiners' reports. While ambitious targets are set in action plans, such as overall student satisfaction, these are not always achieved, and milestones on progress with College-wide initiatives are not always detailed in these action plans.

4.12 The review team examined the Higher Education Strategy, which documents the College's aspirations and key principles supporting its vision, together with the College's documented approach to quality enhancement, and cross-referenced this to outcomes of meetings with both staff and students. The review team read Higher Education Academic Board meeting minutes and the College's own review of higher education for 2013-14, subject Final Rolling Action Plans (FRAPs), and Quality Improvement Plans. Staff operating at different levels within the College were questioned on their understanding of enhancement in the context of the College's higher education provision, and views from both teaching and support staff were sought.

4.13 The review team were informed that the Rolling Action Plans (RAPs) introduced by the University in 2013-14 are seen as the main mechanism for enhancing quality at course level, and FRAPs provide an annual report for the subject areas with Quality Improvement Plans.

4.14 In meetings with staff, the review team was advised that the RAPs, combined with the observation process, including learning walks and the ensuing Quality Improvement Plans, were means of achieving enhancement. The College does not have a discrete learning and teaching strategy, but staff were able to describe how teaching observations identify themes that are used to inform staff development. A cross-institutional report on quality and standards is submitted to the Board of Governors and teaching is discussed at



senior leadership level. The monitoring and review processes, combined with criteria for course design and approval, are well understood, as are operational practices that support a strategic approach to enhancement articulated in the Higher Education Strategy and the College's approach to quality enhancement.

4.15 The College identified limited improvement in its NSS scores in 2014 and set targets to have all satisfaction scores above 80 per cent in 2015. Despite student focus group meetings, and task and finish group pledges, it has not achieved this.

4.16 The College is taking deliberate steps to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities, and operational quality processes are well embedded and used to inform its approaches. Where elements of practice are identified as requiring improvement, steps are taken, but the efficacy of these actions is not always reflected on transparently.

4.17 There is a clear ethos of continual improvement and opportunities in the quality assurance cycle to identify enhancement. Staff were able to articulate a number of initiatives and examples of enhancement, but there is scope to integrate these further into a more systematic approach. Ambitious targets have been set for student satisfaction, and progress and milestones can be articulated more clearly in the well-defined monitoring and review process.

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

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

## The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

4.20 The review team judged that the one Expectation in this area is met with a low level of associated risk.

4.21 The review team determined that the College takes deliberate steps to enhance the quality of students' learning opportunities.

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

## 5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

### Findings

5.1 Given the vocational nature of programmes at the College, the review team found a variety of evidence, through discussions with senior staff, employers and students, which supported the College's focus on employability.

5.2 The College emphasised the use of external expertise in programme design and review through feasibility studies, employer surveys and conversations with experts to ensure the commercial demand and practical benefits of programmes, which reflected the nature of their vocational delivery.

5.3 Foundation students are able to undertake a formal work placement as part of their award, and degree students have the opportunity to work at one of the College's commercial enterprises. The College operates a formal work experience and work placement agreement. Employers highlighted the benefits of these placements and the quality of the students they worked with, and the value added to their education.

5.4 The College operates a local awards scheme for graduates who have demonstrated additional skill in the completion of their award, both furthering students' personal development and helping in their employability by bringing attention to the range of skills they have developed.

5.5 Some programmes use personal reflective statements in their assessments to offer students the chance to reflect on what they have learned and achieved at the College, with the aim of allowing students to communicate their assets to employers.

5.6 The College has recently implemented its own annual careers fair, featuring talks and workshops aimed at supporting students' personal and professional development. However, the review team did not speak with any students who had attended.

5.7 Courses at the College operate a variety of employability-based visits to commercial enterprises, guest lectures and the use of active working dissertations to support the vocational nature of programmes, alongside allowing students to gain insight into a variety of areas of employment. Furthermore, external examiner reports were positive about the industry relationships the College had.

5.8 Employers highlighted the strength of careers advice on offer to students who were described as 'Worldly, wise and [who] must get good careers advice'.

5.9 Integral to the College's approach to employability is the Enterprise initiative. The College operates a number of businesses that work in tandem with its education focus. The commercial enterprises the College operate are the Animal Therapy Centre, Sports Therapy and Rehabilitation Centre, Equestrian Centre, Equine Therapy Centre, Moulton College Farm and Moulton College Garden Centre. These are business-focused enterprises, but are linked to higher education programmes through the provision of real work-based education and training, allowing students to gain experience in the field while they study. The College is currently looking to expand its delivery to meet local and regional industrial needs. Both students and staff highlighted these are core benefits to the teaching and learning on offer at the College.

## 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 29 to 32 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](http://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](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Pages/GlossaryEN.aspx).

### Academic standards

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

### Award

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

### Blended learning

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

### Credit(s)

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

### Degree-awarding body

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

### Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

### Dual award or double award

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

### e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning

### **Enhancement**

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

### **Expectations**

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

### **Flexible and distributed learning**

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

See also **distance learning**.

### **Framework**

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

### **Framework for higher education qualifications**

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

### **Good practice**

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

### **Learning opportunities**

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

### **Learning outcomes**

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

### **Multiple awards**

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

### **Operational definition**

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

### **Programme (of study)**

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

### **Programme specifications**

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

### **Public information**

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

### **Quality Code**

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

### **Reference points**

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

### **Subject Benchmark Statement**

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

### **Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)**

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

### **Threshold academic standard**

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

### **Virtual learning environment (VLE)**

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

### **Widening participation**

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

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Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB

Tel: 01452 557 000  
Email: [enquiries@qaa.ac.uk](mailto:enquiries@qaa.ac.uk)  
Website: [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)

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