Higher Education Review of Warwickshire College

December 2015

Contents

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Warwickshire College, which took place from 8 to 10 December 2015 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Ann Hill
- Bob Saynor
- James Coe (student reviewer)

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

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

The College had recently been granted foundation degree awarding powers (FDAP) by the Privy Council following detailed scrutiny of the College's application by QAA, which included consideration of the setting and maintenance of academic standards and the quality of student learning opportunities. Consequently, this review focused exclusively on the two judgement areas of information provided about higher education provision and the enhancement of student learning opportunities, together with commentaries on three expectations contributing to the quality of student learning opportunities.

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 3. Explanations of the findings are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 6.

In reviewing Warwickshire College the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland. The themes for the academic year 2015-16 are Student Employability and Digital Literacy,[2] and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process. The QAA website gives more information about QAA and its mission.[3] A dedicated section explains the method for Higher Education Review[4] and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents. For an explanation of terms see the glossary at the end of this report.

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[1] The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/quality-code.
[2] Higher Education Review themes:
www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2859.
[3] QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us.
[4] Higher Education Review web pages:
www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Warwickshire College

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

- 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 Warwickshire College.

- The carefully tailored provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices, to enable students to develop as independent reflective learners (Expectation B3 and Enhancement).
- The use of industrial advisers, the range of staff occupational expertise and links with professional networks, which contribute to the enrichment of the student learning experience and promote employability (Expectations B3 and B6).
- The comprehensive and effective pre-entry and induction information, which signals the College's focus on employability (Expectation C).
- Higher education student symposia, which develop understanding of employability, entrepreneurship activity and opportunities for further study (Enhancement).

Recommendations

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

By June 2016:

- implement clearer procedures for the identification and monitoring of key actions resulting from the annual course review process (Expectation B8)
- establish and implement a specified minimum level of teaching and learning content for each programme area to be available on the students' virtual learning environment (Expectation C).

By September 2016:

- develop an approach to e-learning that is appropriately resourced, with ownership across the College, and which is embedded in a wider learning and teaching strategy (Expectation B3)
- incorporate consideration of National Student Survey (NSS) results alongside other data sources to inform planning and decision-making more effectively (Enhancement, Expectations B3, B6 and C).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The introduction of common academic study skills and professional development modules into higher education awards that equip students with relevant academic skills (B3).
- The introduction of a range of mechanisms to consult with staff and students, which inform the annual programme monitoring and review processes (B8).

Theme: Student Employability

The College's approach to employability is articulated in its Higher Education Student Employability Statement, and at a strategic level it employs a 'T-Shaped employability framework', designed to bring together a breadth of capabilities and qualities with a depth of technical competence through developing four core entrepreneurial behaviours: self-efficacy, social skills, technical competence and enterprise. The model is operationalised through curriculum teams, promoted through the Academic Study Skills and Entrepreneurial Thinking Module, and reflected through the College's tutorial policy, five year plan, and higher education student induction. The range of programmes offered by the College has an emphasis on developing student employability skills, with many courses providing work-based placement learning. Employers were unanimously enthusiastic about their relationship with the College. Students are encouraged to reflect on their employability skills through mechanisms such as a regular higher education symposium, and students themselves feel that these have a positive impact on their employability skills.

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

About Warwickshire College

Warwickshire College Group describes itself as 'a large mixed economy further education (FE) college with an annual turnover of £48 million'. The total student population of Warwickshire College numbers approximately 13,000, including 1,100 higher education students. 94 per cent of higher education students are directly funded and approximately 59 per cent of higher education students are full-time.

The origins of the Group date back to 1996 when Warwickshire College, Royal Leamington Spa and Moreton Morrell was incorporated following the merger of the then Mid-Warwickshire College (in Leamington Spa) and the Warwickshire Institute of Equine, Agriculture and Horticulture (in Moreton Morrell). The Group now comprises six centres.

Royal Leamington Spa College offers higher education provision in art and design, business, computing, early years, health and care, counselling and teacher training. Moreton Morrell College remains a specialist land-based centre, providing a wide range of higher education courses in equine studies, animal science and veterinary nursing. Warwick Trident College was built in 2004 to provide specialist engineering facilities following Warwickshire College being designated the only Pathfinder Centre of Vocational Excellence in General Engineering. Trident has maintained excellent employer support since its launch and continues to benefit from local industry investment through sponsorship of specialist equipment and the location of specialist training facilities. Higher education provision at Trident is concentrated on engineering foundation degrees, the majority of which are delivered as part of degree apprenticeships and not Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) funded. Rugby College merged with Warwickshire College in 2004 to improve the quality of opportunities for young people in Rugby, and provides opportunities for higher education provision in engineering, computing and business. The fifth centre is located at Henley-in-Arden College, a former school purchased by the Group in 2004 to provide specialist sports facilities including extensive outdoor playing areas. A related suite of foundation degrees is available, delivering applied management in spa, beauty therapies

and hairdressing. The Pathfinder Centre is scheduled to close in October 2016, and the provision will be transferred to other colleges within The Warwickshire College Group. Pershore College is the newest addition to the Group, having merged in August 2007; higher education provision at Pershore includes horticulture and veterinary nursing.

The College's vision is encapsulated in its current Higher Education Strategy, identifying four key areas: the planned growth of higher education provision with targets to ensure progression from further education, a focus on non-traditional education routes into higher education, expansion of scholarly activity and research and a distinctive approach to the enhancement agenda. The College Group has developed a comprehensive set of guiding principles for its higher education provision and this is supported by recent and ongoing investment in its estate.

The appointment of a new Principal and Chief Executive in April 2015 followed a brief period of interim management after the departure of the previous Principal, who had been in post since 2011; this change in leadership has coincided with substantial funding reductions within further education and, taken together, these have contributed to a number of changes in College management. A well established discrete higher education committee structure is a distinctive feature of the College. Challenges currently facing the College include the bedding down of the new structures and further operationalisation of these structures, strategies and policies, as well as student number fluctuations.

The College works with six external higher education awarding bodies: Pearson Education and five university partners, Coventry University and the University of Warwick representing the majority of the provision together with Birmingham City University, the University of Gloucestershire and the University of Worcester. These collaborative partnerships are managed and monitored by the Higher Education Management Team through a variety of mechanisms appropriate to the differing nature of the relationships.

In 2011, a QAA Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review found confidence in the management and delivery of the standards of the awards Warwickshire College offers on behalf of its awarding bodies; confidence in the quality of the learning opportunities provided by Warwickshire College, as required by its awarding bodies; and reliance on the accuracy and completeness of the information that the College is responsible for publishing about itself and the programmes it delivers. The College made significant progress in the implementation of the recommendations of the review. Subsequently, detailed scrutiny by QAA relating to the College's application for foundation degree awarding powers (FDAP) resulted in these powers being granted to the College on 1 September 2014.

Explanation of the findings about Warwickshire 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

1.1 As a result of the recent grant of FDAP to the College, the current review did not focus on this judgement area.

2 The quality of student learning opportunities

2.1 As a result of the recent grant of FDAP to the College, the current review did not focus on this judgement area other than the following expectations:

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

2.2 The College's approach to teaching and learning is informed by a range of policies and procedures, and in particular the Higher Education Strategy and the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy. These documents are informed by the Five Year Plan, which comprises the College's vision and strategic goals, and a document entitled 2015-2016 Success Indicators.

2.3 The Higher Education Strategy has very recently been approved by the governing body (Corporation), and therefore it was not possible for the team to discern an articulated action plan arising from this strategy, nor from the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy, which articulates teacher and learner expectations in the learning process, including the College's approach to employability in teaching, learning and assessment. The College is aware of this and the team heard that the Higher Education Strategy will be clearly aligned to other College strategies, including the Technology Strategy and the Employee Communications Strategy, and that the strategic objectives will have annual targets which will form the basis of the implementation of the strategy. In meetings staff were clear about the College priorities in practice and their role and function within the higher education organisational framework.

2.4 The College's organisational structure enables the effective consideration of higher education through a dedicated higher education team and an effective committee structure

which reports directly to the Senior Leadership Team and the Corporation, thus ensuring a clear oversight of the higher education portfolio.

2.5   There is a mature and effective committee structure which allows for the comprehensive consideration, monitoring and review of higher education matters. The team heard, for example, that the Higher Education Academic Board will be responsible for monitoring the revised Higher Education Strategy. The team was able to track issues related to learning and teaching through the committee structure, such as the discussion and decisions reached regarding the development of the T-shaped learner model, which resulted in the development of a new programme specification template and the introduction of a platinum-level standard of the T-shaped learner framework.

2.6   Although there is no overarching explicit strategic approach to the organisational planning of higher education staff development, a wide range of College activities aims to ensure that learning and teaching approaches are informed by reflection on professional practice and scholarship. The impact of scholarly activity is routinely monitored by the Higher Education Teaching and Learning Committee, and all teaching staff are required to submit a scholarly activity log. The team noted that while there is a requirement for full-time teaching staff to undertake a minimum of 30 hours of scholarly activity per annum, there is no minimum requirement for professional support staff.

2.7   The Higher Education Conferences, which take place three times a year, include activities focused on the quality of learning opportunities to support higher education students' learning and include topics such as encouraging students to develop research skills and peer observation processes. The review team heard that staff find the event useful for sharing pedagogical practice and networking.

2.8   The College operates a lesson observation process, which is clearly referenced to the Higher Education Academy's professional standards framework (PSF) and aligned with the Quality Code. Peer observation of staff teaching on higher education courses is undertaken by a member of the College's established Teaching and Learning Improvement team, led by the Head of Teaching and Learning Improvement. The lesson observation framework includes consideration of the development of students' professional skills, employability, exploitation of the virtual learning environment, and equality and diversity matters. The team heard that the process is implemented positively to support the development of staff to improve upon their research-informed teaching and assessment practice, and also to identify opportunities for staff development activities.

2.9   There is a clear process in place to ensure that all staff have the appropriate qualifications for their role within the College and the teaching and learning policy clearly articulates the specific arrangements in place for staff to gain further qualifications. The review team heard that new staff appointed to the College take part in an informative induction process and that they are effectively supported by a professional mentor.

2.10   The quality of learning and teaching at higher education level is rigorously monitored, reviewed and evaluated through the committee and quality improvement processes, and the team heard that staff are familiar with these operational procedures, while recognising, for example, that there is potential for improvement regarding the course review process (see Expectation B8). Policies are monitored through the Principal and Chief Executive to the Corporation and it is clear that the higher committee structure assures an effective underpinning framework for the consideration of higher education matters.

2.11   The College has strategies and policies in place to review and potentially enhance teaching and learning activities, the learning environment and student engagement. The approaches taken by the College enable the Expectation to be met.

2.12   The review team scrutinised documentation, processes and policies and met teaching and professional support staff, and a group of employers and students to determine the way in which the College enhances the provision of learning opportunities, so that every student is enable to develop as an independent learner and further develop their analytical, critical and creative thinking.

2.13   The College produces a range of performance-monitoring data to enable monitoring of attendance, retention, achievement and success measures, which are monitored at programme level by curriculum leaders. Strategic targets, such as improving internal progression from further education to higher education by 15 per cent, are articulated in the College's overall annual success indicators statement. Targets are set by the Higher Education Management Team through Higher Education Academic Board. Internal data sources include higher education course surveys, module surveys and course consultative committees. Responses are considered annually by the Higher Education Teaching and Learning Committee and the Higher Education Quality and Academic Standards Committee.

2.14   Through scrutiny of documentation and data relating to the National Student Survey (NSS), the team concludes that overall student satisfaction rates in the College have fallen. Staff whom the team met confirmed that they do not routinely consider the outcomes of the NSS as part of their overall quality improvement processes, preferring instead to focus on internal metrics. The College is aware of this decrease in student satisfaction rates, and has taken action to address the issues through a variety of measures including the annual course review process. However, the team noted the lack of consideration of the outcomes of the National Student Survey and that it is not used as an informative source of data to facilitate the systematic review and enhancement of the provision of learning opportunities (see also Expectations B6, C and Enhancement).

2.15   Students benefit from a wide range of learning resources across the higher education provision, including engineering and other occupational and professional resources of industry standard. There is an extensive range of library resources, which include single-search databases and multiple learning technology platforms. Students commented that they are satisfied with the range of learning resources and environments that are provided by the College, and that the librarians provide useful research and subject-specific skills workshops, which enable them to become effective independent learners. The College has addressed the desirable recommendation from the previous QAA review regarding the provision of quiet study areas for students in the libraries.

2.16   The College has developed a Technology Strategy, which partially addresses the advisable recommendation arising from the previous QAA review to develop a strategy to inform information technology replacement policy to address the specific needs of higher education students. Although the team heard from staff that the e-learning Strategy is included within the Technology Strategy, the team was unable to evidence this, or any learning resources strategy that would specifically inform and monitor the College's learning and teaching priorities relating to the use of learning technologies and pedagogical practice. For example, the team heard that module leaders decide on which learning platform is to be used and for what purpose.

2.17   The team found through examination of documentation, and in meetings with staff, that overall approaches to technology in learning and teaching are not explicitly articulated across the College with regard to operational targets, though it is clear that learning technologies are effectively deployed in teaching and learning activities, and that staff are supported by a range of learning technologists. An update to the Technology Strategy has recently been produced, which is helpful, but it is not clear how targets are set, disseminated or achieved.

2.18   The team therefore **recommends** that by September 2016 the College should develop an approach to e-learning that is appropriately resourced, with ownership across the College, and which is embedded in a wider learning and teaching strategy.

2.19   The majority of awards have College-appointed Industry Advisors who report on employability skills, the needs of the sector, students' skills and knowledge, good practice and recommendations. Assignments sampled by the team indicated that the content has vocational relevance for social care and counselling students. Students also engage in a range of work placement opportunities within early years, engineering, business, computing and events management, and hair and beauty spa management. Higher National in Digital Film and Video students are able to operate as a professional company, which introduces a sense of realism to the assessment experience.

2.20   The College has also worked closely with Jaguar Land Rover and the University of Warwick in the development of the Engineering Graduate Apprenticeship programme, which enables students from the Foundation Degree or Higher National in Engineering to progress to the University. The inclusion of work-related learning and wider engagement with sector organisations and staff networks are highly valued by students.

2.21   The review team heard that industrial advisors are highly regarded by staff and students and that they play an important and formative role regarding their contribution to aspects of programme design, assessment processes, regular evaluation of courses through formal reporting mechanisms, and through the provision of work placements. The use of industrial advisors, the range of staff occupational expertise, and the links with professional networks, which contribute to the enrichment of the student learning experience and promote employability, is **good practice** (see also Expectation B6).

2.22   The College encourages a thorough approach to good academic practice. This is promoted at induction and during the year. To develop students' academic and employment skills the College also delivers modules to help develop students' academic practice and entrepreneurial skills. For recently updated programmes modules have been embedded into programme delivery to help develop students' skills in demonstrating good academic practice. These include Academic Study Skills and Entrepreneurial Thinking and Professional and Academic Development modules. These also encourage students to engage in self-directed learning. The Academic Study Skills and Entrepreneurial Thinking (ASSET) module was developed to allow all students to focus on the core enterprise behaviours within a mandatory module to improve their success within employment. The module is generic to allow programme teams to deliver with relevant contextualisation. The students report positively that these modules support their studies and academic skills. The College confirmed that the new ASSET module is to be reviewed following the first year of delivery, and adjustments made as appropriate.

2.23   The review team heard from students and student representatives that feedback at programme level is taken seriously and has led to numerous improvements in their learning experiences; for example, the FdA Games Art programme has been redesigned in respect of developing students' employability skills, a computer room has been provided for students at the Rugby College, and students have negotiated curriculum adjustments regarding the FdSc Counselling. The carefully tailored provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices, to enable students to develop as independent reflective learners, is **good practice** (see also Enhancement).

2.24   The team heard from students' representatives and students that the introduction of the generic Academic Study Skills and Entrepreneurial Thinking (ASSET) and Professional and Academic Development modules has enabled the development of students' academic practice and understanding of assessment methodologies. In meetings with staff, the review

team heard that the College will review and evaluate the modules subsequent to the first academic year of delivery. The team **affirms** the review and evaluation of the common academic study skills and professional development modules introduced into higher education awards, which equip students with relevant academic skills.

2.25   The review team concludes that Expectation B3 is met, and judges the associated level of risk to be 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

2.26   The College processes for assessment operate in accordance with the academic frameworks and regulations of the awarding bodies/organisation. The College also has in place appropriate academic policies and procedures to support assessment practice for awards it validates as part of recently being granted foundation degree awarding powers (FDAP). The College's own procedures for assessment and its approach to complying with its awarding bodies' and organisation's regulations would allow the expectation to be met.

2.27   The team examined the effectiveness of the approaches and procedures through scrutinising assessment documentation, partnership agreements, student and course handbooks, the Higher Education Assessment Guide, Academic Procedures for Higher Education Programmes: RPL, minutes of the Higher Education Quality and Academic Standards Committee (HEQAS), the Higher Education Management Team (HEMT) and Course Consultative Committee meetings, programme specifications, Annual Course Review (ACR) monitoring reports, and industrial advisors' and external examiners' reports. The team also held meetings with students, employers, teaching staff, professional and support staff, and senior staff, including representatives from the College's awarding bodies.

2.28   Overall, the evidence reviewed showed the procedures to be effective in practice. Procedures for Higher Education Course Approval and Review ensure that effective assessment strategies allow students to demonstrate competence to meet the intended learning outcomes of their programme of study. The College has in place procedures to be able to recognise prior learning of students, which have recently been reviewed and approved by the HEQAS. These operate under the agreements and regulations of awarding partners and are valid and reliable. The assessment practice and outcomes are also reported on by external examiners and industrial advisors.

2.29   External examiners are appointed for all higher education programmes and report on the range of assessment tasks, assessed work including grades, assessor feedback to students and verification records. Standard College forms are available for assessors to provide coursework feedback to students and feedback is monitored by internal verifiers as part of the verification process, also using a standard College form. The College has also produced a standard higher education assignment brief for assessors to use in the issue of assignments to students and a standard form for use by the internal verifier to record the suitability of the brief.

2.30   The College has in place a Guide to Internal Verification, which refers to the Quality Code and which signposts higher education staff to additional guidance and to the Higher Education Manager for further information or queries. All assessments require verification sign-off prior to issue to students. Recent external examiners report that the internal verification procedures operate effectively; however, a number of them recommend more detailed feedback from verifiers regarding the marking, examination papers, alignment of feedback with grading and any issues identified.

2.31   The majority of recent external examiners' reports confirm that feedback is detailed and constructive, using the standard feedback sheet. Reports confirm that the College has detailed and comprehensive systems and procedures in place to support the assessment practice across all awards, and identifies areas of good practice relating to the consistency and thoroughness of marking and use of indicative criteria and generic marking criteria. Feedback is formative in terms of what students do well, and indicates areas for improvement to 'feed forward' to future work. Detailed feedback is provided on students' spelling, punctuation, grammar, referencing and presentation. Some tutors have also used electronic feedback. However, external examiners also report some over-assessment taking place and a need to consider the introduction of formative assessment and feedback and a reduction in the number of summative assessments for modules, as well as a need to embed the targeted, contextualised grade descriptors in the main tasks of the assignments.

2.32   Observation of teaching and learning is undertaken, which reports on assessment practice. The examples scrutinised by the team are comprehensive and they report examples of good practice in comprehensive feedback provided to students during teaching sessions. Students are made aware of assessment criteria through handbooks, the virtual learning environment and in seminars. Students confirmed that they are made aware of the range of assessment methods used, and how they would be assessed. They receive information concerning the regulations around assessment and feedback during admission and induction, through the College virtual learning environment, and in course handbooks.

2.33   Staff development opportunities have been provided for all new and existing staff, with new staff undertaking an in-house staff development programme specifically for higher education staff. This is an intensive half-day induction, which focuses on assessment in higher education and refers staff to the Higher Education Assessment Guide, and which is delivered by the Higher Education Teaching and Learning Improvement Officer. There is evidence that the College has provided staff development and scholarly activities that focus on assessment. Staff spoke positively about the annual Higher Education Conference as a key example of how good practice and experience can be shared among all staff.

2.34   A number of programme teams submit assessment feedback electronically, which students value. The College policy is to provide timely summative feedback within 20 working days for higher education programmes, as reported in the College Assessment Policy. Students reported that they receive feedback within the standard timescale set by the College. The National Student Survey (NSS) student survey data indicates a three-year downward trend for assessment and feedback, with a 60 per cent overall rate of satisfaction, and with a 46 per cent rating for 'feedback on my work has been prompt'. The College uses internal higher education student survey data to identify actions. The latest analysis of the College higher education survey indicates a higher rate of satisfaction for assessment and feedback when compared with the NSS, at 76 per cent; however, this indicates a fall of three per cent on the previous year. The College should consider the use of NSS results alongside other data sources to inform planning and decision-making (see also Expectation Enhancement and B3).

2.35   Staff demonstrated commitment to devising assessments that link theory to practice, are industry relevant and promote active learning. This was endorsed by students, who indicated that they find the assignments relevant, and that they provide a stretch and challenge as their programme develops. The College uses a range of external expertise, placements, personal networks and simulated experiences for students to generate evidence for assessment. These external links are good practice (see Expectation B3). The delivery of the Academic Study Skills and Entrepreneurial Thinking and Professional and Academic Development modules (see also Expectation B3) has helped to develop students' academic practice and understanding of assessment methodologies.

2.36   The College has in place procedures on academic misconduct, which cover the various awarding body requirements. The Higher Education Quality and Academic Standards Committee (HEQAS) maintains an overview of instances of academic misconduct, which are relatively few. However, the most recent report to HEQAS indicated that the procedures for recording academic misconduct may not be consistent across all academic teams, and actions have been taken for the College to have confidence that all case are recorded and reported.

2.37   The College holds both subject and course assessment boards. Subject Assessment Boards (SABs) focus on achievement at module level while Course Assessment Boards (CABs) focus on individual student achievement and make decisions regarding progression and award. SABs and CABs are chaired by College staff with external examiners and university-appointed link tutors in attendance. Procedures for assessment boards are reviewed and approved by the HEQAS, Assessment Board chairs are approved annually by the HEAB and training is provided. Staff confirmed that pre-scrutiny of assessment decisions is undertaken prior to formal presentation and assessment boards. The College registry has responsibility for the collation and recording of assessment results. External examiners report that assessment boards are conducted in an appropriate manner and with due regard to academic regulations. The evidence the team tested indicates that the formal arrangements for the approval of assessment outcomes are carried out in line with the relevant awarding body regulations and that they operate effectively.

2.38   Overall, the College's processes provide students with appropriate opportunities to demonstrate the intended learning outcomes for the award of credit or qualification. There are clear processes and procedures for assessment, which are well understood across programme teams and students. Assessment methods are designed or approved by the awarding bodies to provide opportunities for students to demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes. Criteria and expectations for assessment are clearly presented to students. Verification processes are in place to ensure that standards are being met. Annual course reviews use evidence from a range of performance data, external examiners, industrial advisors and student feedback to provide evidence of appropriate assessment practices.

2.39   The review team concludes that Expectation B6 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

2.40   The College follows the awarding bodies' and organisation's processes for programme monitoring and review and has its own internal processes. These arrangements are set out in the College Procedures for Higher Education Course Approval and Review. Strategic oversight is maintained by reporting to the Higher Education Quality and Academic Standards Committee (HEQAS), Higher Education Academic Board (HEAB) and Academic Standards and Quality Assurance Committee (ASQA). These processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.41   The team tested the effectiveness of the College's arrangements for programme monitoring and review by examining relevant documentation, including Procedures for Higher Education Course Approval and Review, Annual Course Reports (ACR), partnership agreements, reports from awarding partners, operations manuals and handbooks, operations of the Higher Education Management Team (HEMT), minutes of the HEQAS, HEAB and ASQA, Higher Education Quality Review and Course Consultative Committee meetings, and action plans. The team also held meetings with students, teaching and professional support staff, employers, and senior staff, including representatives from the awarding bodies.

2.42   Overall, the team found that the processes for programme approval, monitoring and review work well. The periodic review of university-validated programmes remains the responsibility of the awarding bodies. The HEAB retains oversight of any major changes to College-validated provision, including approving programmes, periodic review, and proposals for major changes. The arrangements for programme monitoring and review are clearly set out in the Procedures for Higher Education Course Approval and Review documentation. Strategic oversight is maintained by reporting to the HEQAS, HEAB and ASQA. The Higher Education Management Team (HEMT) maintains oversight of all higher education-specific procedures and leads on maintaining effective channels of communications with staff as well as compliance with College procedures. The team saw evidence of the College adhering to the annual monitoring cycles set out in the partnership agreements.

2.43   The College has in place clear procedures for the formal approval of new provision. Academies submit proposals to the Director of Higher Education for consideration by the HEMT prior to submission to the HEAB. Proposals take into account projected recruitment numbers, market demand, resourcing and the alignment with the College Higher Education Course Development Principles. These principles are set out clearly in the approval of new provision documentation and take into account external reference points including employer consultation.

2.44   The Annual Course Review (ACR) documents include a range of information to review programmes and to identify actions to improve standards and quality of learning opportunities. Information used includes recruitment and progression data; marketing; module evaluations; teaching, learning and assessment; student support; learning resources; and external examiner and industrial advisor reports. All ACRs are reviewed by the HEMT and a summary report is provided to HEQAS. The process of quality checking and monitoring of ACRs has been reviewed over recent academic years. The HEMT checks

the quality for each programme ACR, and through this process has required some ACRs to be resubmitted to address identified weaknesses.

2.45   There is a variety of formats for the production of programme teams' annual evaluation reports, which are submitted to the relevant awarding body, and these are all in line with the different awarding body requirements. The College ACR template includes more details than is required for the awarding bodies; however, these are completed by all teams and sections extracted to meet awarding body requirements.

2.46   External examiner and industry advisors' recommendations and good practice are included as part of the ACR. The team explored the effectiveness of ACRs and the resulting action planning process and found some inconsistencies across the provision. This included undertaking an analysis of ACRs completed over the previous three academic years for business and computing, equine studies and digital film and video. The audit undertaken by the team identified a number of actions that had not been reported in the updated section of the subsequent review report. The team also identified a number of actions relating to assessment that appeared to be unresolved and duplicated in the 2012-13 and 2013-14 ACRs. The team **recommends** that, by June 2016, the College implements clearer procedures for the identification and monitoring of key actions resulting from the annual course review process.

2.47   The College has in place a range of opportunities to engage with students, which feeds into the monitoring and review of quality and standards. These include consideration of the outcomes from student surveys and evaluations, and formal representation at the Academic Standards and Quality Assurance Committee and the Higher Education Quality Assurance and Standards Committee meetings. The College has recently introduced additional quality review activity to support the continuous quality monitoring at programme level. Student and staff engagement within these additional review activities is clearly evident. These additional activities include the introduction of the Higher Education Quality Review Meetings (HEQRM) and Course Consultative Committee (CCC) meetings. Students and academic staff have an opportunity to contribute to the ACR evidence base through these HEQRM and CCC meetings. The College introduced these new arrangements towards the end of the 2014-15 academic year, with a full implementation in 2015-16. The team **affirms** the introduction of a range of mechanisms to consult with staff and students, which inform the annual programme monitoring and review processes.

2.48   The College also undertakes Continuation Audits for a sample range of programmes on an annual basis. These audits review compliance with College and awarding body procedures and are led by the Higher Education Academic Support Officer. The cycle of audit visits is agreed by the HEAB each year and the outcomes are reported to HEQAS and HETLC. The College has reported that the audit process requires further improvement to achieve a consistency among teams, and any actions identified will be implemented by the HEMT.

2.49   Overall, the evidence from documentation and meetings shows that the College is managing its responsibilities for monitoring and reviewing the programmes delivered on behalf of its awarding partners. The team has, however, made one recommendation, which requires the College to strengthen its own institutional oversight of programme monitoring and review, particularly in relation to the identification and monitoring of key actions resulting from the annual course review process (see paragraph 2.46 above). The College does recognise the need to review its ACR processes and has recently introduced additional in-year review activity, which will inform the final annual reporting process.

2.50   The review team concludes that, although the Expectation is met, there are some weaknesses in the operation of the ACR process, particularly in relation to the tracking of actions, and as such the level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

3.1   The College provides a variety of information for its intended audiences about the learning opportunities on offer. Information is provided to external stakeholders through the College website. Responsibility for the provision of external information is managed by the Higher Education Management Team. In meetings, both students and staff believed that information was consistently accessible, trustworthy, and useful.

3.2   The College clearly articulates responsibilities for the provision of information. Communications between College staff are underpinned by the Employee Communication Plan. The provision of information with partners is managed through the College's Partnership Agreements, responsibilities checklists and links with the College Higher Education Management Team and partners. Information provided to students is consistently considered at a strategic level. In addition, the College has a mature committee structure that enables operational consideration of the accuracy, accessibility, and trustworthiness of information, including with collaborative partners. These processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

3.3   The review team considered the production of information for the College's intended audiences through reviewing a variety of documentation, including course handbooks, external examiner reports, course consultative committee minutes, induction information, partnership information, information produced with partners, and committee minutes, and through assessing the consistency of information. This information was considered in conjunction with meetings with staff and students with an emphasis on the accuracy, accessibility, and trustworthiness of information.

3.4   The College provides comprehensive pre-application information to prospective students on its website, including fees, grade requirements, partners and course information. Information on the College's approach to higher education is articulated through the Higher Education Strategy, which has recently been revised. Following successful application, students are made aware of what they can expect from the College through its student handbook.

3.5   It is made explicit where students can access information in alternative formats, both prior to application and whilst studying. This is underpinned by the College's Equality and Diversity policy. In addition, the requirements of students with additional needs is regularly considered through the committee structure.

3.6   The student handbook provides students with information about the College, the College's approach to teaching and learning, assessment regulations and student support. Student handbooks are largely consistent and the College has shown that it is making considered changes to the handbook in light of feedback. The information provided in the student handbook is reinforced through student induction. Students at the College receive a comprehensive induction that goes beyond the provision of basic information. Induction includes an academic skills induction, which enables the College to identify additional learning needs, an introduction to research skills, and pre-application and induction materials that support the College's approach to employability. Students consider the student

handbook to be useful and informative. In addition, students stated that they believe that the induction process is effective. The comprehensive and effective pre-entry and induction information, which signals the College's focus on employability, is **good practice**.

3.7   Students stated that they believe streaming of students would be an effective way of recognising prior learning; however, it is clear that the College has a consistent and considered approach to the recognition of prior learning. The College's Assessment Policy articulates its approach to recognising prior learning with particular clarity.

3.8   Students are positive about the virtual learning environment (VLE). At a strategic level the VLE provides a range of information to students, including course handbooks, feedback, and external examiner reports.

3.9   The College has also articulated its approach to the dissemination of information through Course Consultative Committees, and has effectively demonstrated the sharing of information in Course Consultative Committees, including some external examiner reports.

3.10   Despite positive feedback regarding the VLE, staff are unclear about what information they are expected to upload to the VLE, and are unaware whether there is a strategy underpinning the uploading of materials on to the VLE. There is currently no indication of minimum content levels that staff are expected to upload; the review team therefore **recommends** that the College should establish and implement a specified minimum level of teaching and learning content for each programme area to be available on the students' virtual learning environment.

3.11   The responsibilities checklist with partners clearly articulates who is responsible for the provision of information and the checklists are clear and consistent in content.

3.12   The evidence from documentation and the meetings with both staff and students demonstrates that the College is providing information on learning opportunities that is fit for purpose, accessible, and trustworthy. The team has made one recommendation, that the College should seek to specify a minimum level of content of teaching and learning materials for each programme to be made available on the students' virtual learning environment. There is, in addition, an area of good practice regarding the effective student induction, which embeds the College's approach to employability. This expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

3.13   In determining its judgement on the quality of information produced by and on behalf of the College, the review team considered the findings against the criteria as outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

3.14   The College clearly articulates responsibilities for the provision of information and ensures that it provides comprehensive information for potential applicants and current students and staff, as well as for the general public. In particular, the review team considers that the comprehensive and effective pre-entry and induction information, which signals the College's focus on employability, is good practice. The absence of a clear indication of the College's minimum expectations about what information staff might be expected to upload to the VLE led to a recommendation by the review team that the College should establish and implement a specified minimum level of teaching and learning content for each programme area to be available on the students' VLE.

3.15   The review team concludes that the quality of information produced by the College about its provision **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.

4.1	The College is clearly committed to enhancing the learning opportunities and experience of its students, and has produced a useful document that presents its strategic approach to enhancement. The College undertakes a wide range of quality monitoring activities within a culture of continuous improvement, and each activity generates a range of information which is then evaluated, usually by the Higher Education Management Team and then through the committee structure. Enhancement initiatives stem from quality monitoring activities.

4.2	The responsibility for embedding enhancement lies with the Higher Education Management Team and is underpinned by a robust and well established deliberative structure, which comprises Higher Education Academic Board, Higher Education Quality and Academic Standards Committee and the Higher Education Teaching and Learning Committee. Through scrutiny of documentation, including the recently revised Higher Education Strategy and terms of reference of each committee, the team was able to assess the effectiveness of the College in driving forward and regularly reviewing and monitoring higher education strategies and operational policies and procedures, which are clearly understood by staff. A list of higher education procedures is maintained and procedures are updated regularly, most recently to include consideration and alignment with the Quality Code.

4.3	The policies and procedures of the College allow the Expectation to be met. The review team considered the effectiveness of the approach to enhancement by reviewing a variety of documentation including data, course reviews, reports, and action plans, and the team raised questions in meetings with staff, students and employers, with a focus on how the various enhancement initiatives were organised and planned in a systematic way.

4.4	During the review, the team heard and saw evidence that the quality of the student learning experience, set within an appropriate higher education ethos, is being enhanced through these mechanisms. Students spoke positively regarding their experience at the higher education symposia, which are held regularly and which improve students' confidence. The team heard that students agree that their skill sets relating to employability and entrepreneurial activity have improved, along with the College's integrated approach to the dissemination of the T-shaped employability framework. The higher education student symposia, which develop understanding of employability, entrepreneurship activity and opportunities for further study, is **good practice**.

4.5	Other enhancement initiatives include the use of student feedback to improve teaching and learning, including the use of module surveys and quality review meetings, which address student issues such as the distribution of pre-course information and the use of digital submission of assignments. A key aspect of embedding employability skills is the creation of a generic module that supports academic skills development and which is mandatory in the College's foundation degree programmes. It is too soon to measure the impact of this; however, the review team heard that students find it useful. Students also reported that they used the wide range of resources and services available from the College's libraries, including workshops on research skills and study skills training. The thoroughness of the approach to the development of learning opportunities to enable students to develop as independent reflective learners is noted as good practice under

Expectation B3 and is also relevant to this Expectation, as further enhancing student learning opportunities.

4.6   The College makes systematic use of internal quality assurance procedures to identify opportunities for enhancement, including the use of data. However, the review team noted that the most recent National Student Survey (NSS) data indicate a three-year downward trend for assessment and feedback, with 60 per cent overall satisfaction, and with a 46 per cent rating for 'feedback on my work has been prompt'. The NSS data also indicates a downward trend in overall student satisfaction (See Expectations B3 and B6).The team heard that senior staff do not find the NSS data as helpful as their own internal data, which is used in-house to form action plans associated with areas of student dissatisfaction. In view of the fact that the National Student Survey is a sector-recognised key performance indicator, which provides a national overview of student satisfaction and benchmark information for prospective students, the team **recommends** that by September 2016, the College should incorporate consideration of NSS results alongside other data sources to inform planning and decision-making more effectively.

4.7   The team notes that the College's most recent internal higher education course survey results indicate a downward trend in most areas, apart from learning resources, with a four per cent drop in overall student satisfaction. The Higher Education Quality and Academic Standards Committee (HEQAS) has ensured that course teams prepare action plans on areas where student satisfaction has dropped below the College average. These plans are shared with students, including at Course Consultative Committees, and the data are used for compiling annual course reports, which are closely monitored by the Higher Education Management Team. Through scrutiny of documentation and in discussion with staff, the review team saw evidence of adherence to these processes, due to the College's robust underpinning quality assurance framework.

4.8   Continuing professional development plays a key role in promoting enhancement, and the team heard that the College provides a variety of opportunities for staff development, which is linked to individual staff appraisals. The Higher Education Conference provides an opportunity for staff training related to the Quality Code. The team formed the view that although relevant sections of Part B of the Quality Code are incorporated in the working practices of the College, there are no systematic specific opportunities for staff to identify enhancement initiatives within the annual course reporting process. Teaching staff are familiar with the use of the Quality Code, professional support staff less so, with the exception of student services, who use the Quality Code to inform service planning, for example with regard to the draft Student Involvement Strategy.

4.9   The review team has confidence that the College is progressing effectively to embed its strategy for enhancement fully and to improve the quality of the student learning opportunities. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of Risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.10   In determining its judgement on the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the College, the review team considered the findings against the criteria as outlined in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

4.11   The review team saw evidence of a clear commitment by the College to enhancing the learning opportunities and experience of its students, and the College has provided a summary of its strategic approach to enhancement. The responsibility for embedding enhancement lies with the Higher Education Management Team, underpinned by the higher education deliberative structure, which comprises Higher Education Academic Board, Higher Education Quality and Academic Standards Committee and the Higher Education Teaching and Learning Committee. The review team found evidence of the effective management of higher education strategies and operational policies and procedures, and of how the quality of the student learning experience is being enhanced through these mechanisms. The team found evidence of the thoroughness of the approach to the development of learning opportunities to enable students to develop as independent reflective learners, and in the higher education student symposia, which develop understanding of employability, entrepreneurship activity and opportunities for further study.

4.12   The review team notes that there is currently no systematic specific opportunities for staff to identify enhancement initiatives within the annual course reporting process, and that while the College makes systematic use of internal quality assurance procedures to identify opportunities for enhancement, including the use of data, it does not take recent National Student Survey (NSS) student survey data into account as a key performance indicator to provide an overview of student satisfaction. The review team therefore recommends that the College should incorporate consideration of NSS results alongside other data sources to inform planning and decision-making more effectively.

4.13   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   The College's approach to employability is articulated in its Higher Education Student Employability Statement. Developing employability skills and progressing students into employment is reflected throughout the strategic documentation of the College. This reflects the College's commitment to employability throughout its provision, both at a strategic level and in the range of vocationally focused subjects that it offers.

5.2   At a strategic level, Warwickshire College employs the T-Shaped employability framework. The College defines this in its Self-Evaluation Document as 'a model that allies a breadth of capabilities and qualities with depth of technical competence through developing four core entrepreneurial behaviours: self-efficacy, social skills, technical competence and enterprise'. The model is operationalised through curriculum teams, promoted through the Academic Study Skills and Entrepreneurial Thinking Module, and reflected through the College's tutorial policy, five year plan, and higher education student induction.

5.3   Warwickshire College has a number of initiatives that inform its considered approach to employability. The College's Self Evaluation Document points out that 'developing student employability begins at course design stage.' The College has clearly shown its commitment to employability through course design and development. In addition, the College considers the effectiveness of its approach to employability through ongoing course review processes, with effective institutional oversight.

5.4   The College uses Industry Advisors to ensure courses are providing students with the necessary skills for future employment. The Industry Advisor's role is to 'comment specifically on issues of employability and the extent to which courses are preparing students for their chosen sector.' Feedback on courses is diverse and often of clear value in course development; the industrial advisor report on HND Digital Film and Video is a particularly good example of the usefulness of these reports. Additionally, the College routinely invites employers to take part in module and course approval, further embedding employability as part of the College's Employability Strategy. Meeting employers confirmed that they feel able to make a positive contribution to developing employability initiatives in the College. They cited specific examples of change, including changes to personal development plans in light of feedback.

5.5   Warwickshire College advertises careers advice as part of its student services provision. Its website describes this service as 'career choices, progression to Higher Education or any other training and educational opportunities.' The students whom the review team met at the College were largely unaware of the Careers Service. In addition, Higher Education Teaching and Learning Committee minutes from June 2015 suggest that there is little specific support for higher education students seeking graduate careers. Despite this, students are generally positive in their view that the College is developing their employability skills and the student submission confirms that the College embeds employability in the curriculum.

5.6   The range of subjects the College offers has an obvious and explicit emphasis on developing student employability skills, with many courses providing work-based and/or placement learning. Employers are unanimously enthusiastic about their relationship with the College. Students are encouraged to reflect on their employability skills through the College's higher education symposium. Higher education symposia also enable students to demonstrate and practise their entrepreneurial skills. Student reflections on the symposium show that students believe the symposium has had a positive impact on their employability skills.

Glossary

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

e-learning
See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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