



Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of Empire College London Ltd

June 2017

Contents

About this review	1
Key findings.....	2
Judgements	2
Good practice	2
Recommendations	2
About the provider	3
Explanation of findings.....	4
1 Click to select judgement	4
2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities.....	13
3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities	28
4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities.....	30
Glossary.....	32

About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Empire College London Ltd. The review took place from 14 to 16 June 2017 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Liam Curran
- Mr Robert Evans
- Miss Kate Wicklow (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provision and to make judgements as to whether or not 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 (Alternative Providers) 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
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the provider is taking or plans to take.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#)² and explains the method for [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).³ For an explanation of terms see the glossary at the end of this report.

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

² QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk.

³ Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers): www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education.

Key findings

Judgements

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

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and/or 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 feature of **good practice**.

- The holistic approach to student support, which enables student development and achievement (Expectation B4).

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations**.

By December 2017:

- make external examiner reports available to the whole student body, excluding sections with individual student data (Expectation B7)
- articulate and disseminate the provider-level approach, including leadership responsibilities, to enhance the quality of student learning opportunities (Enhancement).

About the provider

Empire College London (ECL) was established in 2003 in Ilford on the outskirts of London. It is a company limited by shares with a single Director and Proprietor. In 2008, the company also set up a branch college in Birmingham, which was operational until 2015. The College aims to provide career-oriented further and higher education to students from diverse backgrounds through learner-centred teaching, support and guidance, representing value for money while raising and widening participation to further and higher education in the local area.

The College is registered on the Skills Funding Agency's Register of Training Organisations (ROTO) and on the Register of Apprenticeships Training Providers (RoATP). It currently offers two higher education programmes: a Higher National Diploma (HND) in Business from Pearson and the level 5 Diploma in Education and Teaching awarded by City and Guilds. The College has 139 higher education students enrolled on these two programmes. The majority of students are mature students from the local area.

The 2014 Adapted Review for Specific Course Designation identified three areas of good practice. The College has further developed these areas, in particular with regard to student support. The College has also fully addressed the two desirable recommendations from the review.

Explanation of findings

This section explains the review findings in greater detail.

1 Click to select judgement

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 (FHEQ)* 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 works with two awarding organisations, Pearson and City and Guilds. They are responsible for the setting of threshold standards together with clear and transparent learning outcomes. They also ensure that each qualification the College offers is at the appropriate level in relation to *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)*. The awarding organisations also appoint external examiners to ensure that academic standards are being maintained.

1.2 Under the centre approval agreements with City and Guilds and Pearson, the College is responsible for the academic delivery and assessment of the programmes. The College is also responsible for student recruitment and support, ensuring that programmes are adequately resourced. The College manages academic standards by implementing its awarding organisations' quality procedures. The arrangements in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.3 In considering this Expectation, the review team examined contractual agreements, and programme and quality assurance documentation. The team also met with senior and academic staff.

1.4 The College has comprehensive procedures in place to monitor its performance, which ensures that it is maintaining academic standards and thresholds on behalf of its awarding organisations. The semester and module review processes are rigorous and the reports provide a detailed evaluation of the College's programme performance. In addition, Pearson monitors the College's management of academic standards through its Annual Management Review process. The last two reports are positive and confirm that the College is adequately fulfilling its responsibilities. External examiner reports for programmes from both awarding organisations confirm that academic standards are maintained, and identify no major issues.

1.5 The College fulfils its responsibilities for the maintenance of academic standards and manages them effectively. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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

1.6 The awarding organisations have comprehensive academic frameworks and academic regulations in place to secure the academic standards of their awards. The College ensures that it complies with their requirements through its deliberate quality management structure and quality assurance processes. The Quality Manual provides guidance to staff regarding these matters. The College's Internal Quality Assurance Policy, contained in the Quality Manual, highlights the importance of monitoring and self-assessment for maintaining academic standards and continually improving the student experience. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.7 The review team tested this Expectation by examining quality policies and procedures, and minutes of relevant meetings. In addition, the team met with senior and academic staff and students.

1.8 The College works closely with the academic regulations of its awarding organisations for the delivery and assessment of the programmes, and for quality assurance. The College has contextualised the awarding organisations' quality assurance processes and requirements in the form of a Quality Manual that provides comprehensive guidance to staff in key areas such as teaching and learning, assessment, internal verification and external examining. The Quality Manual and related academic policies are accessible to staff and students on the VLE. They support the delivery, assessment and quality management of all programmes effectively. Programme handbooks make appropriate reference to the College's and awarding organisations' policies, procedures and academic frameworks. These handbooks are located on the VLE and are easily accessible to students.

1.9 The Head of Centre and the Head of Studies maintain appropriate oversight of the College's management and implementation of the awarding organisations' academic frameworks and regulations through a plethora of themed meetings with management, academic and support staff and students. In addition, semester planning and review meetings also ensure that the College works within the awarding organisations' academic frameworks and fully implements their academic regulations. External examiner reports and reports of Academic Management Reviews conducted by Pearson confirm that the College works within the awarding organisations' academic frameworks and regulations.

1.10 The College has appropriate quality processes in place to ensure that the awarding organisations' academic frameworks and regulations are fully implemented. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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

1.11 The awarding organisations have overall responsibility for developing definitive programme records. All programmes delivered by the College have a programme specification that forms the definitive record for that programme. Programme specifications form part of the student handbooks, and set out the aims of the programme as well as the composite units and assessments. The College keeps a record of student achievement for the provision of records of study. The arrangements in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.12 To test the Expectation, the review team examined student handbooks and minutes of relevant meetings, and met with staff and students of the College.

1.13 Based on the awarding organisations' qualification specifications, the Head of Studies and the Head of Centre have created contextualised programme specifications which, for the Pearson programme, are signed off by the external verifier. Students have access to the programme specifications through their programme handbooks, which they can access in print and digital formats. Students who met the review team were satisfied with the information provided and found programme specifications a useful reference tool. Programme specifications are reviewed as part of the semester planning process to ensure the accuracy of information. However, this is not formally recorded in the minutes.

1.14 The College returns student achievement data to the awarding organisations, and internal student records are reviewed by Pearson as part of the Academic Management Review process. Review reports confirm that the College keeps accurate records.

1.15 The College maintains and regularly updates its programme specifications to align with programme delivery. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated 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

1.16 Formal responsibility for the approval of the Higher National Diploma programmes and of the Diploma in Education and Training, including ensuring engagement with all relevant external expectations, lies with the awarding organisations. The College's responsibility is limited to the selection of any optional units, programme delivery and maintenance of academic standards. For the Pearson programme, the latter also includes ensuring that procedures are in place to set assessments at an appropriate level, thereby enabling students to demonstrate achievement of the specified learning outcomes. The Senior Management Team approves the delivery of any new programmes and changes to the delivery of existing ones. The arrangements in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.17 In considering this Expectation the review team scrutinised minutes of management meetings and held meetings with senior and academic staff.

1.18 Staff clearly understand and are able to articulate the division of responsibilities between the awarding organisations and the College, and the processes by which the College discharges its responsibilities. The College has not proposed the delivery of new programmes. Therefore, the effectiveness of the internal programme approval process could not be ascertained. However, staff clearly articulated the procedures that would be followed. Proposals for the delivery of new programmes would be discussed by the Senior Management Team at one of its regular meetings. Decisions would be based on the perceived market, financial considerations and general resources including staff expertise. Similarly, there have been no changes to delivery of optional units for the Pearson programme. Any changes to the choice of optional units for the delivery would be considered by the Senior Management Team during the planning phase prior to delivery in consultation with relevant tutors.

1.19 Pearson conducts annual reviews to monitor the College's capacity to deliver the programmes effectively, and therefore its ability to maintain academic standards. These demonstrate satisfaction with the College, covering the adequacy of financial and physical resources, academic governance structures and quality assurance mechanisms, particularly in relation to module assessments.

1.20 The review team concludes that the College understands its responsibilities and discharges them effectively. The Expectation is met and the 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

1.21 Pearson stipulates the module learning outcomes and associated assessment strategies for the Higher National qualification, ensuring that it meets the requirements of the Quality Code and any professional body benchmarks. The College plays a defined operational role in the assessment process. It is responsible for the setting and internal verification of assessment briefs pursuant to Pearson guidelines, first marking and internal verification of assessment. In the case of the Diploma in Education and Training (DET), assessments are set by City and Guilds and the College's responsibility is limited to first marking and internal verification of the scripts.

1.22 The College maintains assessment policies, which include internal verification and recognition of prior learning. These are located in the Quality Manual. All assessment decisions are internally verified, and the process of external examining through the relevant awarding organisation ensures the maintenance of appropriate academic standards. Assessment decisions are confirmed at Assessment Boards. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.23 The review team tested the Expectation by documentary study of the College's Quality Manual and minutes of relevant meetings. The team also met with senior and academic staff and students.

1.24 The College has adequate assessment policies that ensure that credit and qualifications are awarded upon achievement of the specified learning outcomes. The Internal Verification Policy states the scrutiny of draft assessment briefs and the verification of assessment decisions.

1.25 Assessment Boards are held for all programmes according to the awarding organisations' requirements. They are chaired by the Head of Centre and appropriately discuss and confirm student results. The Boards also deal with applications for mitigating circumstances and would receive reports of any cases of academic misconduct.

1.26 Reports from the external examiners from both awarding organisations confirm that appropriate standards are met. In addition, the Pearson annual Academic Management Review evaluates the College's quality systems including the management, delivery and assessment of qualifications. Reports of the reviews confirm compliance with the awarding organisation's requirements.

1.27 The College's internal assessment processes are effective and understood by relevant members of staff. The Expectation is therefore met and the 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

1.28 The College understands that it has a role in quality monitoring of programmes, and discharges its responsibilities for programme monitoring and review through the quality reviews taking place at the end of each semester. This is supplemented by regular meetings between management, teaching staff and students to review academic standards and identify best practice. Following the reviews, a College development plan is produced. The College's internal review processes are examined as part of Pearson's annual Academic Management Review. The awarding organisations are responsible for the periodic reviews of their qualifications. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.29 In considering this Expectation, the review team examined the semester reviews and the ensuing development plans. The team also held meetings with senior and academic staff, and students.

1.30 The College's processes for the monitoring of programmes are sound and well understood by staff. Semester reviews are comprehensive and include aspects of enrolment, progression and achievement data, student feedback, the outcomes of teaching observations and consideration of external examiner reports. Action points are identified and these are tracked at the ensuing semester review. The College's development plan is detailed with SMART actions and captures specific areas for continuous and further development.

1.31 There is no formal internal process, beyond annual monitoring, to contribute to the periodic review of the programmes, as the awarding organisation has overall responsibility for this. However, the College believes that the recently introduced Pearson Annual Programme Monitoring Report, to which the College contributes, assists the awarding organisation in gathering data for the periodic review process, and senior managers understand their responsibilities in this respect.

1.32 The College has robust processes in place for annual monitoring of the programmes it delivers. Staff at all levels understand the importance of the monitoring process and their particular roles within it. The team therefore concludes that the College makes effective use of its own internal monitoring processes to ensure that the programmes meet UK threshold academic standards and awarding organisation requirements. The Expectation is met and the 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

1.33 The College largely fulfils its responsibilities for the use of external expertise through its engagement with the external examiners appointed by the awarding organisations. The College also uses independent external expertise in programme delivery and assessment design. The arrangements in place would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.34 In considering this Expectation the review team examined external examiner reports, relevant meeting minutes and related documentation. The team also met with senior and academic staff.

1.35 The College makes effective use of external examiners' reports which are shared with staff, and to some degree also with student representatives. Appropriate actions are agreed based on the report recommendations, and good practice identified in the reports is shared.

1.36 In addition, the College makes effective use of employer engagement activities whereby guest speakers visit the College and give a lecture. For the Higher National Diploma in Business Management, for example, guest speakers include marketing managers, recruitment consultants, bankers and law consultants. Students confirmed that they found the input of external guest speakers to be beneficial to their learning by contextualising real business practice with theoretical concepts.

1.37 The College also makes good use of external expertise in assessment design and internal moderation for Pearson provision. An external consultant designs the majority of assessments, which are subsequently approved by the College. The Pearson external examiner has also provided feedback on some assessment briefs, which the College found helpful. In addition, the internal verification process makes use of an independent external verifier to strengthen the internal expertise. This is identified as good practice in the Pearson Academic Management Review report.

1.38 The College makes effective use of independent external expertise to maintain academic standards. The review team considers that this Expectation is met and the 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

1.39 In reaching its judgement the review team matched its finding against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All seven of the Expectations for this judgement area are met and the associated level of risk is low in each case. There are no recommendations and affirmations in this judgement area.

1.40 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 provider **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 awarding organisations are responsible for the overall programme design and approval at national level. The College has responsibility for the selection of the optional units for the Pearson programme, which are agreed by the Senior Management Team. The College is also responsible for programme planning in relation to the delivery, including the design of learning strategies, teaching materials, and, in the case of the Pearson provision, also for the design of assessments. The College's approach to this responsibility is centred on its semester-planning processes, which include regular reviews to ensure continued validity and relevance of the programmes. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.2 The review team tested the Expectation through study of relevant minutes of meetings and through discussion with senior and teaching staff.

2.3 Decisions on the choice of optional units for delivery are made by the Senior Management Team during the planning phase, prior to delivery and following consultation with academic staff. There is no separate and discrete process for internal programme approval. The forum for decisions on any new programmes would normally be one of the regular meetings of the Senior Management Team, and decisions are made based on the perceived market, financial considerations and general resources including staff expertise. As the current programme offerings are still relatively new, there has been limited need to discuss new initiatives. Given the size of the College and its focus on a small number of established programmes, the review team is satisfied that the College's management processes are sufficient to ensure that a proposed programme or activity is appropriate for delivery and that the College has the capacity to deliver it effectively.

2.4 Minutes from semester planning and review meetings confirm that the processes of programme delivery, planning and review are thorough, and programmes are kept up to date and relevant through these mechanisms.

2.5 The College discharges its limited responsibilities for programme design and development appropriately. The Expectation is met and the 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

2.6 The recruitment process is managed by the Senior Management Team and is governed by the College's Admissions Policy. Information about the recruitment process, including the recruitment decision appeals procedure, is available to prospective students on the College website. The College uses a variety of diagnostic tools to ensure that students are the right fit for their chosen programme, including an English language test. As part of the admissions process, all students submit an application form and are interviewed by the Senior Management Team prior to an offer being made. Before enrolment, students' previous qualifications are checked, with information from UK National Recognition Information Centre (NARIC) used to check for equivalence of international qualifications. Senior managers meet regularly to evaluate the recruitment strategies and operation of the admission process. The arrangements in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.7 In considering this Expectation, the review team examined the Admissions Policy and processes, student admission files and minutes of relevant meetings. The team also met with senior, academic and professional support staff and students.

2.8 Students who met the review team found the application process clear and well structured. Accurate and timely information was available to them during the admissions process, and they could easily find information about the programme structure and content on the website and in the prospectus. All students confirmed that they were interviewed by a member of senior management. During enrolment they undertook a numeracy, literacy and IT skills test which was then used to develop their individual learning plans.

2.9 The College clearly states its standard academic entry requirements on the website. It also allows entry of students with relevant work experience in line with the awarding organisations' regulations for the recognition of prior learning. Senior managers make appropriate use of the awarding organisations' regulations to admit non-traditional students. Staff who make admissions decisions are provided with sufficient training.

2.10 Recruitment, retention and attainment data is analysed by senior management. Regular discussions also take place with teaching staff, and admissions data is considered as part of the semester review process. Pearson also reviews the College's approach to recruitment and admissions as part of the annual Academic Management Review. Review reports confirm that recruitment policies and practices are effective.

2.11 The College has robust and effective admissions and selection policies and procedures in place, which it implements effectively. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated 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

2.12 The College's strategic approach to the review and enhancement of learning opportunities and teaching practices is outlined in the Internal Quality Assurance Policy contained in the Quality Manual. The policy is supported by a range of ancillary policies regarding staff recruitment, development and appraisal. Systematic review of learning opportunities also forms part of the semester review process. The College's development plan sets out objectives for continuous and further development. The arrangements in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.13 The review team tested this Expectation by reviewing College policies, monitoring reports and relevant meeting minutes. The team also met with senior and academic staff, and students.

2.14 The Internal Quality Assurance Policy demonstrates a commitment to continuous improvement of teaching and learning through regular self-assessment and the development of academic staff. Semester review reports confirm that the College thoroughly evaluates teaching and learning and the impact of any actions taken to improve the student experience. The College's resulting development plan has clear objectives, actions and targets, which are measurable in terms of impact.

2.15 Academic staff are suitably qualified and have the appropriate career experience to teach at the relevant subject level. Teaching staff qualifications are checked as part of the recruitment procedure, and approval is also obtained from the awarding organisations. New staff receive a comprehensive induction by the Head of Centre and the Head of Studies. Staff who met the review team reported that their initial induction had been valuable and indicated that they receive an annual refresher induction.

2.16 All teaching staff take part in annual performance reviews, which are carried out by the Senior Management Team. Staff appraisal forms confirm target setting and identification of continuing professional development (CPD) requirements. New teaching staff have an additional interim performance review. This allows early intervention where necessary. The College also has a mentoring scheme in place to support newer members of teaching staff.

2.17 The College recognises staff as a valuable resource. The Staff Development Policy demonstrates a strong commitment to supporting staff development activities for both full-time and part-time staff. The College hosts a number of CPD workshops related to learning, teaching and assessment. In addition, teaching staff have the opportunity to undertake the Diploma in Education and Training. Staff also attend staff development sessions provided by the awarding organisations.

2.18 The College regularly monitors the quality of teaching through management-led teaching observations. The Head of Studies or Head of Centre observe all teaching staff once per semester using the OFSTED grading criteria. Observations are recorded and findings are discussed individually with staff. Where necessary, actions are agreed with

timescales for completion. Students actively participate in the evaluation of teaching quality by completing an evaluation form. Results from the student evaluation feed into a teacher evaluation report, which is discussed at a staff meeting.

2.19 The College also makes effective use of independent external expertise in monitoring teaching quality through a consultant who carries out lesson observations. As a result, teaching staff receive detailed and helpful feedback on their teaching practice. Good practice and areas for development are also identified. Findings are reported to the Senior Management Team via meetings, are used in programme reviews, and inform staff development. A peer observation scheme is still in its infancy.

2.20 The College works effectively with staff, students and external experts to review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement

Findings

2.21 Empire College is committed to providing a range of support services for students. The College has a range of student support policies, including policies on equality and diversity, disability, and reasonable adjustments and special considerations, which are contained in the Quality Manual. Prior to starting their programmes students undergo diagnostic assessments to identify their support needs. Upon commencement of their studies students receive an induction and complete an Individual Learning Plan (ILP), which is monitored via tutorials. Students' academic progress is tracked and monitored regularly by the Senior Management Team. The College's Tutorial Policy outlines the individual academic and pastoral support that students can expect from their personal tutors. Mandatory study skills sessions focusing on academic writing skills are also in place. The arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.22 The team tested this Expectation by examining student support policies, ILPs, external examiner reports and relevant meeting minutes. The team also met with senior and academic staff and students.

2.23 The College has a strong ethos of academic support and pastoral care for students. Before the start of their programmes the College provides all students with a detailed induction that introduces them to their programme and academic and pastoral support arrangements. At the beginning of every semester students receive additional updates. Students who met the review team were satisfied with the induction they had received and confirmed that it was comprehensive and useful.

2.24 During enrolment all students are initially assessed in areas of literacy and information technology skills. During this process student learning styles and special support needs are identified. Students are also encouraged to disclose any support needs at application. In the event of a student having specific learning needs, appropriate internal or external support is put in place in accordance with the College's policy on reasonable adjustments. All students participate in mandatory timetabled study skills sessions on academic writing.

2.25 Information gained at the application and initial assessment stage is used to inform teaching. Teaching staff receive a group profile, which consists of information regarding the students who will be attending their class. These student profiles are also passed to a dedicated personal tutor who compiles an Individual Learning Plan with each student. The ILP identifies their goals and needs on the programme and SMART targets are developed to achieve the objectives. Student progress is recorded and tracked through a formal tracking system and monitored in a weekly timetabled tutorial session. ILPs examined by the team are detailed, with clear goals, activities to achieve the goals, and completion dates. They also evidence regular meetings between students and personal tutors to monitor progress. Both students and staff confirmed that this process is motivational for students and effective in setting and monitoring targets. The College keeps the tutorial process under review through audits by the Senior Management Team. Student achievement is monitored on a semester basis through module achievement reports, enabling early interventions and provision of additional support to those students who need it.

2.26 The College's VLE is used by academic staff as a tool to support student learning.

Teaching staff upload lesson plans and assessment information, which students can access remotely. Students outlined how they make use of anti-plagiarism software when submitting assessments electronically. The College regularly monitors the resources made available to students on the VLE. Students on the Pearson programme are also encouraged to make use of the awarding organisation's online platform. Students who met the review team indicated that they value these online resources.

2.27 Students undertaking the Diploma in Teaching and Training spoke positively about the support and guidance the College gave them for placements. The programme leader and the Head of Studies provide them with contacts they can approach to arrange a placement. They were also complimentary about the placement visits from College staff and the documentation the College provides, which assists them in building their portfolios.

2.28 The College takes great care to support its students to ensure that they can develop their academic, personal and professional potential. The review team considers the College's holistic approach to student support, which enables student development and achievement, to be a feature of **good practice**.

2.29 The College has a comprehensive system of student support in place, which is regularly monitored and evaluated. The Expectation is met and the 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

2.30 The College has a number of ways in which it engages students in the assurance and enhancement of their learning experience. The College collects feedback from students on a range of their experiences. This includes feedback on the induction programme, unit and semester feedback, feedback on teaching, and feedback on assessment feedback provided by teaching staff. The Pearson programme is also subject to an annual student survey.

2.31 There is a student representation system with monthly formal meetings between student representatives and the Senior Management Team. Course representatives are elected by the student body. Student representatives put together an annual student submission detailing their views on their experiences throughout the academic year. Student feedback is regularly considered at programme and management meetings and as part of the semester review process. The arrangements in place would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.32 The review team tested this Expectation by reviewing minutes of meetings, student feedback results, the annual student submissions and semester review reports. The team also met with senior and academic staff and students.

2.33 All students are informed of the importance of student feedback at induction, and the roles and responsibilities of the course representatives are outlined both verbally and in a role profile. Course representatives receive advice and guidance on how to undertake their role effectively.

2.34 Students are actively consulted on the quality of the teaching they receive through the module and semester review processes and by providing feedback on the assessment feedback they receive. Students are also consulted on the quality of the induction.

2.35 Minutes of management meetings and semester reviews show due consideration of student feedback. While students are not directly involved in management meetings, this approach is considered effective by the both staff and students. Students who met the review team felt comfortable raising any concerns with academic staff, their personal tutors or senior managers, both in student meetings and informally after classes, and find the College to be responsive to their feedback.

2.36 The College has effective mechanisms in place for the engagement of students in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. The student voice is valued and acted upon. Therefore, this Expectation is met, and the associated 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

2.37 The assessment of students is carried out in accordance with the College's Assessment Strategy and the awarding organisations' guidance on assessment. The programme specifications identify the number and frequency of assessments. The College's responsibilities for assessment vary depending on the awarding organisation.

2.38 For the Pearson programme, the awarding organisation has responsibility for developing the learning outcomes and assessment criteria, while the College is responsible for the setting and internal verification of assessment briefs in accordance with awarding organisation guidance and unit specifications. Similarly, City and Guilds is responsible for the learning outcomes, assessment criteria and the setting of assessments.

2.39 The College is also responsible for the first marking and internal verification of assessment, and the provision of feedback on assessed work to students for all its higher education programmes. These processes are governed by the College's policies on assessment, including the recognition of prior learning and internal verification, which are located in the Quality Manual. The College holds Assessment Boards for all programmes for the confirmation of assessment decisions. The procedures in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.40 The review team tested the Expectation through scrutiny of assessment and related policies, examination board minutes and external verifier reports. The team also held meetings with senior and academic staff and students.

2.41 The College discharges its responsibilities for the design of Pearson assessments through the use of an external organisation to prepare the assessment briefs in consultation with the academic staff at the College. To add another layer of scrutiny the College uses Pearson's assignment checking service. Its report suggests that some work is required following the draft assessments to render them suitable for use.

2.42 Marking and internal verification are conducted in accordance with awarding organisation guidelines. A process of sampling of assessed work by the internal verifier is in place to assist consistency of marking. The College has strengthened its internal verification process through the use of independent external expertise and makes use of an external internal verifier. External examiner reports from both awarding organisations confirm that assessment and internal verification processes are sound. In addition, the Pearson annual Academic Management Review reports state compliance with the awarding organisation's requirements with regard to the management of assessment.

2.43 Students receive comprehensive guidance on assessment from academic staff and through the student handbooks. They appreciate the timely and helpful feedback on their work. External examiner reports also comment favourably on the supportive and developmental assessment feedback provided.

2.44 The College holds Assessment Boards in line with the awarding organisations'

requirements. Boards are chaired by the Head of Centre and confirm assessment decisions. They also routinely deal with applications for mitigating circumstances and may deal with matters of academic misconduct if they arise. Appropriate adjustments are made, having regard to the assessment needs of particular learners. Minutes of the Boards demonstrate careful consideration of students' circumstances. Recognition of prior learning is considered in line with awarding organisations' guidelines.

2.45 Overall, the review team found that the College operates equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment, enabling students to demonstrate the extent to which they meet the learning outcomes. The Expectation is therefore met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining

Findings

2.46 It is the responsibility of the awarding organisations to appoint, train and remunerate external examiners. The College has no input to this process. External examiners confirm assessment and internal verification decisions made by the College and produce reports for the awarding organisations, which are shared with the College. The Head of Centre has oversight of the external examination process within the College. There is a defined process for the receipt of, and response to, external examiners' reports. External examiner findings are shared with academic staff. The arrangements in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.47 In considering this Expectation the review team examined reports from external verifiers, minutes of relevant meetings and semester monitoring reports. The team also held meetings with senior and academic staff and students.

2.48 The College receives its external examiner reports via the awarding organisations' portals. Staff were able to articulate clearly the process for the consideration of external examiner reports. Reports and their findings are shared at management and team meetings and formally responded to by the Head of Centre. The College draws up an action plan in response to any issues identified and recommendations made in the reports. The plan is monitored by the teaching staff and the Senior Management Team until all actions are concluded. Findings from the external examiner reports feed into the semester review process. The College also uses external examiners for confirmation that new staff members are suitably qualified to teach on a particular programme.

2.49 The College verbally shares the key findings of external examiner reports with student representatives; however, the wider student body has no access to them. The team therefore **recommends** that the College makes external examiner reports available to the whole student body, excluding sections with individual student data.

2.50 The review team concludes that the College engages with the external examining process in a positive way and has a well-established and effective system in place for responding to external examiner reports and comments. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the 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

2.51 The College's programme monitoring process is based around quality reviews at the end of each semester. All College processes are covered in these reviews, including recruitment, student achievement and progression, staffing and teaching. Students, academic staff and senior managers contribute to the process, which results in action planning. Pearson's annual Academic Management Review process comments on the College's arrangements for programme monitoring and review. The mechanisms in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.52 In considering this Expectation the review team examined semester review reports, relevant meeting minutes and Pearson annual Academic Management Reports. The team also held meetings with senior and teaching staff, and students.

2.53 The College's semester review process is thorough and covers a range of indicators. Reports finalised at meetings between staff and management include aspects of enrolment, progression and achievement data, student feedback, the outcomes of teaching observations and consideration of external examiner reports. Action points are identified and feed into a Management Development Plan. Progress against actions is tracked at the ensuing semester review. The formal monitoring processes are supplemented by regular meetings between management, teaching staff and students to review academic standards and identify best practice. The process permits timely intervention and the identification and sharing of good practice and enables management to monitor programme performance throughout the year. Pearson's annual Academic Management Review reports are positive with regards to the College's annual programme review processes.

2.54 As the awarding organisation has overall responsibility for the periodic review of programmes there is no College process, beyond annual programme monitoring, to contribute to this process. However, the College views Pearson's recently introduced Annual Programme Monitoring Report as a further layer of annual monitoring, whereby areas of concern, good practice and strengths can be identified, contributing to shorter or longer-term actions as appropriate.

2.55 The review team found that the College operates effective, regular and systematic processes for monitoring and review of its programmes, all clearly understood by relevant members of staff. The team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints

Findings

2.56 The College has complaints and appeals procedures, which can be found in student handbooks and the Quality Manual. They are also available on the College's VLE. Complaints and appeals are monitored by the College. The arrangements in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.57 In considering this Expectation the review team examined procedures and relevant documentation relating to complaints and appeals. The team also met with senior and academic staff, and students.

2.58 The College appeals process allows students to appeal against assessment decisions internally, before appealing to the awarding body. The Head of Studies is responsible for undertaking the first stage of the appeal, which can be escalated by the student to a member of senior management if necessary. Details of appeals will be made available to awarding body external examiners, who are responsible for ensuring the integrity in the process. The appeals process is explained to students during induction. It is also referred to in the student handbook, but appeals information is not disaggregated from the complaints procedure. However, students with whom the review team met understood the process. The College's appeals processes have also been reviewed by Pearson. The Pearson annual Academic Management Review reports confirm that the College has clear appeals and malpractice policies in place, which are accessible to staff and students.

2.59 The College's complaints procedure is sufficiently detailed. It provides an overview of the process, the responsibilities of the various parties and timescales for responses. The procedure is in line with the awarding organisations' requirements, and references are made to the Office for the Independent Adjudicator (OIA). The effectiveness of procedures could not be tested at the review because the College had not received any formal complaints by students. The College has robust informal processes in place to capture student feedback, and students with whom the review team met knew where to find information about the formal complaints process.

2.60 The College keeps a complaints log to formally record any complaints received. It also has a Conflict of Interest Policy to ensure that any complaints would be dealt with appropriately. College staff have attended OIA training.

2.61 The College has appropriate procedures in place for student complaints and academic appeals. Therefore, the review team concludes that this Expectation is met and the associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.62 The Diploma in Education and Training has a placement element, with teaching practice observations that are an integral part of the programme. It is the responsibility of the students to find their placements, with the College assisting those who need support in finding suitable ones. All placements are governed by an agreement. Placement providers act as mentors to students during their placements, and together with College staff they observe and report on students' teaching practice. The College provides guidance to placement providers about their responsibilities. The arrangements in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.63 In considering this Expectation the review team examined guidance materials for students and placement providers, and placement agreements. The team also met with senior and academic staff with specific responsibilities for placements and work-related learning, students and placement providers.

2.64 Students undertaking the Diploma in Education and Training must have access to 100 hours of teaching practice, which can be in a variety of settings. Students who met the team confirmed that it is their responsibility to find a placement. They reported that they are guided by the College to find the right placement for them and that they can draw on the database of contacts the College has built up over the years. They were also complimentary about the support from College staff that assists them in building their teaching portfolios.

2.65 The College adequately ensures that all parties understand their responsibilities in the process. It has in place placement agreements that outline the key responsibilities of the College, students and placement providers. Agreements are signed by all parties and a copy is held centrally by the Head of Studies in the College.

2.66 The College supports placements providers well in fulfilling their responsibilities. It provides a detailed mentoring handbook that outlines the support they are expected to provide to students on teaching practice. This is supplemented by a mentoring agreement for each student. Placement providers who met the team confirmed that they fully understand their responsibilities and reported that communication with the College is good.

2.67 Placement mentors are not involved in the assessment of students but conduct teaching observations and provide feedback to students on their performance. Observation reports seen by the review team provide helpful feedback on strengths and areas for improvement.

2.68 The review team concludes that the College's management of placement learning is effective. The Expectation is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Findings

The provider does not offer any research degrees.

Expectation: Not applicable

Level of risk: Not applicable

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.69 In reaching its judgement the review team matched its finding against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. Of the 11 Expectations in this section, 10 are applicable to the College. All applicable Expectations are judged to be met, with low risk.

2.70 There is one feature of good practice in this section, with regard to the holistic approach to student support located in Expectation B4. One recommendation has been identified in Expectation B7, which concerns the access of students to external examiner reports.

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

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Findings

3.1 The College publishes information in a variety of print and digital formats. The website and prospectus provide details to prospective students and the public on the course offer and the application process. The website also hosts key student policies and procedures. The awarding organisations require the College to gain approval for all information about their programmes that is published externally. Senior managers sign off such information using a College template before passing it on to the awarding organisations. Pearson also reviews published materials as part of its annual Academic Management Review process.

3.2 Student handbooks containing programme and assessment information are made available to current students in hard copy and on the College's VLE. Students and staff have access to the VLE, which largely acts as a repository of programme documentation, College policies and meeting minutes. The Senior Management Team monitors the accuracy of the information uploaded. The arrangements in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

3.3 In considering this Expectation the review team examined information the College provides to students, staff and other stakeholders in a variety of formats. The team also met with senior, academic and professional support staff and students.

3.4 Programme and admissions information on the College website and the prospectus is comprehensive and enables students to make informed decisions. Student handbooks contain more detailed information on the programme including information on teaching, learning and assessment, resources and student support. They also signpost key policies. Students who met the team were satisfied with the accuracy, completeness and timeliness of information supplied to them.

3.5 The College VLE is used to deliver teaching materials and key information to students. The VLE is monitored by members of the Senior Management Team to ascertain student engagement with this resource and to ensure the accuracy of information on it. The College also uses the VLE to make minutes of meetings accessible to staff.

3.6 There is a clear process for the approval of information for publication. All information relating to the College is sent to the Senior Management Team for approval before publication on the website or VLE, or printing. The College uses an information sign-off form which clearly identifies the content type, information initiator, approver and approval date to log all approved published information. Staff who met the review team understand their responsibilities in the process. The sign-off seen by the review team confirms that the College is implementing its processes for the approval of published information in all formats. College policies are reviewed on an annual basis by the Head of Centre.

3.7 The College provides clear, relevant and trustworthy information to students, staff and the public and has effective procedures in place that ensure that all published information is up to date and accurate. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

3.8 In reaching its judgement the review team matched its finding against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. Expectation C is met and the associated level of risk is low. There are no recommendations, affirmations or features of good practice in this judgement area.

3.9 The review team concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the provider **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 understands its responsibilities for improving the quality of student learning opportunities and ensures that institutional policies and structures are in place to facilitate this. The College's approach to enhancement is not articulated discretely in policy documents, but the mission statement in the Quality Manual makes reference to the goal of providing outstanding teaching and learning. The Internal Quality Assurance Policy refers to regular evaluation of all areas to provide the best quality learning experience for every student. The College uses its internal quality processes, as well as reports from external bodies, to identify institutional enhancement needs. The Senior Management Team has overall responsibility for this and the subsequent monitoring of any enhancement activities. The arrangements in place would allow the Expectation to be met.

4.2 In considering this Expectation the review team examined quality policies and processes, and relevant meeting minutes, and met with senior and academic staff and students.

4.3 Staff who met the review team acknowledged the importance of enhancement and a desire to be proactive in identifying and implementing enhancements to the students' learning experience. Internal quality assurance processes for programme monitoring and review, external examiner reports and other reports from the awarding organisations, as well as student feedback, have led to a range of deliberate steps being taken to that effect. These include the identification of learning support for students through an initial diagnostic assessment, monitoring student achievement on a semester basis to allow for early interventions, a revised unit delivery pattern that permits a focus on two units at a time, increased employer engagement so that classroom theory can be combined with workplace practice, and increased study skills support classes.

4.4 While the identification of good practice, areas for development and improvement, and consequent action points, all captured in the semester reviews, is evidence of an ethos of continuous improvement at the College, an institutional-level approach to enhancement is not clearly articulated anywhere and responsibilities for enhancement are vaguely stated, with all staff being involved. In addition, there does not appear to be an integration of 'on the ground' enhancement initiatives in a systematic and planned manner at provider level that goes beyond a review of programme data. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College articulates and disseminates its provider-level approach, including leadership responsibilities, to enhancing the quality of student learning opportunities.

4.5 The College is aware of the importance of enhancement and has demonstrably taken deliberate steps to improve the quality of learning opportunities appropriate to its context of operation and size. However, there is a lack of clarity of the strategic approach to enhancement at provider level and leadership responsibilities for the process. Overall, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.6 In reaching its judgement the review team matched its finding against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The Expectation is met and the associated risk is moderate. The Expectation attracted one recommendation relating to the articulation and dissemination of a provider-level approach to enhancing the quality of student learning opportunities. There are no features of good practice or affirmations in this judgement area.

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

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 21-24 of the [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\) 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.

Awarding organisation

An organisation authorised to award a particular qualification; an organisation recognised by Ofqual to award Ofqual-regulated qualifications.

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.

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.

Self-evaluation document

A report submitted by a higher education provider, assessing its own performance, to be used as evidence in a QAA review.

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.

QAA1954 - R8342 - Sep 17

© The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2017
Southgate House, Southgate Street, Gloucester GL1 1UB
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786

Tel: 01452 557050
Website: www.qaa.ac.uk