

# Higher Education Review of Boston College

May 2014

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## About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Boston College. The review took place from 12 to 14 May 2014 and was conducted by a team of two reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Jamie Clark (student reviewer)
- Dr Hayley Randle.

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by Boston 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](#) (Quality Code)<sup>1</sup> setting out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and of each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 7.

In reviewing Boston College the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland. The [themes](#) for the academic year 2013-14 are Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement, and Student Employability,<sup>2</sup> and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.<sup>3</sup> A dedicated section explains the method for [Higher Education Review](#)<sup>4</sup> and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents. For an explanation of terms see the [glossary](#) at the end of this report.

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<sup>1</sup> The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code).

<sup>2</sup> Higher Education Review themes: [www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106).

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

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

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about Boston College

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

- The maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding bodies and other awarding organisation **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information produced about its provision **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

### Good practice

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

- The College's arrangements for supporting and fostering high-quality teaching and learning and the positive impact this has on the student learning experience (Expectation B3).
- The English Laboratory initiative which directly enhances students' learning opportunities (Expectation B3, Enhancement).
- The College's commitment to raising its students' academic confidence and aspirations which enables progression to higher-level study (Expectation B3).
- The approachability of staff and the range of initiatives designed to gather direct feedback from students (Expectation B5).

### Recommendations

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

By October 2014:

- ensure that appropriate mechanisms for identifying additional learning support needs are implemented before academic delivery commences (Expectation B4)
- review and revise the arrangements with the awarding bodies to enable the effective oversight of students' work-based learning experience (Expectation B10).

By July 2015:

- develop a structured and proactive approach to the use of employers as a source of external expertise (Expectation A5)
- strengthen arrangements for taking deliberate steps to enhance the quality of students' learning opportunities, including increasing the engagement of staff with the Quality Code (Enhancement).

## **Affirmation of action being taken**

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

- The actions being taken to inform students of potential progression routes to level 6 study (Expectation C).

## **Theme: Student Employability**

The College aims to work closely with employers to ensure that local needs are effectively met. In 2013, the College introduced an Enterprise Zone which allows higher education students to become involved with employment-related activities alongside College staff and external employers. This initiative enables the National Occupational Standards for enterprise to be met. There are examples of the benefits of liaison with employers such as the provision of voluntary placement experience which helps students to meet course requirements and provides a service for a local charity.

Some of the work with local employers has been led by employers rather than the College. The College has provided an effective service for local employers in such cases, but could also be more proactive in making further use of this input. Employers could therefore be involved more extensively with College programmes as a source of external expertise.

Students value the industry-based experience offered by tutors at the College. This experience allows links to be made to practical examples within lessons which students find motivating.

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

## About Boston College

Boston College (the College) is a medium-sized general further education college in Lincolnshire. The College plays an important role in the life of the town and contributes to the local economy through the educational programmes and employment opportunities it provides. The College aims to make a major contribution to community cohesion and to work closely with local businesses to help meet their skills needs.

The College's vision is 'To be a brilliant College that transforms people's lives and makes an outstanding contribution to the economic, social and cultural life of Lincolnshire'. The College identifies itself as an inclusive organisation that embraces the following values: trust, openness, respect, challenge, honesty and excellence.

The College has provided higher education since 1987, initially as an associate college of De Montfort University. It previously worked in partnership with the University of Lincoln and the University of Sunderland. Higher education is a key component of the College's strategy for growth and provides a framework within which the College can address the local, national and international skills agenda and raise the aspirations of both staff and students.

The College is still a member of the University of Huddersfield Consortium and in January 2012 was approved for direct funding by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). Since the last QAA review in November 2009, collaborative provision with the University of Lincoln and the University of Sunderland has ceased (in 2011). The provision with the University of Huddersfield is also reaching a conclusion.

There have also been changes in the senior leadership team at the College since the last QAA review and a new management structure has been developed. A new Principal was appointed in June 2011 and new Vice-Principal: Curriculum and Quality in August 2011.

The geographical area served by the College is large, rural and sparsely populated. The local employer base comprises predominantly small and medium-sized enterprises. The College is very aware of the challenge to retain and attract well qualified individuals to work in the area. Analysis of the labour market and the geographical challenges faced has led directly to the establishment of the College's ambitions and priorities for its own higher education provision. The intention is to develop and expand local higher education provision to meet the needs of the community.

As of January 2014, the College has 105 students directly funded by HEFCE across six programme areas: Computing, Sport, Business, Performing Arts, Health and Social Care and Teacher Training. These students are on programmes associated with Bishop Grosseteste University and Pearson. There are also 13 students still studying through the partnership with the University of Huddersfield.

The College has addressed the recommendations from the QAA Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review (IQER) review, built on the areas of good practice and logged progress thoroughly on the IQER action plan. Previous advisable recommendations were to ensure the consistent application of policy regarding late submissions and to formally timetable tutorials. Desirable recommendations related to the use of a forum for higher education staff to share problems, good practice and ideas and also the consideration of ways to improve library facilities.

The College has reinstated the Higher Education Practitioner Forum as the Higher Education Group through which good practice is shared. It has also set up the Higher Education Quality Assurance Committee which deals with policy and processes. All students are now also issued with a Higher Education Handbook for Written Work which includes guidance on the

presentation, submission and grading of written work. The College has maintained its close links with awarding bodies/organisations, particularly in relation to work with Bishop Grosseteste University.

## Explanation of the findings about Boston College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

Terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers have been included in a [brief glossary](#) at the end of this report. A fuller [glossary of terms](#) is available on the QAA website, and formal definitions of certain terms may be found in the operational description and handbook for the [review method](#), also on the QAA website.

# 1 Judgement: Maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards

**Expectation (A1): Each qualification (including those awarded through arrangements with other delivery organisations or support providers) is allocated to the appropriate level in *The framework for higher education qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (FHEQ)*.**

## **Quality Code, Chapter A1: The national level**

### **Findings**

1.1 The College's higher education provision is focused on FHEQ levels 4 and 5 programmes. The expectations of study at these levels are explained to students through the programme-related information that they receive on enrolment and within module handbooks. Students can also access additional information about the required academic performance from the College's virtual learning environment (VLE) throughout their course.

1.2 Programme outcomes are matched to qualification descriptors on the FHEQ through the programme approval process which is managed by the awarding bodies or awarding organisation (the University of Huddersfield, Bishop Grosseteste University or Pearson). However, the College takes more responsibility for this process with the Pearson provision.

1.3 The teaching, learning and assessment of the College's higher education provision are monitored through partnership arrangements with the University of Huddersfield and Bishop Grosseteste University. The College also relies on Pearson's quality assurance system for all BTEC higher-level programmes on the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) at levels 4 to 7 to ensure the outcomes of assessment meet national standards. The awarding bodies and awarding organisation also appoint external examiners who confirm that students receive appropriate teaching and assessment to allow them to meet the required standards at each level.

1.4 The Higher Education Strategy and the Boston College Strategic Plan (2013-16) outline one of the College's three broad aims as 'to prepare learners for effective study at higher levels'. The Higher Education Quality Manual, originally developed to support Pearson Centre approval, is distributed to all higher education staff and is regularly updated. This contains all of the policies that are relevant to, and support, the management and quality assurance of the higher education provision. All policies are regularly reviewed and updated using quality impact assessments and the expectations associated with the different levels of higher education study are clearly laid out in this manual. All higher education teaching, management and support staff consider that the Higher Education Quality Manual is a valuable reference source.

1.5 In testing Expectation A1, the review team scrutinised the College's self-evaluation document and associated supporting evidence including the Higher Education Quality Manual, the Higher Education Strategy, the College's Strategic Plans, memoranda of cooperation and provider responsibilities, programme handbooks and programme specifications, and external examiner reports. The review team met with students and senior, teaching and support staff, and comprehensively explored understanding of both the academic performance and volume of study expected at levels 4 and 5.

1.6 External examiner reports confirm that appropriate volumes of study have been set to allow learning outcomes to be achieved. Past problems resulting in the blocking of one



external examiner for the HND programmes have been resolved and the active status of the programme has been resumed. Guidance on the appropriate volume of work associated with levels is also given in the Higher Education Quality Manual and in Higher Education Group meetings. Study hours and assessment requirements are clearly laid out in the module handbooks and programme specifications, as are expectations of the level at which the module is delivered and assessed according to awarding body or awarding organisation requirements. Students understand the different expectations at the different academic levels.

1.7 The review team found that programmes are delivered and assessed at the appropriate level and students undertake a sufficient volume of study to allow them to achieve the qualification. The review team therefore concludes that the delivery and management of the College's higher education qualifications meet Expectation A1 and that the associated risk level is low.

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

**Expectation (A2): All higher education programmes of study take account of relevant subject and qualification benchmark statements.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A2: The subject and qualification level**

**Findings**

1.8 The College's higher education provision takes into account national benchmarks and this is achieved through its working relationship with its awarding bodies and awarding organisation. The awarding bodies and awarding organisation ensure that the subject and qualification benchmark statements are used appropriately to inform programme learning outcomes. Links between the content of programmes and the requirements outlined in the subject and qualification benchmark statements are made clear in the programme-related documentation that students receive. The effectiveness of the College in delivering against these benchmark statements is verified by external examiners. None of the curriculum is subject to professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) requirements.

1.9 The team reviewed the self-evaluation document and associated evidence such as programme-related documentation in testing Expectation A2. In addition, the team met with senior, teaching and support staff, students and employers.

1.10 All of the subject benchmark statements that are relevant to the higher education provision are listed at the end of the Higher Education Quality Manual but not mapped specifically to individual programmes within the College's higher education provision. However, subject benchmark statements are explicitly referred to in the programme handbooks. The comprehensive programme specifications for the Foundation Degree in Applied Studies (Learning Support) awarded by Bishop Grosseteste University, the outgoing programmes awarded by the University of Huddersfield and the specifications for the Pearson programmes provide clear links to subject benchmark statements.

1.11 The Pearson programme specifications and design update (for employers) make it very clear that although the content of higher nationals is firmly linked to the underpinning knowledge required for the achievement of National Occupational Standards, these are not gained as part of the qualification. The College's approach to professional training concurs with this view and although the higher education courses it provides are chosen and designed to provide local professional and vocational training, these are not currently linked to PSRBs and are therefore not subject to further assessment-related requirements. Although the College does not currently embed professional qualifications into its higher education curriculum, future work with PSRBs is not precluded.

1.12 Overall, the review team concludes that as a result of the College's use of relevant subject and qualification benchmark statements, Expectation A2 is met and the level of risk is low.

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

**Expectation (A3): Higher education providers make available definitive information on the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements for a programme of study.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A3: The programme level**

**Findings**

1.13 The College delivers programmes approved by awarding bodies and the awarding organisation, developed in strict accordance with its college-based curriculum planning protocol. The College produces definitive information describing the aims and intended learning outcomes for all of the programmes that it delivers, in programme specifications, programme handbooks and module handbooks. Programme-related information is published in accordance with the awarding body or awarding organisation requirements and is mainly published via the College's website and the dedicated higher education area on the VLE. Web-based material is subject to monthly checking for accuracy and currency.

1.14 The team reviewed the self-evaluation document and associated evidence when testing Expectation A3, with a key focus on programme and module-related documentation. In addition, the team met with the Principal; awarding body and awarding organisation staff; senior, teaching, support and marketing staff; and students.

1.15 Information about programmes is published by the College following approval from the awarding bodies and awarding organisation. Programme specifications, handbooks and module handbooks are made available to students mainly through the VLE. Information about the courses is also available via the College website which is subject to monthly checking. The information provided about the aims, outcomes and expected requirements of the programme is reviewed by the Higher Education Quality Assurance Committee (HE QAC) and the Higher Education Group along with the programme area manager. College staff work closely with link tutors and awarding body staff to ensure that programme-level changes are implemented. Monitoring and review of the Bishop Grosseteste University and University of Huddersfield programmes take place in accordance with the expectations set out in the memoranda of collaboration. The Quality Improvement Manager acts as a conduit between Pearson and the College, relaying programme-level changes, and the College is responsible for monitoring and reviewing the information. The review team found that the procedures the College has developed fulfil the requirements of its awarding bodies and awarding organisation.

1.16 The College has an electronic higher education noticeboard on the VLE. This is widely used by students and considered to be a reliable source of information. Each programme has its own area and takes a programme-level approach to the amount of information provided and how it is organised.

1.17 Overall, the review team concludes that the College meets Expectation A3 through the careful management of its information relating to the aims, intended learning outcomes and expected learner achievements for a programme of study and the level of risk is low.

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

**Expectation (A4): Higher education providers have in place effective processes to approve and periodically review the validity and relevance of programmes.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A4: Approval and review**

**Findings**

1.18 The College has recently reconfigured its higher education provision to include a greater full-time offer at levels 4 and 5. The Head of Quality and the Higher Education Coordinator play pivotal roles in the management and quality assurance of the higher education programmes. The College conducts its higher education delivery in accordance with the expectations of the awarding bodies and awarding organisation, and the College's Higher Education Group and the HE QAC are responsible for the academic quality of its provision.

1.19 In testing Expectation A4, the team reviewed the self-evaluation document and associated evidence provided. The team met the Principal; senior, teaching and support staff; students; and employers.

1.20 The College works closely with its awarding bodies and awarding organisation to validate, deliver, monitor, review and quality assure its provision. The College also works effectively with awarding body link tutors to ensure compliance with the academic regulations of the awarding bodies and as a subject-level critical friend. There are also effective procedures in place to use feedback from external examiners in the review and monitoring of programmes.

1.21 The Bishop Grosseteste University awarded provision is subject to external industry scrutiny during the approval stage. The Pearson programmes were deliberately chosen to provide specialist vocational training at levels 4 and 5, to meet the needs of professional organisations and the National Occupational Standards for the appropriate industry sector. The generic Pearson guidance on programme design (for employers) and employer engagement is used to inform curriculum and delivery. There is some additional external input from employers in the approval, monitoring and review of these programmes.

1.22 The College's quality assurance policies in the Higher Education Quality Manual align with the academic quality assurance requirements of its associated awarding bodies and awarding organisation. The Quality Assurance and Improvement Policy outlines the processes that underpin the quality assurance of the higher education provision. The College has a comprehensive set of procedures leading to the production of annual self-assessment reports which are scrutinised at the summer meeting of the Higher Education Quality Assurance Committee.

1.23 The review team concludes that the College's compliance with its awarding bodies and awarding organisation regulatory frameworks and implementation of the higher education quality assurance policies ensure that Expectation A4 is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

**Quality Code, Chapter A5: Externality**

**Findings**

1.24 The management of the College's higher education provision is governed by the requirements of its awarding bodies and awarding organisation who also appoint the external examiners and verifiers respectively. The quality of the higher education provision is monitored by the Higher Education Group to ensure a coherent operational approach is taken to the management of academic standards. To maintain academic standards across the higher education provision, staff development events on standardisation are organised by the Higher Education Group and often delivered by the Higher Education Coordinator.

1.25 In testing Expectation A5, the team reviewed the self-evaluation document and associated evidence provided both prior to and at the review. The team also met with the Principal; awarding body and awarding organisation staff; senior, teaching and support staff; and employers. The team examined the external examiner reports carefully and investigated the process by which external examiners' and external verifiers' reports were received by the College and subsequently processed.

1.26 Programme assessment is subject to robust internal moderation at both programme area level and via the Higher Education Group using standard templates and in accordance with the College's Assessment for HE Students Policy. The College also uses external examiners effectively to ensure that the required academic standards for its higher education programmes are being met.

1.27 External examiners play a critical role in ensuring that the College's programmes are delivered at the appropriate level and that required academic standards are achieved. These examiners operate in accordance with the awarding bodies' and awarding organisation's academic regulations frameworks. External examiners moderate assessed student work and complete templates issued by the awarding body or awarding organisation. The work of external examiners and verifiers in confirming academic achievement is pivotal to the ratification of marks and the assurance of the academic standard of the provision at the College.

1.28 External examiner feedback ensures the currency of programme aims and learning outcomes. The College also uses it to identify areas of good practice, areas for improvement and to provide students with information about their course. Issues arising in the annual external examiner reports are dealt with by the Higher Education Quality Assurance Committee. The outcomes of external examiner reports and student feedback gained by other means are used to produce annual monitoring reports.

1.29 Currently, the College makes limited use of employers in the quality assurance process. The contribution of employers to the teaching and assessment of students is limited to a small number of programmes. Therefore, the College is encouraged to increase its use of employers and the review team **recommends** that by July 2015 it develop a structured and proactive approach to the use of employers as a source of external expertise.

1.30 The review team concludes that the use of academic external examiners leads to Expectation A5 being met and that the level of risk is low.

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

**Expectation (A6): Higher education providers ensure the assessment of students is robust, valid and reliable and that the award of qualifications and credit are based on the achievement of the intended learning outcomes.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A6: Assessment of achievement of learning outcomes**

## **Findings**

1.31 The College's assessment processes operate in accordance with the awarding bodies' and awarding organisation's regulatory frameworks where appropriate. All assessment of the higher education provision at the College is governed by the policies and processes outlined in the Higher Education Quality Manual and the Assessment for HE Students Policy. External examiners confirm that the assessments used will allow students to achieve module and programme-level outcomes.

1.32 In testing Expectation A6, the review team examined all assessment-related material provided with the self-evaluation document and additional evidence supplied before and during the visit. The team also met staff from the awarding bodies and awarding organisation; management, teaching and support staff; students; and employers.

1.33 Overall responsibility for assessment is with the awarding bodies and awarding organisation. However, programme-level responsibility lies with the College, particularly the Higher Education Group, the programme area managers and programme delivery staff. Assessment is planned and implemented in accordance with the College's Assessment for HE Students Policy. All staff members receive clear guidance on the design and implementation of assessments through the documentation provided by the College. All staff members are appropriately qualified and competent to assess student work and receive regular pedagogical training provided by the awarding bodies and awarding organisation and/or the College's Higher Education Coordinator.

1.34 Assessment is used effectively to assist student learning. Detailed use is made of assessment matrices which define grades clearly and students find these useful when completing assessments. Students also make effective use of the guidance provided in programme and module handbooks, formative assessment opportunities and the feedback provided on assessed work.

1.35 Clear moderation processes are in place and are supported with standardised recording and reporting documentation. All work is subject to internal moderation prior to being sampled by an external examiner. External examiners' scrutiny of assessment briefs and assessed work ensures that these are valid, rigorous and reliable. It also ensures that they allow students to achieve the intended learning outcomes of modules and programmes of study and that they have been conducted in accordance with the academic regulatory framework of the respective awarding body or awarding organisation.

1.36 Students fully understand the assessment submission rules and use formative submission opportunities. All summative work is assessed and returned to students within the 15 working days turnaround time stipulated by the awarding organisation.

1.37 Overall, the review team concludes that the College's effective assessment process means that Expectation A6 is met and the level of risk is low.

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

## Maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards: Summary of findings

1.38 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The team identified one recommendation in this area.

1.39 The College has different responsibilities for its University and Pearson provision and these are managed effectively. The College demonstrates a clear understanding of its responsibilities and uses the processes of the awarding bodies and awarding organisation appropriately.

1.40 The College aims to work closely with employers to meet their needs and there was some evidence of the contributions made in this area. However, the review team felt that, overall, the College could take a more structured and proactive approach to employers as a source of external expertise.

1.41 All Expectations in this area are met. Therefore, the review team concludes that the maintenance of the threshold academic standards of awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation **meets** UK expectations.

## 2 Judgement: Quality of student learning opportunities

**Expectation (B1): Higher education providers have effective processes for the design and approval of programmes.**

**Quality Code, Chapter B1: Programme design and approval**

### Findings

2.1 The College manages the design and approval of programmes in accordance with its partnership agreements linked to the University of Huddersfield, Bishop Grosseteste University and Pearson. The College's higher education manual fully describes the quality assurance framework and committee structures which govern the processes for the design and approval of all College provision.

2.2 The College management structure for oversight of quality and higher education learning opportunities has been revised since the last QAA review. The Higher Education Group and HE QAC both operate to ensure that the strategic and operational approach of the College's higher education provision aligns with the Quality Code.

2.3 Both the Universities are responsible for the design, approval and evaluation of their respective programmes delivered at the College. However, the Pearson-accredited programme design, approval and evaluation is the responsibility of the College in line with the requirements of the awarding organisation. The College's Quality Cycle encompasses the requirements of the different awarding bodies and awarding organisation and there are standard higher education meeting agenda items designed to focus on relevant issues at different points in the academic year.

2.4 Expectation B1 was tested by reviewing the College's self-evaluation document and supporting evidence. It was also explored through meetings with staff members at the College, awarding body representatives, students and employers.

2.5 The College has a comprehensive system in place for the curriculum planning of its higher education provision which is designed around meeting local needs and students' progression requirements. Pearson provision tends to build on already established level 3 curriculum areas to enable students to progress onto HNC/D programmes. Foundation degrees have traditionally been geared directly towards meeting local employer needs while providing learners with an opportunity to gain the qualification without having to travel out of the area.

2.6 The College has a formal and effective process for the approval of any new programme of study. Proposals are developed with close adherence to the Curriculum Planning Guidance document and the completion of a detailed new course approval form. New course proposals are discussed at the HE QAC and approved subject to a successful business case being provided which will include rationalisation against the College's strategic vision. Programme area managers are responsible for the effective coordination of the proposals for any new curriculum areas.

2.7 The review team finds that the College maintains effective oversight of the programme design and approval process. There are clear internal processes that enable the different requirements of the awarding bodies and awarding organisation to be met. Therefore, the review team considers Expectation B1 to be met and the level of risk is low.

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



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

**Quality Code, Chapter B2: Admissions**

**Findings**

2.8 The College has a Higher Education Admissions Policy that sets out the requirements for entry to its higher education programmes. The College is not registered for UCAS but uses an online application form, completed via its website, for entry to all of its provision.

2.9 The University of Huddersfield and Bishop Grosseteste University programmes require the awarding bodies' general entrance criteria to be met before any others set by the College. In both cases the awarding body is responsible for consideration of recognition of prior learning claims. The College is responsible for the admission of students onto its Pearson programmes and uses its admissions policy to ensure parity in the process for students across all of its higher national provision. The College's dedicated internal admissions team is responsible for ensuring that the admissions process is administered fairly and consistently to all applicants.

2.10 The review team tested Expectation B2 by looking at the College's website and through the documentation provided, including information on the accreditation of prior learning. Admissions policies and procedures were also discussed in meetings with staff and students.

2.11 The College website has a clear link on the homepage which directs prospective students to further relevant information about the different higher education courses available and the application processes depending on the level of study desired. 'How to apply' information is clearly visible on all course pages. All applicants admitted under the College's Higher Education Admissions Policy procedure are interviewed and receive clear information about the entry criteria for the programme of study.

2.12 Application data is made available to senior staff and programme teams to enable them to track and plan the provision for the coming intake accordingly. The Higher Education Group primarily deals with operational matters and therefore uses recruitment and retention data for each cohort.

2.13 It is acknowledged that not all applicants hold standard entry qualifications. The College accommodates these applications according to the relevant admissions policy. For Bishop Grosseteste University courses, applications for the accreditation of prior learning (APL) are considered by the College's relevant programme leader under the terms of the University's *Code of Practice for the Accreditation of Prior Learning*. The programme leader is required to make a recommendation to the University APL panel via the link tutor. For University of Huddersfield courses, the suitability of all applicants claiming APL is considered by school panels within the University. For Pearson provision, the application is screened by the programme leader and discussed with the programme area manager before a decision on entry is made. The College has a specific APL policy for higher education students for this purpose and external examiners confirm that an appropriate admissions process is being used effectively.

2.14 Students met by the review team stated that they had received support and guidance from the College before, during and after their application to higher education programmes. It was noted that the majority of higher education learners at the College had progressed from its further education provision and some from level 1 study.

2.15 Complaints about the College-administered admissions process are heard through the College's internal 'Complaints and Praise Policy' procedure. To date, the College has not received any such complaints. University of Huddersfield and Bishop Grosseteste University students are directed to their respective awarding bodies' complaints and appeals policies should they wish to make a complaint or appeal relating to their application to study. This was supported by students met by the review team.

2.16 The review team concludes that the College has clear policies and procedures in place to admit students and that these are applied consistently. The team therefore concludes that Expectation B2 is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

**Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and teaching***

**Findings**

2.17 The College has a comprehensive Higher Education Quality Manual which details the committees responsible for the management and quality assurance of the higher education provision including: resources, teaching, learning and assessment. The College also has Teaching and Learning and Language Support and Raising Learner Aspirations strategies and is committed to the development of its learners' educational experience and aspirations to move on to further study.

2.18 Staff qualifications are reviewed as part of the curriculum planning process to ensure that all higher education teaching staff meet the core requirements for teaching at levels 4 and 5. This also identifies professional development requirements for the staff member. All staff members undergo an annual individual performance review which is geared towards developing the individual's professional practice and personal development. It builds on the previous year and the report is shared with the reviewee, their line manager and the Human Resources Manager.

2.19 The College uses formal and informal observation processes to aid the development of learning and teaching. This approach includes the use of both managerial and peer observations and the associated input of Advanced Practitioners as required.

2.20 Expectation B3 was tested by examining the self-evaluation document and evidence including student feedback. During the review visit, meetings were held with senior management staff, representatives from awarding bodies, academic and support staff members, and students.

2.21 There is a college-wide formal observation process for both further and higher education provision. This operates on a grading scale of one to four, with one being outstanding. Exceptional standards observed in teaching are recognised by the College's J2O programme. Approximately 10 per cent of all graded observations lead to a grade one observation.

2.22 The College has four Advanced Practitioners and two of these teach on higher education courses. Their role is to help develop the quality of the learning and teaching across the College. They undertake a large number of lesson observations and mentor those teachers who have received a grade three or four in their observation.

2.23 Teaching staff are given the opportunity to engage in peer observation via the College's 'Teaching Triangle' initiative which was introduced in 2012-13. The process requires teaching staff from three different departments to observe each other's teaching practice. After each observation the findings and thoughts are discussed and a brief informal report is produced and forwarded to the relevant programme area manager. The project has been adopted by Sport and has recently expanded to include other higher education programme areas. Staff members were very enthusiastic about the benefits the system offers in the development of their own professional practice.

2.24 The College has a staff development budget which is allocated after receipt of bids identified as part of the annual programme area budget bidding process. The requests are evaluated separately to the general budget but are requested at the same time to ensure that they are relevant to the future plans of the higher education programme area, and to ensure that the investment is appropriately directed towards the enhancement of the programme. The review team saw evidence of staff development days and further study opportunities. The College has previously helped to support staff members financially by covering the cost of certain course fees.

2.25 The College openly recognises the importance of scholarly activity and the review team met several members of teaching staff commencing or completing study at master's degree level. A number of teaching staff have also participated in various research activities associated with continual professional development connected with higher education courses. Arrangements are currently in place to enable teaching staff from the College to shadow their counterparts at Bishop Grosseteste University to enable the sharing of good practice. Many of the teaching staff are current practitioners in their chosen field and this directly benefits the students through the application of theory to current practice. The value of this was reinforced by the students met by the review team.

2.26 Students highlighted the availability and support of their course tutors as the best aspects of studying higher education at the College. There was a running theme throughout the review visit of the openness of teaching staff to interact with learners. Overall, the College's arrangements for supporting and fostering high-quality learning and teaching and the positive impact this has on the student learning experience, is **good practice**.

2.27 The College identified that it has a large number of students for whom English is their second language. This prompted them to develop a dedicated English language skills facility located in the library services area. The scheme has proved highly popular with native and non-native English speakers alike. Students were highly complimentary about the service and stated that it was playing a key part in their academic development at the College. The English Laboratory initiative, which directly enhances students' learning opportunities, is **good practice**.

2.28 The College is committed to the development of its students' academic confidence and in turn raising their aspirations for the future. This ethos is embedded throughout the institution and exemplified by the development of initiatives such as the English Laboratory and the strategies specifically targeted at enabling learners to reach their full potential. The College acknowledges the importance of autonomy and independence of higher education learners within a robust framework of support and consistently encourages the development of critical thinking through practice. The College's commitment to raising its students' academic confidence and aspirations, which enables progression to higher-level study, is **good practice**.

2.29 The arrangements that the College has to enhance learning opportunities and teaching practices have been confirmed as working effectively through the documentation provided and meetings with staff and students. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation B3 is met and that the level of risk is low.

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

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

**Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling student development and achievement**

**Findings**

2.30 The College takes a strategic approach to student development and achievement through the application of the Assessment for HE Students Policy and adherence to information and guidance provided in the Higher Education Quality Manual. The College has recently invested in a University Centre which provides learners with a dedicated space for higher education study. Such resources are monitored to ensure that any expansion of the higher education provision will include consideration of the wider resourcing needs. Resourcing requirements are identified through the College's annual monitoring report process, which is overseen by programme area managers and course leaders with final decision-making responsibility resting with the senior leadership team (as part of the business planning process).

2.31 There is a small annual budget to address any costs that may occur during the year. This is used when responding to student requests, such as access to a specific journal or complaints about resources and facilities. The relevant awarding body or awarding organisation checks the suitability of physical resources during the programme approval process. External examiners continue to monitor this suitability of resources while programmes are running.

2.32 Expectation B4 was tested through examination of the College's self-evaluation document and the associated evidence. During the review visit, it was also explored in meetings held with staff members and students.

2.33 The College actively works with existing level 3 students to prepare them for study at level 4 through the use of example level 4 delivery materials. The College recognises skills gaps in mature learners and encourages potential applicants for higher education programmes to undertake an Access to Higher Education course. However, despite this preparatory work, students have noted the substantial increase in academic expectation and the College has responded positively to student requests for more support around this time to ease the transition. In some curriculum areas, the level 3 subject offer has been altered to fit more closely with the intended level 4 progression curriculum. Academic referencing has been introduced to the level 3 study in some curriculum areas and the College has also taken the opportunity to deliver a level 5 unit at the end of level 4 to ease the transition for the final year of the Higher National qualification.

2.34 The College has a higher education study day, which covers all aspects of a learner's pastoral and academic information requirements before academic delivery commences. Students provided mixed responses to the induction process. Some students found the process helpful and informative while others felt that the material provided during induction was insufficient and in other cases overwhelming. The College is, however, proactive in seeking out the opinions of students who have gone through induction so that they can enhance the delivery for the next cohort and has taken this feedback seriously in adapting the higher education induction programme to provide a more effective transition into higher education study. Some subject areas, such as Sport and Performing Arts, have extended the induction period to allow more time for learners to absorb and understand the information being provided to them.

2.35 Students gain confidence through the support of their tutors during the first few weeks of the academic term. The College has a learning support team in place to assist students who have additional learning support needs. However, new students who have not progressed through the College's further education structures are not screened as a matter of course during induction or earlier for any potential academic learning support needs. Identification of a potential academic support need is therefore dependent on the learner declaring it on their application form. If students do not declare any additional needs, the responsibility for this identification is placed on academic staff analysing student work after course delivery has begun. While staff are aware of their pastoral responsibilities and identify anyone they believe to require such support as soon as possible, the review team are concerned that this could present a potential risk to the quality of the students' learning opportunities if required academic learning support needs are not identified and support put in place before the learner commences their course of study. The review team therefore **recommends** that by October 2014 the College ensures that appropriate mechanisms for identifying additional learning support needs are implemented before academic delivery commences.

2.36 A wide range of study skills support workshops are offered through the library service in addition to the English Laboratory discussed under Expectation B3 in this report. The library service produces study aids such as the Higher Education Handbook for Written Work to help learners achieve their full potential in assessments. In addition to this, students that the review team met cited the College's VLE as a useful way to find out about the support opportunities available.

2.37 Student data is used in monitoring and evaluating the arrangements made by the College to enable students to develop their potential. This includes regularly sharing information relating to progression, attainment and attendance which ensures that teaching staff are able to target their resources and support appropriately and effectively.

2.38 On the basis of the College's arrangements and resources for higher education provision and the monitoring of these, the review team concludes that Expectation B4 is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.39 A high-quality student experience is a strategic objective for the higher education provision at the College. Student engagement, learning and teaching are integral aspects of this philosophy. Quality learning and student experience drives all aspects of the College's provision and student engagement in this process occurs at both strategic and operational levels through a range of formal and informal forums.

2.40 The Higher Education Quality Manual contains clearly defined terms of reference for all higher education-related committees and boards and indicates where student membership is required along with the processes to be followed for appointing members. The College has a Learner Involvement Strategy which has been developed to try to engage students in the management and delivery of their educational experience. The progress and impact monitoring of this initiative is the direct responsibility of the Vice-Principal: Curriculum and Quality who produces progress reports which are shared with the senior management team, including the Impact of Learner Involvement report which is an annual paper at the College's Corporation meeting.

2.41 The College operates a Complaints and Praise Policy which students can use to formally register their views both positively and negatively. The College runs an annual Higher Education Learner Survey which asks students about their whole course of study and educational experience at the College. The review team found that the questions for this survey closely mirror the questions of the National Student Survey and considered this to be an innovative approach to gathering student feedback given the small cohort numbers within the College's provision.

2.42 The review team examined relevant documentation in testing Expectation B5. Evidence included the Learner Involvement Strategy and associated job descriptions. The team also discussed student engagement in meetings with staff members and students.

2.43 The College has appointed a Learner Involvement Coordinator whose role is to coordinate student engagement activities. Students seen by the review team were very complimentary and supportive of this role and the benefits offered to student representatives by the post-holder.

2.44 The College provides all courses with the opportunity to elect a student representative by a ballot of the cohort which is overseen by course leaders. The review team learned from questioning the students and staff that the majority of positions are filled using this process. Training and support of student representatives are conducted by the Learner Involvement Coordinator. It is not uncommon for programmes to retain the same representative for the duration of the course of study, though the position is always advertised at the beginning of the academic year by the course teams.

2.45 Student representatives are invited to feed back their cohort's views through the Student Forum meetings which are usually three times a year. In addition to this, there is a strong emphasis on fostering an 'open-door' approach to gathering learner views, and course teams regularly interact with learners outside the established forums. This approach ensures that any potential problems can be discussed and resolved quickly and effectively.

It was clear from discussions with learners that there are good communication links between staff and students.

2.46 There is a student on the Board of Governors who is elected by ballot of the course representatives. After receiving a role induction, the main aim of this role is to represent the student view to the governing body for a one-year period. However, when this role was discussed with students during the review visit, they were not all aware of the position. There is student representation on the HE QAC which reports to the Standards Committee (a subcommittee of the Board of Governors). This ensures that higher education learners have a voice at the highest decision-making levels within the College, enabling learners to feed into strategic College decision making.

2.47 Students have the opportunity to provide feedback on their experiences in a range of ways. Evaluation forms are completed by all students at the end of a module. These feed directly into the course's annual monitoring report and help to directly inform future delivery of the course. In addition to regular module evaluations, students can provide formal feedback on events such as the higher education study day and this information is communicated to the senior management team.

2.48 'Buzz the Boss' is an innovative way for all students at the College to contact the Principal directly via a link on the College VLE. The Principal was very enthusiastic about this function and the fact that it allows her to have a direct line to students and vice versa. Students seen by the review team all knew about the service and some had used it in the past. They verified that they did indeed receive a direct response from the Principal and were very positive about this facility.

2.49 The Principal periodically runs 'Principal's Question Time' which is a forum for all students to ask anything they like about the College and its provision. Principal's Question Time was again well understood and complimented by the students met at the review visit. The approachability of staff and the range of initiatives designed to gather direct feedback from students is **good practice**.

2.50 The review team concludes that the College has a student representation system in place which is effective for the size and nature of the provision and that Expectation B5 is met and the level of risk is low.

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



**Expectation (B6): Higher education providers ensure that students have appropriate opportunities to show they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the award of a qualification or credit.**

**Quality Code, Chapter B6: Assessment of students and accreditation of prior learning**

**Findings**

2.51 There is a generic college-wide Teaching and Learning Strategy and the Higher Education Quality Manual also contains a comprehensive and detailed section on the principles and process of assessment including grading and moderation. In addition to this, the College has an Assessment for HE Students Policy which underpins practices across the provision. Assessment is conducted in accordance with the regulatory framework of the awarding body or organisation. There are shared assessment strategies with the University of Huddersfield and Bishop Grosseteste University where common programmes are delivered. For Pearson provision, the College devises the assessments and uses its own standardisation procedures before a module commences. The College holds academic boards to ratify the outcomes of assessment for its higher education programmes. External examiners check the effectiveness of the College's designed assessments and report on these within their annual reports, in addition to confirming the appropriateness of internal assessment outcomes.

2.52 In testing Expectation B6, the review team examined the self-evaluation document produced by the College and evidence associated with assessment. The assessment experiences of students were explored in meetings during the review visit and this area was also discussed with staff members.

2.53 The Assessment for HE Students Policy provides clear guidance to staff relating to the application of reliable assessment methods. During induction, students receive a course handbook which explains the assessment methods for the programme along with an overview of submission requirements. This assessment guidance enables students to understand the requirements for attaining the grades they desire.

2.54 Summative and formative assessment practices are varied and align with the student-focused ethos of the College. Assessment briefs are clear and make reference to the learning outcomes being tested. Assessments are carefully designed to meet the requirements laid out in the programme specifications in terms of enabling students to achieve the intended learning outcomes for modules and to fulfil the overall programme aims. Students confirmed to the review team that they were made explicitly aware of the assessment criteria by their tutors and through course documentation. Students also highlighted that their tutors were always very helpful when it came to explaining the requirements of the modules.

2.55 Marking and grading is done in alignment with the expectations outlined in the module handbooks. The College is not yet using anonymous and blind marking for its Pearson courses; however, this is standard practice for its University of Huddersfield and Bishop Grosseteste University provision.

2.56 Formative feedback is a routine feature of College practice, although the review team found that the use of typed feedback varies across programmes of study. Feedback given to students is tailored to the individual and the College feedback turnaround time is three weeks. During the visit, staff and students noted that this feedback timeframe is usually much quicker. If the turnaround timescale cannot be met, staff are open with learners and discuss a new deadline for the return of assessment results. Summative assessment

performance is monitored and tracked and contributes to the annual programme monitoring report which enables the College to accurately track the performance of its learners.

2.57 Overall, the review team considers that the College has effective processes for assessment including moderation and double marking. Learning outcomes are communicated and discussed with students, both in class and in written form through the assessment briefs. Therefore, the review team concludes that Expectation B6 is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.58 External examiners are appointed by the relevant awarding body or awarding organisation for all courses, although the College can suggest an external examiner for Bishop Grosseteste University programmes if desired. This application would be processed via the awarding body's validation and appointment process. Pearson appoints external examiners to the programme areas across multiple colleges and so the College has no influence over their external examiner. The College received five external examiner reports in 2012-13 which focused on the quality and appropriateness of the teaching, learning and assessment of the programme, including subject currency.

2.59 The review team used the College's self-evaluation document and associated evidence to test Expectation B7. External examiner reports from the different awarding bodies and awarding organisation were considered in line with the College's documented processes. Meetings were also held with staff members, awarding body and awarding organisation representatives, and students.

2.60 The awarding bodies' external examiner reports are expected to make specific reference to the College although this has not always happened in the past. External examiner reports are considered by the awarding bodies' committees before entering the College systems. These reports are then considered at the College's HE QAC where themes across programme areas can be identified and discussed if appropriate.

2.61 The external examiner reports are discussed with students by course teams when they are released. The reports, comments and discussion are used to inform the production of the programme area's annual monitoring report, coordinated by the programme area manager in partnership with the relevant programme team. The reports serve a dual purpose within the College, namely to inform programme areas of best practice and areas to improve, and to provide students with information about their course of study.

2.62 All received external examiner reports are posted to the College's higher education VLE for all students to access. Students met during the review visit confirmed that they could access the reports and were able to explain the process for this. External examiners also regularly meet with students and gather feedback from them.

2.63 The review team finds that the College makes good use of external examiners and their reports and uses them to inform the development of programme areas. The review team therefore concludes that Expectation B7 is met and the level of risk is low.

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

**Expectation (B8): Higher education providers have effective procedures in place to routinely monitor and periodically review programmes.**

**Quality Code, Chapter B8: Programme monitoring and review**

**Findings**

2.64 The overall management of higher education is shared between the College and the relevant awarding body for university provision while the College is responsible for the management of its Pearson programmes. Within the College, the responsibility for monitoring and reviewing programmes lies with the HE QAC and the Higher Education Group. On a programme level, monitoring and review is achieved through the annual monitoring/evaluation reporting process associated with Bishop Grosseteste University and the University of Huddersfield. The Pearson provision follows the College's own annual monitoring process which feeds into the wider College teaching, learning and assessment strategies and quality assurance processes. Areas covered in the scope of the reports include: the quality of recruitment and admission, progression and outcomes, curriculum design, teaching and learning (informed by student module evaluations), assessment procedure, programme management and delivery, external reports, student support, staff development and resources.

2.65 Expectation B8 was tested through examination of the self-evaluation document and associated evidence linked to the monitoring and periodical review processes. Meetings were also held with staff members from the College, representatives from the awarding bodies and awarding organisation, and students.

2.66 The annual monitoring report process is evolutionary and is in practice an ongoing evaluation of processes and performance throughout the year. Monitoring occurs at the end of each term and culminates in the final annual monitoring report. The Vice-Principal: Curriculum and Quality is responsible for overseeing this process across the College. The completed annual monitoring reports then feed into a more strategic College-wide report which also considers further education provision. The Vice-Principal: Curriculum and Quality also holds quarterly meetings with all programme area managers and issues monthly key performance indicator data to enable effective monitoring and assessment of 'live' performance against established targets.

2.67 Closure of a course is the responsibility of the HE QAC based on the annual monitoring report process and consideration of recruitment data. In the event of a course closure, the College has appropriate measures in place to ensure the effective teaching out of the remaining provision. These procedures have been implemented for the teaching out of the University of Huddersfield foundation degree which is finishing in the 2013-14 academic year. Students on this programme who were seen by the review team felt that they had been supported with their programme even though the partnership arrangement was ending.

2.68 The College has clear and effective processes for the monitoring and periodic review of programmes in accordance with the requirements of the awarding bodies and awarding organisation. On the basis of this, the review team concludes that Expectation B8 is met and the level of risk is low.

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

**Expectation (B9): Higher education providers have fair, effective and timely procedures for handling students' complaints and academic appeals.**

**Quality Code, Chapter B9: Complaints and appeals**

**Findings**

2.69 The College has separate complaints and appeals policies which detail when and how the processes can be used. Students enrolled on University of Huddersfield or Bishop Grosseteste University programmes will use the academic complaints and appeals procedures of their respective awarding body.

2.70 The review team tested Expectation B9 by examining documentation including the relevant complaints and appeals policies. The team also explored how these policies were implemented in practice by talking to staff members and students.

2.71 Students are supported initially with making a complaint or appeal by their award teams or they can seek help and guidance from the learner services department at the College. Bishop Grosseteste University students do not have access to University support and guidance services as the provision is operated under a franchised agreement.

2.72 Students seen by the review team were aware of where to locate the complaints and appeals processes (on the College VLE) but none had needed to use them. They were supportive of the assumption that they would be able to seek appropriate support and guidance should they require it in future.

2.73 The number and nature of students' complaints are compiled into an annual report which is discussed at the College's Higher Education Quality Assurance Committee. To the date of the review visit, the College had only received one higher education complaint, the nature of which was unrelated to academic delivery.

2.74 The review team concludes that the College has clear complaints and appeals procedures which are well understood by both students and staff and therefore Expectation B9 is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

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

## **Findings**

2.75 The College does not have degree awarding powers and therefore its higher education provision is ultimately the responsibility of its awarding bodies and awarding organisation. However, the College is responsible for managing and implementing the agreed procedures effectively. At the time of the review visit, the College only offered one course that incorporated elements delivered in partnership with external organisations relevant to this review. The Foundation Degree in Applied Studies (Learning Support) which is franchised from Bishop Grosseteste University has a requirement for the learner to undertake 12 hours of placement each week as a condition of entry to the programme of study.

2.76 The review team tested Expectation B10 by examining the College's self-evaluation document and associated evidence. Meetings were also held with staff members and students.

2.77 The College has in place clear and comprehensive written agreements with its awarding bodies and awarding organisation. These reflect the requirements for appropriate due diligence arrangements and approval procedures for all new and existing programmes of study delivered by the College. The College works effectively with its awarding bodies and these relationships are managed by the University and College link tutors.

2.78 Most students enrolled on the Foundation Degree in Applied Studies (Learning Support) course were already employed by a school who wanted to support them to gain their qualification. The College is required by Bishop Grosseteste University's Code of Practice for Work Based Learning to ensure that it is able to support learners in their studies by providing suitable opportunities which will enable them to meet the learning outcomes for the module and award.

2.79 The review team was unable to find evidence that the College has a process for the vetting and assessment of their work-based partners to ensure that the learner is able to meet the learning outcomes and expectations of the programme of study before they commence the course. Students are not formally supported in the workplace by their College tutors. The review team heard that the learners were appointed mentors by the placement providers but that the College has no role in this process.

2.80 Under the Code of Practice for Work Based Learning with Bishop Grosseteste University, the College is required to establish a formal written agreement with any external organisations that contribute to the delivery of its provision, even if it is franchised. The College provided the review team with evidence of the letters and responses sent to school headteachers as part of the application and enrolment process, receipt of which is a requirement for enrolment to the course. However, the correspondence from the College does not explicitly state either side's obligations and expectations in line with the awarding body's expectations. The College could not clearly articulate or provide the review team with sufficient evidence that the responsibilities it had under the Bishop Grosseteste University Code of Practice for Work Based Learning were being met. Therefore, it is the review team's view that the College does not have processes to ensure the effective oversight of higher

education students' placement experience. The team **recommends** that by October 2014 the College review and revise the arrangements with the awarding bodies and awarding organisation to enable the effective oversight of students' work-based learning experience.

2.81 On the basis of the lack of formal oversight of work-based learning for higher education students, the review team concludes that Expectation B10 is not met and that it represents a moderate risk.

**Expectation: Not met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

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

**Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research degrees***

**Findings**

2.82 The College does not award research degrees, therefore this Expectation is not applicable.



## Quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.83 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The team identified three features of good practice and two recommendations in this area. One further feature of good practice is also linked to the area of Enhancement.

2.84 The College has a clear, shared commitment to supporting students with the aim of raising their aspirations and levels of academic confidence. A thorough approach is taken to learning and teaching as well as the provision of additional academic support for students outside of the classroom environment.

2.85 The review team concludes, however, that the Expectation relating to managing higher education provision with others was not met and posed a moderate risk. While there is a commitment to supporting students with their employment/placements and encouraging them to make links between theory and practice, the oversight of higher education work-based learning requires development. Mechanisms to verify the suitability of work-based learning are required to ensure that students are receiving the best possible experience.

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

### **3 Judgement: Quality of the information produced about its provision**

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

#### **Quality Code, Part C: Information about higher education provision**

#### **Findings**

3.1 The College publishes a range of information about itself and its activities mainly through its website and brochure. There is also a bespoke document for mature students that has been produced in association with Access to Higher Education students. The College also provides students with information during the academic interview prior to enrolment.

3.2 Programme area managers and heads of department have the primary responsibility in ensuring that the external-facing information (mainly about courses) is appropriate. The Marketing Manager ensures that all appropriate College personnel, such as learner services and student support teams, are able to have an input into the content of specific publications. College staff ensure that the content of programme-related documentation issued to students is correct and up to date. This is achieved through close liaison with the awarding bodies' and awarding organisation's staff. For the Pearson provision, the Quality Improvement Manager acts as a conduit between the awarding organisation and the delivery staff, ensuring that handbooks are kept up to date.

3.3 The College will be producing Key Information Set (KIS) data for the first time in 2013-14. The required information will be collated centrally and distributed to those responsible for creating the KIS at programme level.

3.4 In testing Expectation C, the review team explored the information provided by the College in both electronic and paper-based forms and the processes for managing this. Meetings were also held with staff and students to explore the quality of information available to stakeholders.

3.5 The College publishes information on its website and in hard copy brochure format for prospective students. The website hosts a wide range of appropriate information about the content and expectations of the College's higher education courses and the College brochure contains extensive information regarding the support systems available. The marketing team operates a rigorous review process to ensure that both generic and course information is accurate and all details are subject to a three-stage checking process before final publication on the website. In addition, programme-specific information is returned to the subject specialists for a final check prior to publication.

3.6 Students seen by the review team did note that as they had often progressed from level 3 qualifications at the College they did not tend to use the information provided on the website. Not all students who had used the website considered the information provided to be of sufficient quality as some unit/module details had been incorrect. The College has, however, improved the quality of the information provided via the website.

3.7 The College recognises the importance of social media to students and employers, and uses social media platforms as a source of advertising and to help with admissions queries. Some programmes have their own closed pages to which only enrolled students have access and these are useful for communication purposes. At present, entries are

monitored and where necessary moderated daily, including at weekends. The Marketing Manager monitors the use of social media daily and responds to requests for the issue of press releases in conjunction with the appropriate course leader/subject specialist. Where curriculum areas or programmes have their own social media page, a named member of staff is responsible for the oversight of content.

3.8 The College runs a dedicated higher education induction event during which students are supplied with an induction pack and further Students' Union information. The College reduced the amount of information provided during the induction phase in response to student feedback. Students report that most of the advice, information and guidance they require is best obtained directly from staff as part of the tutorial process.

3.9 Once enrolled, students receive a range of programme-specific information including the programme handbooks, programme specifications, module handbooks and the generic Higher Education Handbook for Written Work. Responsibility for issuing information about the programmes lies with the Marketing Manager, although this responsibility does not explicitly appear in the terms of reference for either the HE QAC or the Higher Education Group and does not feature in the Higher Education Quality Manual.

3.10 The College makes effective use of its VLE and course pages are maintained by the associated course team. Students cited the VLE as the main source of information relating to their courses and confirmed that content was kept up to date and easy to access. In addition to the subject-specific details, there is an 'HE Noticeboard' page, populated by course managers, which contains more general information relevant to higher education learners and enables good practice to be shared. Policies and procedures such as complaints and appeals forms are also available on the VLE along with all higher education external examiner reports. There is no prescribed minimum content and each course manages their area on the VLE differently, although it is expected that the information provided will be engaging and correct. Most areas provide the programme handbook, module handbooks, appropriate study guides and lecture notes/presentations. The requirements for the upload of information to the VLE are not made explicit in formal College documentation.

3.11 Student achievement is ratified at the end-of-academic-year assessment boards attended by College staff responsible for the teaching, learning and assessment of the programme, awarding body staff and external examiners. On completion of an academic year, students receive notification of progression to the following year or award of the qualification via the awarding body. College staff manage the process for the Pearson provision, accessing the results and issuing them to the students directly.

3.12 Students met by the review team reported that information regarding progression opportunities for level 6 study had been a little unclear. However, the College has started to formulate a process to ensure that all level 5 students have access to correct information regarding potential routes. This has included the use of the VLE to highlight possible progression opportunities. The review team therefore **affirms** the actions being taken to inform students of potential progression routes to level 6 study.

3.13 The range of information produced by the College along with the approval and monitoring systems ensure that Expectation C is met and that the level of risk is low.

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

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

3.14 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook and identified one affirmation. Students are provided with information that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The College's VLE is a valued source of information for students along with the specific course information provided in course handbooks.

3.15 The College is aware of the need to support students with progression to level 6 study and has started via the VLE to promote the opportunities available to them. The review team affirmed this course of action which is needed to keep students fully informed and encourage further progression.

3.16 The College has developed effective processes for monitoring the range of information produced including details on social media. These processes are understood by the relevant staff members involved and meet the requirements of the awarding bodies and awarding organisation.

3.17 The review team concludes that the quality of the information produced about its provision **meets** UK expectations.

## 4 Judgement: Enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

### Findings

4.1 The College's Strategic Priorities focus on high-quality learning for students. These higher education priorities are linked to the College's strategic aims through its Higher Education Strategy document. The College conducts a course performance review at three points during the year to monitor progress and this feeds into its annual monitoring report process.

4.2 The College has recently developed a dedicated University Centre which is intended to be solely for the use of its higher education learners. It provides learners with spaces to study and socialise away from the College's further education students. The College provides students with a higher education study day that helps to prepare them for the transition to higher-level programmes. The College also runs a higher education fair which is geared towards providing further education learners with support, guidance and opportunities for higher-level study and supporting their academic progression.

4.3 The review team examined this Expectation by reviewing documentation including the College's self-evaluation document and associated evidence such as policies and meeting minutes. Meetings were also held with students, student representatives and staff during the review visit.

4.4 The College does not have a distinct enhancement strategy. However, the review team found multiple examples of enhancement activity taking place. The new University Centre, for example, has begun to give higher education learners a more distinct identity. However, during discussions with students it became apparent that there are still issues with further education learners using the spaces supposed to be allocated for higher education. The review team also noted that the Centre does not cater for all higher learners as some courses such as Sport are based on a different campus. Students met by the review team were, however, consistently complimentary about the level of support available to them throughout their study and several stated that close links with tutors along with smaller class sizes was a key factor in their decision to study at the College. The English Laboratory initiative discussed under Expectation B3 directly enhances the quality of students' learning opportunities by enabling learners to develop their academic practice.

4.5 The College actively supports staff to engage in higher-level study. The senior management team has allocated a budget to staff development and further study opportunities identified by programme areas. This enhances the learning environment for students by exposing them to staff with wider subject knowledge. The College's teaching triangles and lesson observation processes help to enhance the learning environment by allowing staff to be consistently challenged and developed by peer interaction and support which leads directly to improvements in the classroom.

4.6 The Higher Education Coordinator's role is to develop the provision at the College and work closely with all programme areas in the collation of themes and ideas, while also disseminating relevant information/changes to the appropriate programme area managers and course leaders. The formal course review process also enables the College to constantly assess and develop the learning environment.

4.7 The College has invested in supporting students to provide feedback on their learning experience, including the use of module evaluation forms across all programmes and on specific planned activities to support progression. Reports based on student feedback have included the Learner Impact Report, the report on Learner Perceptions of Teaching and Learning, Principal's Question Time and the annual higher education survey.

4.8 The College has recently developed an Enterprise Strategy which is aimed at encouraging learners to build business and employability skills to support their programme of study. The review team met with students from Performing Arts who had used this initiative to produce a range of events and activities for the whole College to be a part of.

4.9 While the review team was able to identify a range of enhancement activities, it felt that the College should try to embed the understanding of these and make more visible use of the Quality Code among its teaching and management staff to help further improve and enhance the students' learning opportunities. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that by July 2015 the College strengthen arrangements for taking deliberate steps to enhance the quality of students' learning opportunities, including increasing the engagement of staff with the Quality Code.

4.10 Overall, on the basis of the documentation provided and meetings with students and staff, the review team concludes that the College takes deliberate steps to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities and that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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

## Enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.11 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook and identified one feature of good practice (as noted under Expectation B3) and one recommendation.

4.12 The College's Strategic Priorities focus on high-quality learning for students and this is reflected in the commitment from staff members and the new developments within the organisation. The English Laboratory initiative is making a particularly positive contribution to the enhancement of students' learning opportunities.

4.13 Overall, however, the review team considers that arrangements for taking deliberate steps to enhance the quality of students' learning opportunities could be strengthened. Staff members could be more fully engaged with the Quality Code and this could be used more visibly across the College and ultimately to further enhance the quality of students' learning opportunities.

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

## 5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

### Findings

5.1 The College places substantial emphasis on supporting its local community, partly in recognition of the fact that it is located within an area characterised by a higher than national average proportion of people with no qualifications and a lower proportion of those with qualifications at level 4 or above. The College therefore views its higher education provision as a framework through which it can address the local, national and international skills agenda, through raising the aspirations of both its staff and students.

5.2 The College has a Business Development Unit and an Employment Engagement Manager whose main purpose is to identify collaborative opportunities. Students have benefitted from the Enterprise Zone which has provided project start-up funding.

5.3 The College focuses strongly on developing employability and enterprise skills in its students. It seeks to achieve this by embedding employability skills into the curriculum areas via teaching, learning and student experience, and to some extent assessment. The College has recently established an Enterprise Zone, a joint initiative between the College and the local council technology hub. The purpose of the Enterprise Zone is to facilitate idea generation, exploration of funding opportunities and collaborative working on projects. This has been used successfully by Performing Arts students for assessment of business development skills.

5.4 The College has a clear focus on developing curricula that generate employment-ready students. This is demonstrated through the programme design and the choice of modules that comprise its higher education qualifications. Modules that develop employability skills are included wherever possible. The development of interpersonal skills has also received much attention and contributes to overall personal and professional development across the higher education portfolio. Within the Business curriculum area, focus has been on establishing relationships with local employers and local businesses are beginning to provide industry-specific assessment opportunities.

5.5 The College has a Business Development Department which supports both further and higher education provision. The Employment Engagement Manager communicates with employers to determine industry needs and to align the higher education provision with these. The College recently hosted a Higher Education Graduate Fair which helped raise awareness of the need for enhanced employability-related graduate skills. A recent Food Sector Showcase event was also attended by employers from all areas ('Field to Fork') and plans are in place for similar events in other sector areas such as Engineering.

5.6 A local business is currently sponsoring two of its own members of staff to study at the College. The presence of these two students is having a positive effect on the rest of the cohort and the College is seeking to develop more formal, wider sponsorship relationships with local businesses. Other programmes require students to engage in outreach programmes working alongside organisations to further develop their employability skills. Employers and students report favourably on the steps taken through industry-level involvement in the delivery of programmes around the use of work-related learning opportunities. These allow the application of theory to practice and (to some extent) practice to theory on return to the classroom.

5.7 Only students on the Foundation Degree in Applied Studies (Learning Support) are formally required to spend part of their course within the industrial context. In most cases this is in their place of employment, although the specific course requirement is 12 hours' work-



based learning per week. This enables students to develop educational practice through work-based employability training, supported by their own employer.

5.8 The College could be more proactive in its work with employers and its use of them as a source of external expertise. However, students report favourably on the embedding of employability skills and agree that one of the best aspects of their courses is the ability to relate their formal study to their work experience.

## Glossary

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

If you require formal definitions of other terms please refer to the section on assuring standards and quality: [www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuringstandardsandquality).

User-friendly explanations of a wide range of terms can be found in the longer **Glossary** on the QAA website: [www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us/glossary](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us/glossary).

### Academic standards

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

### Award

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

### Blended learning

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

### Credit(s)

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

### Degree-awarding body

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

### Distance learning

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

### Dual award or double award

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

### e-learning

See **technology enhanced or enabled learning**.

### **Enhancement**

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

### **Expectations**

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

### **Flexible and distributed learning**

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

### **Framework**

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

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

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

### **Good practice**

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

### **Learning opportunities**

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

### **Learning outcomes**

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

### **Multiple awards**

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

### **Operational definition**

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

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

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

**Programme specifications**

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

**Public information**

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

**Quality Code**

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

**Reference points**

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

**Subject benchmark statement**

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

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

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

**Threshold academic standard**

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

**Virtual learning environment (VLE)**

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

**Widening participation**

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

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