



Higher Education Review of Grantham College

February 2016

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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 Grantham College. The review took place from 1 to 3 February 2016 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Dr Mary Meldrum
- Mrs Roshani Swift
- Mr Ken Harris (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. [Explanations of the findings](#) are found on page 4 with numbered paragraphs starting on page 5.

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

The [themes](#) for the academic year 2015-16 are Student Employability and Digital Literacy,² and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

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

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

² Higher Education Review themes:
www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=2859.

³ QAA website: www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us.

⁴ Higher Education Review web pages:
www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review.

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Grantham College

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

- The maintenance of the academic standards of the 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 about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

Good practice

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

- The inclusive approach to admissions that widens student participation in higher education (Expectation B2).
- The comprehensive and personalised academic and pastoral support provided to all higher education students (Expectation B4).
- The effective management of partnerships with employers that enhances the student learning experience (Expectation B10).

Recommendations

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

By July 2016:

- create consistent and clear definitive records for all Pearson higher education programmes (Expectation A2.2)
- ensure appropriate participation of students in the Subject Assessment & Progression Boards to protect the confidentiality of all students (Expectation B6).

By December 2016:

- ensure the effective and consistent use of the VLE by teaching teams (Expectation B3)
- ensure the actions arising from monitoring and review processes are formally captured and shown to inform the enhancement of higher education provision (Expectation B8).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The introduction of the Work-Related Learning Policy and Procedure for higher education students (Expectation B10).

Theme: Student Employability

The College places strategic emphasis on engaging with, and supporting, student employability from a whole College perspective, and recognises the significance of enabling students to be ready for work, or for those already at work to enhance their work-based practice. The majority of the higher education students at the College are part-time and employed, or volunteers working within areas of practice linked to their programme of study. This enables them to draw on their work-related experience and inform their academic outcomes, and to enhance their practice through engagement with theoretical and technical developments.

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

About Grantham College

Grantham College is a general further education College operating from five sites in the town of Grantham and serving a predominantly rural area. In 2014-15 there were approximately 4,000 students enrolled at the College. The College's mission focuses on inspiring students, empowering their stakeholders and so supporting the achievement of goals and aspirations, and this mission is reflected in the College's Public Values Statement.

The College's indirectly funded higher education provision is delivered in collaboration with two degree-awarding bodies, the University of Bedfordshire and Bishop Grosseteste University. The College also offers directly funded higher education provision in collaboration with Pearson. There are 170 higher education enrolments, of which 110 are part-time. The College's higher education provision attracts students who are in employment, particularly in the areas of education, health services and the engineering sectors, as well as students returning to education and those keen to progress from further education courses within the College.

Since the review of Grantham College undertaken by QAA in 2011, academic collaborations that the College had with De Montfort University and the University of Lincoln have been terminated. In addition, there have been a number of changes to the Senior Leadership Team as well as the management structure during this time, including the responsibility of higher education which now rests with the Acting Principal and Deputy Chief Executive, with day-to-day oversight provided by the Assistant Principal Curriculum and Quality.

The College identifies the changes in collaborating partners as a key challenge over the past six years in relation to their higher education provision. They identify that they have adapted to this challenge, expanding their provision as well as the variety of programmes on offer, including receiving a directly funded contract with HEFCE to deliver Pearson higher education programmes. The other key challenges identified by the College relate to the introduction of higher fees and the changing policies on student number controls, both of which impact on growth opportunities.

The 2011 QAA review identified an advisable recommendation regarding the management of higher education. A new management structure is in place across the College, and this report identifies that the structure is effective in providing more strategic oversight and monitoring of higher education provision. In relation to the desirable recommendations, these have been addressed in part and are explored in this report.

Explanation of the findings about Grantham College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

1.1 The College delivers indirectly and directly funded higher education programmes at Levels 4 and 5 of the FHEQ. The indirectly funded provision operates within formal partnership agreements with its awarding bodies, the University of Bedfordshire and Bishop Grosseteste University, and the directly funded provision operates within agreements with Pearson. The awarding bodies hold the ultimate responsibility for ensuring compliance with the requirements of the FHEQ, the QAA's guidance on Qualification Characteristics, relevant National Credit Frameworks and Subject Benchmark Statements and this is highlighted within the Responsibilities Checklist for each awarding body.

1.2 Where courses are developed by the College with its university awarding bodies as part of collaborative partnerships, or for single delivery at the College, staff apply the respective University's guidance which facilitates engagement with the FHEQ, Subject Benchmark Statements and relevant external reference points for both new programmes and revalidations. College staff engaged in such developments use the processes and practices supported by specific templates, which are submitted to the partner University for approval.

1.3 Similarly, Pearson awards the BTEC Higher National qualifications located within the Qualifications and Credit Framework and have overall responsibility for assuring the setting and maintenance of academic standards. The College does, however, use the

Pearson guidelines to decide on the structure of individual programmes, working with the prescribed mandatory units and selecting from a range of optional units to meet the specific needs of students and employers.

1.4 Each programme has a programme specification reflecting the requirements of the external reference points. Report templates direct external examiners to assess whether the provision meets the appropriate threshold academic standards.

1.5 The partner Universities and Pearson scrutinise the appropriateness of the level, the learning outcomes, qualification titles and content as part of the approval, reapproval and monitoring procedures; this would enable the College to meet the Expectation. The review team tested this Expectation by reviewing College, University and Pearson documentation which included Partnership Agreements, validation documents, external examiner reports, programme specifications and staff development plans. The review team met the Principal, senior staff, teaching teams, administrative teams, and students to explore the College's awareness and engagement with the appropriate external reference points for setting and maintaining threshold academic standards.

1.6 The review team found that the College works effectively within the respective awarding partner's processes and academic regulations. The review team concludes that staff understand how and why programmes are approved, delivered and assessed at different levels, the importance of externality and their responsibilities for maintaining threshold academic standards for the higher education programmes under the respective partnership agreements.

1.7 The review team concludes that the College works effectively within the appropriate awarding partnership frameworks and regulations for the award of credit and qualifications. Therefore, the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.8 The partnership agreement with each University requires the College to work within the academic frameworks provided by the respective University academic regulations. Similarly, Pearson arrangements are covered within a formal partnership agreement with the College. The respective responsibilities of the College and the awarding bodies and organisation are set out in the agreements between the College and its three partners, and confirmed within the responsibilities checklist, which identifies both individual and shared responsibilities. The capacity of the College to meet the requirements of the awarding partners' reference points for academic standards is assessed within validation, approval, external examining, annual monitoring and periodic review processes.

1.9 Within the College, oversight of the higher education provision is part of the monitoring and reviewing remit of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), which receives quarterly reports against key indicators. The Acting Principal currently has responsibility for the strategic direction of the provision with the recently appointed Curriculum Manager for higher education reporting to the Assistant Principal - Curriculum and Quality. Each teaching area within the College has a Curriculum Manager responsible for its higher education provision.

1.10 The College has further developed its committee structures for the oversight of the quality and standards of its higher education provision in response to its last QAA review in 2011, introducing a separate Higher Education Group, to bring together the curriculum managers and higher education staff from the different areas to improve communication. This Group provides a forum for the discussion of operational issues, and oversight of the flow of information regarding higher education to and from the College SLT.

1.11 The awarding partners' academic frameworks and supporting processes, and the College higher education oversight systems and processes would allow the College to meet the Expectation. In order to test the effectiveness of the College's approach, the review team examined relevant documentation produced by the awarding partners and the College including programme handbooks, external examiner reports and awarding partner regulatory frameworks, as well as minutes of College higher education oversight meetings. The review team explored understanding of the relevant awarding body reference points for academic standards with senior managers and academic staff and students during the visit.

1.12 The review team found that the College's engagement with the academic frameworks for the awarding universities and Pearson, together with the College's own oversight systems for higher education, effectively support the College in meeting the Expectation. The Expectation is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.13 The College does not have degree awarding powers. Programmes are approved through the awarding partners. Changes to any definitive elements are therefore approved in line with the partnership policies for each of the partners.

1.14 Definitive records of programmes run by the College are retained by the College in the form of Course and Unit Information Forms and the responsibility for devising, validating and amending these documents remains with the awarding partner. Programme specifications are made available within programme handbooks, the College's website and on the virtual learning environment (VLE). Design and approval of programmes is achieved by consulting with staff and students by way of a course proposal form before being presented to the Curriculum Manager for consideration at the Higher Education Group. Final consideration of the programme specification is approved by SLT and the Board of Governors at the College's Standards Committee. For Pearson programmes the College follows the procedures as defined within the course approval form.

1.15 The policies and processes in place at the College would allow the Expectation to be met. The review team considered a range of documents relating to this Expectation that included course and unit information forms and programme specification documents, programme handbooks, the VLE, course proposal form, minutes of SLT Meetings, and meetings were held with staff and students.

1.16 The review team explored the College's approach to maintaining definitive records and found that staff are aware of the responsibilities and processes as defined by the awarding partners. Programme approval and changes to programme specifications for University of Bedfordshire are the responsibility of the University. Bishop Grosseteste University programmes are discussed with the University and additional units pass through their validation process. For Pearson programmes the process is discussed formally by SLT and the Standards Committee. The review team found that the process is defined within a course approval flow chart with further detail for developing Pearson programmes defined in a separate document. In testing their understanding of this the review team found that staff were able to demonstrate their knowledge of the relevant processes.

1.17 The review team found that for University partner programmes, where the responsibility resides with and is provided by the awarding partner, the definitive records contain detailed information for both students and staff, including details about the modules, as well as the content and assessment. For Pearson programmes, the review team reviewed one programme specification document and information available on the website and in handbooks. Neither the one programme specification, nor the programme handbooks made clear the number of credits students are required to study at each level. In light of this the review team **recommends** that the College create consistent and clear definitive records for all Pearson higher education programmes.

1.18 Overall, the review team found that the College has processes in place to support maintaining academic standards in this area. The College delivers its provision according to

the policies and procedures of its awarding partners and is defined by a process document in each case. The processes for managing programme specifications for university partner awards meet expectations. However, the College was only able to show the team that it had produced a programme specification for one of the Pearson programmes and the information provided to students on Pearson programmes did not have sufficient detail on the overall credit requirements for an award. The review team concludes that because definitive records do not exist for all Pearson programmes, and the information provided on the existing record is incomplete, the Expectation is not met and the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

Findings

1.19 The College follows the awarding body processes for the approval of taught programmes. The College is responsible for working with its awarding partners for ensuring that academic standards are set at a level which meets the UK standard for the qualification.

1.20 The College has undergone formal validation and approval for its University partner awards. These processes are detailed in the University awarding body procedures. External expertise is used as part of the process with awarding partners. Assignments are set by the University partner, with the exception of the Foundation Degree in Special Education Needs and Disability. Assignments are agreed by an external examiner and verified internally when completed. A sample of marked work is reviewed by the external examiner.

1.21 For Pearson awards the College has its own internal review process before new programmes and units are put forward to Pearson for approval. Assessed work is internally moderated by an internal verifier and then checked by an external examiner.

1.22 The team met senior staff and course leaders and reviewed a range of documents including programme specifications, minutes of approval meetings and process documentation.

1.23 The universities' requirements ensure that there is an external member on panels for the approval of new programmes and on programme periodic reviews and that there is employer engagement in the design of programmes. Broad learning outcomes for Levels 4 and 5 are mapped to the FHEQ and checked by the awarding partners through approval processes.

1.24 The annual monitoring process includes response to review panel conditions and recommendations as well as to external examiner reports. The approval process for Pearson programmes is followed. The external examiner reports confirm standards on both University and Pearson programmes. On the College course proposal forms for new Pearson awards, there is little evidence of engagement with externals as part of the new programme development consultation. The College recognises that there is scope to have a more consistent approach to employer involvement in the development of programmes.

1.25 The review team found that the programme and review procedures work effectively. There is evidence of externality within the programme approval and review processes but scope to improve consultation with employers. Staff are aware of the programme approval and review procedures. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.26 The Universities and Pearson oversee the academic standards of their own awards. They are responsible for confirming that the achievement of programme learning outcomes is met through assessment and for ensuring that UK standards and their own academic standards have been met.

1.27 The awarding partners determine internal moderation processes and the appointment of external examiners. The external examiner reports confirm that UK threshold standards and the awarding partners' own requirements for the achievement of learning outcomes through assessment has been met. Institutional processes are followed to ensure that standards applied at the College are fully aligned with awarding partner standards.

1.28 The review team looked at programme and assessment documentation, external examiner reports, annual monitoring reports, and met senior and teaching staff, as well as course leaders.

1.29 The College meets the monitoring and review requirements of its awarding partners. College oversight of standards is provided through Course Review Team (CRT) meetings and Subject Assessment & Progression Boards (SABs). External examiner reports confirm that programme learning outcomes are met.

1.30 The team considers that the mechanisms used by the College ensure that the achievement of programme learning outcomes is met through assessment and that the procedures that the College adopts for ensuring that UK threshold standards and their awarding bodies' academic standards have been satisfied are secure. The team concludes that the Expectation is met and that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.31 The responsibility for monitoring and review of programmes and alignment with UK threshold standards and awarding partner standards is the responsibility of the awarding partners. The College is responsible for qualification delivery and maintenance of the academic standards of the awarding bodies. The College has the responsibility of ensuring that any changes to modules or programmes made by the awarding body are implemented and this is monitored through the external examining reports from the awarding partners.

1.32 Awarding partner processes include verification of achievement of UK threshold standards and maintenance of the academic standards of awarding partners through moderation processes and the appointment of external examiners.

1.33 The review team met senior staff, course leaders and teaching staff. The team examined programme monitoring reports including annual reports and external examiner reports.

1.34 The schedule of programmes that the College is accredited to run on behalf of the University of Bedfordshire was updated in 2011 and the University review of the programmes is scheduled for 2017. External examiner reports show that UK threshold standards are met. The Bishop Grosseteste Foundation Degree in Special Educational Needs and Disability was approved in 2012 and an external examiner report confirms that UK threshold standards are being met. The Pearson processes for external oversight of programmes confirm that UK threshold standards are being met.

1.35 The review team concludes that the College is following the processes for monitoring and review of programmes and is maintaining the academic standards of its awarding partners. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.36 The College works to the Universities' academic regulations which require approval and reapproval processes to involve independent external and industry expertise. University-appointed external examiners, link tutors and account managers also support, guide and monitor the ongoing maintenance of academic standards of the programmes in terms of delivery and assessment. For Pearson programmes, external examiners are appointed to externally review the ongoing achievement of the required academic standards.

1.37 At College level, externality is provided through the employer voice, and employer views are captured by the College within focus groups, which inform programme development, and the visiting lecturer programme. Examples of the involvement of visiting lecturers include the Foundation Degree in Special Educational Needs and Disability and the Foundation Degree in Children, Families and Community Health.

1.38 The engagement with the academic regulatory framework of the partner Universities and Pearson covering externality, and the College processes for ensuring the involvement of stakeholders, would enable the College to meet the Expectation.

1.39 The review team tested this by considering relevant documentation on programme approval, external examiner reports, stakeholder focus group terms of reference and minutes, and module reviews. Reports from external examiners were comprehensive and mainly positive, with actions arising addressed appropriately. The review team also explored staff, student and employer understanding of the significance of involving externality in the setting and maintenance of academic standards during meetings.

1.40 The review team was satisfied that the College's engagement with the awarding partners' approaches for ensuring externality and its own established systems for responding to external examiners, working with University link tutors and account managers, engagement with students and employers and visiting lecturers are effective.

1.41 The review team concludes that the College engages appropriately with externality by using external and independent expertise in setting, approving and maintaining academic standards. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

1.43 Of the seven Expectations in this area, six are met. The one Expectation that is not met is determined by the review team to have a moderate risk. Expectation A2.2 is not met because of the lack of consistent and clear definitive records for the College's higher education programmes delivered in collaboration with Pearson. The review team makes a recommendation to the College to address this issue. There are no other key findings in this area.

1.44 The review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered on behalf of degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation at the College **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1 The College processes for, and involvement in, programme design and approval are subject to the processes of its awarding bodies. The College has its own internal programme review process for Pearson programmes. The College's Higher Education Group reviews proposals for new Pearson programmes.

2.2 The awarding Universities have their own procedures for the development and approval of new programmes and are responsible for ensuring that curriculum development for their awards takes account of the learner voice and employer feedback connected to partner colleges.

2.3 For Pearson programmes, College curriculum teams are responsible for developing proposal documentation in line with the internal approval process. The course proposal form is used for new programmes. The form is initially sent to the curriculum manager before the Higher Education Group decides if the proposal should go forward. The final internal approval stage is at Standards Committee. The programme then goes forward to Pearson for approval.

2.4 The review team met senior and teaching staff, and course leaders, and reviewed programme approval documentation. The University partners are responsible for producing programme specifications. For Pearson programmes, College staff follow the internal process for putting forward new programme proposals. Proposals that pass the internal process are then put forward to Pearson for approval. The College has identified the need for a more consistent approach to the engagement of employers in the development of Pearson programmes.

2.5 For Pearson awards, the College was only able to produce one College programme specification showing the subset of the Pearson award as approved to run at the College, and this did not clearly specify the total credits required at each level to gain an award. The review team notes that the need for a programme specification was raised by an external examiner in February 2015. It is clear from talking to students and staff that the schedule of unit delivery is clearly understood and is detailed in handbooks. However, the definitive specification of the approved award was not made available to the team for all but one of the Pearson programmes (see Expectation A2.2).

2.6 The review team concludes that there is a process in place for proposing new Pearson programmes and that this would benefit from a consistent approach to consultation with employers. The team notes the need for consistent and clear definitive programme specifications for all Pearson programmes. The review team concludes that, overall, the College procedures for programme design and approval meet the Expectation and that the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.7 The College has a number of documents and policies in place to allow for a fair admissions process including an HE Admissions Policy that is guided by the policies of each awarding partner, and further by the College's HE Strategy and Public Values Statement. The College has a policy for the Assessment of Prior Learning (APL). There is a Recruitment and Selection Policy and an Admissions Policy provided by its awarding bodies, which outlines where responsibility is delegated to the College. Applications to the College are received by direct application. It produces a prospectus for higher education admissions and this information is available online. Staff are trained in the recruitment process. To aid prospective students on the application process, the College has open evening events three times a year and all students receive an interview. Upon successful application the College sends a letter detailing enrolment and induction. All applicants have the right to appeal a refused decision.

2.8 The policies and processes in place at the College would allow the Expectation to be met. The review team considered a range of documents that included the HE Admissions Policy, awarding partners' admissions policies, and student surveys, as well as exploring the Expectation through a number of meetings held with staff and students. The review team also examined the College's HE Strategy, which sets out the four strategic aims that should allow for effective delivery of the application process and its aims to increase its higher education provision by way of increasing recruitment. The Strategy was implemented in 2012 and is current.

2.9 The review team examined the Public Values Statement. This states the College's commitment to serving the local community by working in partnership to deliver high quality training and education that is customer-focused, professional and valuing diversity. The Statement sets out the College's approach to the delivery of the Admissions Policy, which also sets out the same commitments to equality and diversity, and its aims to delivering a clear and fair application process. The policy sets out the process for application to the College and can be used by staff to ensure they are following the correct process. The policy confirms that all higher education applications are made by application form, which is available directly from the College and submitted by hard or electronic copy. Students confirmed that they were satisfied with the application process and trusted the accuracy of information provided.

2.10 The policy for APL covers information for students with alternative qualifications and/or experience. For student with overseas qualifications, the College will make decisions using qualified staff in this area. The APL policy sets out the basis for considering prior learning and experience. The Recruitment Positive Action Strategy sets out the College's approach to addressing poor recruitment for black and minority ethnic students.

2.11 The review team looked at information used by prospective students as part of the application process and examined the prospectus. This is a dedicated document for higher education applicants and covers a range of information that includes course information, information on the awarding partners, student comments and profiles, fee information,

student support services, facilities, and information on how to apply directly to the College. Information is included on the levels of each award for both Pearson and University courses. Students were able to confirm satisfaction and confidence in the accuracy and availability of the information.

2.12 The application form used for admissions appears clear and easy to follow. It includes information that informs applicants of the process following submission, the same process is also available online via the website. When selecting which course to apply for online, there is information that covers details of the course including fee information for the current academic year.

2.13 The review team looked for evidence that staff are trained and supported in the recruitment process and examined evidence of training records. This document details qualifications of staff involved in admissions and includes customer service training and advice and guidance training, with evidence of staff trained in assessing learner disability needs and this was confirmed in meetings with support staff.

2.14 In exploring how the College reviews the application, admissions and enrolment processes, the review team examined minutes of meetings and focus groups. The Higher Education Group has agenda items that include Applications and Marketing Update and the HE Student Forum Meeting contains discussions with student representatives across higher education subjects, contains an agenda item on Review of Induction Arrangements. The application and induction process was also discussed at the CTR meeting. Students again confirmed that the College actively seeks their opinions on the application and enrolment process. The wide range of activities and engagement of the staff involved in admissions is **good practice** due to the inclusive approach to admissions that widens student participation in higher education.

2.15 The College follows the processes of its awarding partners for admissions and has a number of policies aimed at providing a fair and inclusive application experience for prospective students. Staff are suitably trained and provide a wide range of support and guidance to students. Therefore the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.16 The College recognises the centrality of high quality learning and teaching within its Higher Education Strategy. It has prioritised the development of a higher education identity within the College by locating parts of the higher education provision in separate premises.

2.17 The College aims to recruit teaching staff with academic qualifications which are at least one level above their teaching commitments, and who have relevant industrial or vocational expertise which will support the academic and vocational development of students. Staff teaching on higher education courses are also expected to have, or be working towards, a formal teaching qualification at Level 5 or 6 with remission being given for those working towards such qualifications. A mentoring system is in place to support staff who do not have relevant teaching qualifications, and new staff. A specific academic role has been developed to support and lead on developing staff expertise in quality and standards.

2.18 All staff are observed as part of the College's processes, and for higher education staff the observations have been contextualised to meet the needs of higher education practice. The College supports a range of continuing professional development opportunities for staff through a budget allocation lodged within the Human Resources Department. Higher education staff have the opportunity to attend training events held by awarding bodies or partner institutions, and can request financial support for courses for their personal professional development as part of the annual appraisal process. Staff develop their professional practice in higher education by undertaking research and maintaining industry links to update subject knowledge. To increase the level and quality of academic scholarship the College is involved in an Association of Colleges scholarship project and is in negotiation with a Partner University to facilitate College academic staff to apply for Higher Education Academy (HEA) membership.

2.19 The College gathers independent feedback on teaching and learning from different sources including link tutors/account managers, students, external examiners and employers. One external examiner specifically commended the teaching and learning methods used as being well developed, appropriate and effective. Link tutors from the partner universities support by observing the higher education teaching processes, and this complements the arrangements within the College. Feedback from learning and teaching is considered within the course monitoring process, which includes CTRs and SABs, relevant forum meetings, surveys and module reviews.

2.20 Students are aware of the need to engage with the learning opportunities and have the benefit of appropriately detailed course and module handbooks covering course content, learning, teaching and assessment opportunities including, where relevant, work-related or work experience-based learning, which they can access as hard copies and electronically.

2.21 Departmental staff teams ensure that students have appropriate resources to access information on module and course-level learning and assessment. The learning and teaching practices are designed to promote inclusive opportunities to enable all students to access the curriculum and if required these practices are modified to meet specific individual

student needs, and where necessary supported by learning support assistants. The awarding partner processes are also used to support such individual needs.

2.22 Students have electronic access to learning materials through the VLE. The College has minimum requirements on the information that all courses are required to upload to the VLE, and there are Bronze, Silver and Gold standards for VLE engagement. It aims to support flexible access for all students including part-time and blended learning students, such as those within the Armed Forces.

2.23 The College's strategic oversight, and processes and systems for reviewing teaching and learning, would allow the Expectation to be met. The review team tested the Expectation by examining documents relating to the review of learning and teaching which included policies and strategies, feedback information from students, employers, external examiners and awarding partner representatives as well as minutes of relevant committees and forums. The review team also met the Acting Principal, SLTs, academic and professional teams, students, and employers.

2.24 The review team found that the College works effectively with students, employers and awarding partners to ensure the review of its learning and teaching practices and resources. The infrastructure to support learning and teaching is established, and this includes use of the VLE to support the delivery of the higher education curriculum.

2.25 However, when the review team explored within academic staff and student meetings how the VLE system supported student learning, it was noted that there was inconsistency in the way that teaching teams within different programmes used it to support learning and teaching practices. There is a minimum level of usage expected of all curriculum areas, and there are significant inconsistencies in the development of the VLE beyond this level. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College take steps to ensure the effective and consistent use of the VLE by teaching teams.

2.26 The College's strategic focus on learning and teaching, and processes for supporting and reviewing the quality of learning and teaching practices enable the College to meet the Expectation. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated 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

2.27 The College focuses strategically on developing an inclusive ethos which supports all students to develop academically, personally and professionally. College processes monitor and evaluate the arrangements which enable such developments.

2.28 As part of this evaluation the College examines progression and destination data for higher education students at SLTs, curriculum and quality meetings and the Higher Education Forum, which collectively inform the corporate self-assessment reports (SARs) and action plans.

2.29 Student feedback also informs the further development of resources to promote student development. The initiative to establish a separate higher education centre, with designated library and IT resources resulted directly from these processes. Students on programmes governed by the partner universities benefit from the resources made available by each University and are trained in the use of e-library resources.

2.30 The support for students with specific needs is a key priority for the College, and is provided by the dyslexia specialist and learning support advisers, all of whom work within the College's and awarding partners' specific policy and processes to address the priorities of such students.

2.31 The College has established inclusive systems to promote participation and support student transition into higher education for students from different backgrounds, including those from Level 3, and the workplace. Induction processes provide students with an induction plan, and standardised information about locations and services. This process is supported through the programme and higher education handbooks and reviewed to address areas for improvement.

2.32 Students benefit from the opportunities to develop personal skills by engaging in group work, peer review presentations and leading discussions which together support the development of communication and interpersonal skills which can support student employability development as well.

2.33 Students on programmes requiring work-related or work experience placement learning are able to access support from a nominated mentor. Opportunities to develop employability skills are embedded within the curriculum and students have access to employability advice from tutors, as well as opportunities to discuss their career prospects with a specialist careers adviser during their course. The College holds the Career Mark (Gold award) for its careers advice and is able to offer information and guidance on both academic progression routes to higher level qualifications and also more general advice on career pathways to students. Students also have access to careers information through the careers pages on the VLE.

2.34 Information on study skills for students is formalised through programme/module handbooks, study skills sessions, and through information provided by the awarding partners, which are inbuilt into the initial stages of higher education programmes as part of the induction process. The development of study skills is embedded within all programmes and supported by the VLE system, delivered by the Skills Tutor in one-to-one sessions and disseminated in information leaflets. The nature and level of support is reviewed and

contextualised as students progress through the different levels of study and is tailored to allow them to become independent learners at the later stages of their study. The external examiner for the Foundation Degree in Special Educational Needs and Disability praised the College for the development between levels on the programme, evidenced in the growing criticality of student work. This is reflected in the move to the more explicit focus on careers and study progression opportunities for students in the final year of their higher education study. The wider student support network incorporates the services of chaplaincy, health care, counselling, careers and financial advice services along with the pastoral services provided by the academic team, which the external examiner for the Engineering programmes described as appropriate, effective and individual-oriented guidance and support.

2.35 The strategic focus and the established systems for supporting academic, professional and personal development and achievement would allow the College to meet the Expectation. The review team tested the Expectation by reviewing the evidence from policies, processes and from meetings with the Acting Principal, senior management, academic staff, employers, administrative staff and students.

2.36 In meetings with staff and students in particular, the review team was able to explore the strength of the support systems to develop students academically, personally and professionally. The team found that students benefited from support from both administrative and academic staff to access higher education, to engage with their studies, and through contextualised support to progress to careers or higher studies. The comprehensive and personalised academic and pastoral support provided to all higher education students is **good practice**.

2.37 The College has comprehensive arrangements and processes in place which are effective in supporting students to develop personally, academically and professionally in line with the Expectation. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student Engagement

Findings

2.38 The College provides a wide range of opportunities to capture the student voice. Each programme has the ability to elect one student representative for each year and they are able to attend programme-level meetings, course review meetings, focus groups and College forums. Students have the ability to participate in the student voice processes of the partner universities. Students are also present on the SABs. Students are also able to meet the external examiner for Pearson programmes. The College seeks to capture the comments and experiences of students by way of internal and external surveys such as the NSS. Student comments from relevant College and student meetings feed into the College's quality cycle. Each course has a module evaluation that is completed by students at the end of the course. The College has a variety of informal and alternative methods of capturing the student voice across the College, and students are able to send comments directly to the Principal.

2.39 The policies and processes in place at the College would allow the Expectation to be met. The review team considered a range of documents relating to student engagement and students' involvement in the College higher education processes. A number of meetings were held with staff and students.

2.40 The team looked for evidence that the College engaged students in quality assurance processes and found that the College has a number of students registered as student representatives. In the meeting with students, the review team was able to speak with a number of student representatives on a variety of courses across different years of study. The students were aware of the College's approach to student engagement and commented on the information and guidance provided by the College at the start of the course and throughout. Students and staff were also able to confirm the variety of methods that the College uses in order to capture the views of all students across the College and cited an example where they had met the Principal to raise issues, which then resulted in a positive change. In reviewing the VLE, the team was able to confirm that this contains the ability to contact the Principal using 'Buzz the Boss'.

2.41 The review team looked for evidence of students involved in formal committees. Students are invited members of the CTR and SABs, and are included within the terms of reference and there was evidence of students attending the CTR and SAB meetings. The CTR meetings are where the students are able to feedback to the College on issues relating to their course. In reviewing the minutes the team confirmed that students were able to raise and discuss issues with the College. The SABs meet twice yearly and students are included in the terms of reference. The review team was told that at the SAB meetings student issues are discussed and the team found examples of issues being raised, actioned and resolved. In exploring the minutes from the SAB meetings, the review team identified occasions where students were present while progression information and details relating to other students was also discussed. The College informed the review team that students would be asked to leave if sensitive information was to be discussed. However, the minutes do not reflect this action occurring and the terms of reference state that minutes will be shared with all members. This issue is followed up in Expectation B6.

2.42 Student forum meetings contain a large number of students and a student governor. These consider students' feedback on the quality of learning and teaching, with actions

assigned. There were additional examples of student focus groups with the Foundation Degree Sports Coaching, with minutes providing a summary of issues, although they do not show an attendance list or details of actions and responsibility for issues. The College provided a summary of issues from student forums that shows the questions they asked and a summary of answers. In addition to the student forums, the Higher Education Manager and Principal hold a Student Focus Group meeting twice a year. The meetings provide an opportunity for the College to actively engage with students and provide feedback on issues relating to their course and experiences.

2.43 The review team looked for evidence of the College's approach to collecting feedback through module evaluations. Data from module feedback is fed into a number of documents for evaluation and discussion that include a summary of PGCE student feedback, the University of Bedfordshire enhancement plan document (collated from engineering student feedback) and a course report for the Foundation Degree Sports Coaching.

2.44 There is evidence of the student voice across the College and students are involved in its formal committees and structures. The College takes deliberate steps to capture and engage all students in the enhancement of their learning experiences both formally and informally. Students spoke positively about the level of engagement with the College and were able to provide examples of change occurring as a result. The review team finds that the Expectation is met and the level of associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.45 The processes of assessment are conducted according to awarding partners regulations. The division of responsibilities varies across partners and sometimes within partner arrangements for particular programmes.

2.46 For the University of Bedfordshire programmes, the University retains responsibility for the design, setting and timing of assessments. For Bishop Grosseteste University there is a partnership approach to the design, setting and timing of assessments. The university partners have processes and procedures for marking and moderation and appointment of external examiners. College staff attend Award and Progression Boards at the awarding partners.

2.47 For Pearson awards, the College has its own processes for marking and moderation to align with Pearson requirements. The College SABs determine student progression and award. Extenuating circumstances are covered by the policies and procedures of the awarding bodies and Pearson.

2.48 The review team met senior and teaching staff, administrative staff, and examined documents including assessment regulations, external examiner reports and minutes of meetings.

2.49 Staff are given training on assessment by the College, awarding partners and through staff attendance at awarding body events. For Pearson awards, assessments are designed by the College's programme team and submitted for approval through the Pearson assignment checking service. Programme and module handbooks inform students of assessment dates and types and, where appropriate, weightings. Tutors are aware of the regulations that apply to accreditation of prior (experiential) learning claims by students and are able to advise on the viability of such claims.

2.50 Students are made aware at induction, via the VLE, of the procedures governing academic misconduct relevant to their awarding partner. Plagiarism-detection software is currently used for Bedfordshire University provision. For Pearson awards, the College relies on a self-declaration process. Students submit a self-declaration statement when they submit their assignment and the team saw external examiner evidence of an issue being identified and dealt with. The College's higher education action plan identifies the need to introduce the use of a plagiarism-detection software but no progress was noted against this action.

2.51 Staff and students gave examples of innovative and interesting assessments including live projects with clients, book reviews and work-based investigations and research projects. There were also examples given of innovation in feedback mechanisms using verbal and video feedback. External examiner reports confirm that the arrangements for internal verification and marking are largely consistent. External examiner and external quality assurance reports are monitored in SABs, termly course review reports and in curriculum area SARs, but there is scope in SABs and course reviews to sharpen up the

identification of actions required, rather than describing the process, and overall to close the loop on dealing with issues raised through external examiner comments.

2.52 SABs review student progress on Pearson awards. The review team saw documentation showing that student progression is considered, but that there is some variability in the matters considered at SARs and the level of detail recorded. The review team was concerned that, although senior staff stated it not to be the case, minutes showed that student representatives are present throughout these boards, or would be sent minutes if they were unable to attend, where business includes the discussion of student results and confidential information on student personal circumstances. The review team **recommends** that the College ensure appropriate participation of students in the SABs to protect the confidentiality of all students.

2.53 The review team concludes that the College operates a robust approach to assessment but that the student role in SABs requires review. There is evidence of good assessment practice and of good support for students in assessment. The review team concludes that the College meets the Expectation and that the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining

Findings

2.54 The College's awarding bodies have responsibility for appointing external examiners for their respective programmes. The role of the external examiner is defined within the awarding bodies' respective regulatory frameworks. The College does, however, have an opportunity to review nominations to identify any conflicts of interest.

2.55 Comments from external examiner reports are shared with the College course teams, and addressed within the annual monitoring processes and the University is informed about the actions taken. The formal responses to external examiners, including actions identified by the College, are made by the respective University.

2.56 There is an equivalent process for Pearson awards, undertaken by external examiners, and their written reports are received by the Course Tutor and Curriculum Manager, who are jointly responsible for responding on behalf of the College.

2.57 External reports are considered at SAB meetings, which include students. External reports include independent and effective assurance that points raised have been actioned by the College. To ensure more formal communication to students, such reports will now be located on the VLE system.

2.58 The College has systems in place to address and action issues raised within external examiner reports, and this would allow the Expectation to be met. The review team tested the Expectation by examining external examiner reports, evidence of relevant communication with the awarding partners, action plans and minutes of specific committees such as the SAB. The team explored the staff and student understandings of the process and confirmed that it is effective in addressing the requirements of the Expectation.

2.59 There is clear engagement of staff with external examiner priorities, evidenced within records of course review meetings, annual monitoring reviews (an example of this is the Foundation Degree in Special Educational Needs and Disability) and unit reviews with the University. The review team considers the College's arrangements for engaging with and addressing external examiners and their reports are effective in meeting the Expectation. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review

Findings

2.60 The College has a clearly defined annual quality cycle overseen by the College Standards Committee. In addition, the College has to meet the monitoring and review processes of its awarding partners.

2.61 Programmes are reviewed generally through the termly CTR process and in depth through the SABs. The information gathered through this process is used to inform action plans and annual SARs at course, curriculum and organisational levels. The curriculum and organisational SARs currently cover both higher and further education, but the College plans to introduce a separate SAR for higher education. In addition, the College follows the university awarding partner's annual monitoring processes. Pearson specifies the external verification process for its awards.

2.62 The review team held meetings with senior, teaching and administrative staff and reviewed College and partner monitoring and review documentation. The review team saw examples of annual monitoring documentation for the University partners. Examples were seen of CTRs and a curriculum SAR. The team also saw a higher education action plan and minutes of SABs. The student voice is captured in the review process, through 'Buzz the Boss' and Principal's surgeries, and through SABs.

2.63 The College has taken deliberate steps to enhance the quality of student learning opportunities. It has provided a new higher education centre for students and there were changes in the library facilities in response to student requests. However, it was not clear to the review team from the documentation, and from discussions with senior staff, teaching staff and administrative staff, how the monitoring process for higher education programmes formally feeds into actions or where the higher education action plan was monitored and used to support enhancement of higher education provision. The review team **recommends** that the College ensure the actions arising from monitoring and review processes are formally captured and shown to support enhancement of higher education provision.

2.64 Higher education is a very small proportion of the total student body and there is low visibility of it in the College-level consideration of programme monitoring and review. The review team did not see a clear evidence trail from data collected through the monitoring and review process for higher education to actions taken, or of the monitoring of these actions. With the plan to grow higher education provision, it would be more effective if a more formal process was adopted, although the review team observed that matters are being dealt with informally. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and that the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

Findings

2.65 The College has three separate policies for dealing with complaints and appeals from students: Admission Complaints; the Complaints Policy for higher education students, which deals with general complaints unrelated to academic processes; and the Academic Appeals Policy, which deals specifically with issues arising from academic matters. All the policies are clearly displayed on the College's website and attention is drawn to them in the individual higher education course handbooks, and are also published on the VLE. For academic appeals, mitigation and complaints students are referred to the processes of the university partners, and for Pearson programmes, students follow College processes. Bishop Grosseteste University has provided a document that sets out the guidance and Code of Practice for Extenuating Circumstances for students on its awards, the College follows the procedure for University of Bedfordshire as set out in its Student Complaints Policy, and there is a separate document provided by the College for Pearson programmes. College staff are trained in the relevant processes according to each awarding partner. The College reviews the complaints process annually.

2.66 The policies and processes in place at the College would allow the Expectation to be met. The review team considered a range of documents relating to this Expectation, and held meetings with College staff and a selection of students.

2.67 The review team examined the College's Complaints Policy for higher education students, which deals with general complaints unrelated to academic processes, and the Academic Appeals Policy. The Complaints Policy sets out the definition of a complaint, and describes the process in two stages, the informal and formal. The formal process is managed by the Assistant Principal whereas the informal process is expected to be dealt with locally under supervision of the Services for Students' team, which can include teaching staff and the Assistant Principal. The document sets out the time frames and procedure in which complaints are handled and is current, having been reviewed in 2015. Students are able to appeal against decisions of the complaints procedure by way of the Complaints Procedure Review Request document.

2.68 The Academic Appeals Policy deals specifically with complaints arising from academic matters and students may appeal against a decision of the SAB for their academic programme. The policy sets out the reasons that a student may access the complaints procedure, the timescales of the process and any associated evidence that may be needed to support the claim. The document is current, having been reviewed in 2015.

2.69 The College has received no academic appeals for its higher education provision. In meetings with students and staff it was confirmed that students are aware of the processes and their ability to make a complaint if necessary. Students commented on the level of information that is made available on the processes and the level of support provided by the College in respect of complaints. This was again confirmed by staff at the College who informed the review team about the information provided during induction and enrolment and information contained in the handbooks. Course handbooks contain information on the complaints procedure, academic appeals and guidance on academic offences and plagiarism. Where relevant, the handbooks include web links direct to the awarding partner's online documentation.

2.70 The College reviews the robustness of its complaints and appeals processes at the College Corporation Standards Committee by way of a report that is produced by the Assistant Principal. The report contains a log and analysis of all complaints received by the College and it was confirmed in the document that there have been no complaints relating to higher education and this was confirmed in meetings with College staff.

2.71 The College has processes in place to allow for fair, accessible and timely handling of academic appeals and complaints. There is a wide range of information made available to students in both printed and digital documentation. Staff are aware of the relevant processes as they relate to each awarding partner and the team has confidence that despite receiving no formal appeals, students understand their rights and ability to access the process and staff were equally aware. The Expectation is therefore 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

2.72 The College does not delegate arrangements for the delivery of its higher education programmes to third parties. However, it sees the workplace as an important opportunity to facilitate the link between academic study and work-based practice. The majority of the students on higher education programmes are employed in areas related to their studies, and the workplace is used as a resource for enhancing the student academic learning experience.

2.73 The College's University partners are ultimately responsible for the academic standards and quality of learning opportunities for programmes where workplace learning is part of the curriculum. However, the College has devolved powers to monitor learning opportunities that occur in the workplace. The Work-Related Learning Policy and Procedure for higher education students, which supports this process, has been further developed to accommodate the different contexts of the student and workplace connections. This policy incorporates two definitions of work-place learning, including work-related learning for those students already at work or volunteering and work experience placement learning for academic and vocational skills development. Most of the students at the College undertake work-related learning.

2.74 The process is also supported by the specific forms which are required to be completed and a Workplace Agreement Form is in place, which establishes a tripartite agreement between the workplace, the student and the College, and governs the rights, responsibilities and duties of each of the parties to the agreement during the study period.

2.75 There are appropriate policies and processes for managing the quality of workplace learning within the College that would allow the Expectation to be met. The review team tested the Expectation by examining policies and processes on learning within the workplace, external examiner reports, employer focus group meetings and annual monitoring reports. The majority of the students attend part-time and are employed, or are working on a voluntary basis in an area related to their study programme. The tripartite partnership between the student, their employer and the College is effective in facilitating work-related learning that allows students to demonstrate the application of theory to practice, and also to use their practice to inform their academic studies. The engineering external examiner noted specifically that work-related learning is one of the most prominent features of teaching and learning in Grantham College.

2.76 Senior management and staff explained that there have been considerable efforts over the past 12 to 18 months to strengthen and improve the work-related learning policies and procedures and that these improvements are now being tested within health and social care for further roll-out during the next academic year. The review team **affirms** the introduction of the Work-Related Learning Policy and Procedure for higher education students.

2.77 The review team found that the College partnerships with employers are well established and effective. Students confirmed that they benefit from the process and academic staff maintain close contact with students and employers. Students are positive

about their experience of linking theory to practice, and can identify its relevance to their study and work. The effective management of the partnerships with employers that enhances the student learning experience is **good practice**.

2.78 The College has effective policies and procedures to support students with their learning within the workplace and established employer partnerships, which facilitates the required learning opportunities for students. The Expectation is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

2.80 The review team concludes that all Expectations in this area are met. While eight Expectations are considered low risk, the review team considers that two Expectations have a moderate risk and provides two recommendations to address these issues. In relation to Expectation B6, the review team identifies a potential confidentiality issue in relation to student progression data, and recommends that the College ensure there is appropriate participation of students in the SABs. In relation to Expectation B8, the review team notes that the College could enhance its monitoring and review processes, specifically recommending that actions arising from these processes are formally captured and shown to support enhancement of higher education provision. A more specific recommendation is made in this area in relation to the effective and consistent use of the VLE by teaching teams, an issue the College had already identified as needing to be addressed.

2.81 The review team notes a number of areas of good practice in relation to how the College provides student learning opportunities in relation to its higher education provision. These reflect the opportunities the College provides to students through its student support systems and its relationships with employers. The features of good practice related specifically to the College's inclusive approach to admissions, the comprehensive and personalised academic and pastoral support, and the effective management of partnerships with employers. The review team also affirms the introduction of a work-related learning policy as an effective approach to improve this area of working with employers.

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

3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

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

Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision

Findings

3.1 The College publishes information about its higher education provision and facilities and services on its website, on social media websites, and in hard copy prospectuses.

3.2 All public information is checked through a series of processes. Information is checked by staff, the curriculum managers and the Marketing Department before draft materials are signed off by the Assistant Principal to ensure that information is fit for purpose and meets the needs of the intended audience. The awarding university partners maintain an oversight of the public information issued by the College. The Higher Education Forum is used for reviewing and making recommendations for improvements to the College's public information. Information for current students is provided on the VLE. Course information is available for students in the form of course handbooks. For prospective students the College website and prospectus is a source of information.

3.3 The policies and processes in place at the College would allow the Expectation to be met. The review team considered a range of documents relating to this Expectation that included course handbooks, the VLE, prospectuses and course information, as well as the Approval of Public Information Policy. Meetings were held with staff and a selection of students.

3.4 The review team explored the variety of information that the College publishes about its higher education provision and considered the College's website, prospectus and VLE. The College makes most of its information available on its website and in prospectuses and the information included on the website includes the College Mission and Values Statement, Freedom of Information Statement and papers for its appropriate formal committees that include the Corporation Minutes, Standards Committee, Finance Committee, and Audit Committee.

3.5 Prospective students are able to view information about the College's facilities, accommodation, equality and diversity, campus maps, and services. Course information is made available in a scaled down form for its higher education courses. The College has produced a higher education prospectus specifically for prospective students. The document contains College information, student profiles and testimonials, an overview of course information, finance information, and details of support services. The review team met a number of students who stated satisfaction with the information provided by the College.

3.6 The review team explored the content of the course handbooks. Each handbook varies in the level of information contained within them and some information is provided from the awarding partner. Overall, the content was detailed and allowed for students to have an understanding of what was required of them in order to complete their programme of study and included useful information, such as methods of assessment, information on complaints and staff contact information. Course handbooks are checked annually for updates. Students confirmed that they found the handbooks useful and that the information was accurate.

3.7 The process for managing the security and accuracy of information is guided by the Approval of Public Information Policy, which sets out clearly the process and responsibilities at each stage. Staff at the College consider the relevant regulations before being checked by Student Services for final sign off by the SLT for approval by the Assistant Principal. Where relevant, the College follows the guidance regarding published information as defined by its awarding bodies and set out within the collaborative partnership agreements. Marketing material for University of Bedfordshire programmes is provided by the University.

3.8 The VLE is used across the whole College as a way to provide information to students about the College and their programmes of study; information includes study skills, support and local College information. The College is able to collect data on VLE usage from both staff and students. There are no minimal usage requirements as this is left to the discretion of the course leader. Students at the College have access to the VLE of the University of Bedfordshire. There are no minimal requirements on the use of the VLE and the review team in meetings with students were told of different levels of satisfaction from students which the College are aware of. A recommendation about the consistent use of the VLE is made under Expectation B3.

3.9 The College provides a variety of information for prospective and current students that is easily accessible and accurate. Information is available for internal and external audiences in both digital and hard format. There is a robust process for checking and signing off its public information that is managed at a senior level. Course handbooks are comprehensive and received well by students. The VLE contains a range of information and the College recognises the mixture of responses on its quality from students. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

3.11 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low. The quality of the information, and the processes for checking this information, are well managed by the College. A specific recommendation in relation to the consistency of use of the VLE is made elsewhere in the report (Expectation B3).

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

4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

- 4.1 The College has a strategic plan that identifies seven key priorities encompassing its further and higher education provision. In addition, the College has a Higher Education Strategy that was written in 2012. The College annual quality cycle collects data at course level and aggregates it up to organisational level.
- 4.2 The SLT and the College Standards Committee meetings consider the cycle of papers and reports, working to a defined quality cycle. The College SAR and Quality Improvement Plan are the summary reports of the quality cycle and encompass further and higher education.
- 4.3 CRTs meet termly and feed actions relating to higher education programmes into curriculum area SARs that encompass both further and higher education. These in turn inform the College SAR. In addition there is a Higher Education Group that meets to discuss issues relating to higher education programmes.
- 4.4 The team reviewed key documentation including the College Strategic Plan and Higher Education Strategy, quality cycle reports, minutes of meetings and external examiner reports. The review team also discussed enhancement in meetings with the Principal, senior and teaching staff, administrative staff, students and employers.
- 4.5 At programme level there is clear evidence of the student voice being heard and of deliberate steps being taken to improve the quality of student learning opportunities through CRT meetings and SABs. Students and staff gave examples of programme team responsiveness to needs.
- 4.6 The review team followed evidence trails through minutes of meetings to identify deliberate steps being taken at College level to enhance student learning opportunities. In 2015 a new higher education centre was opened in response to student feedback. Quiet study space was also made available in the library in response to student feedback. Recently the College has revised its management of higher education with a new Curriculum Manager for higher education programmes.
- 4.7 The team did note, however, that the College Strategic Plan 2013-16 includes reference to higher education, but it is not clear how priorities for the student voice and enterprise and employability in the curriculum are implemented in higher education. In addition, the Higher Education Strategy written in January 2012 does not directly link to the College Strategy. The review team could not find evidence of a higher education operational plan that implemented the Strategy apart from the development of the Higher National programmes. As identified in Expectation B8, it is not clear to the team where action plans for higher education are tracked and how these feed into College-level actions. Although the team found clear evidence for enhancement activity it suggests that a more integrated, formalised approach going forward would be beneficial.
- 4.8 Although the College strategy for higher education may not be fully integrated at all levels, the review team considers that deliberate steps are being taken to enhance the quality of student learning opportunities. The Expectation is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

4.10 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low. There are clear, deliberate steps taken by the College to enhance the student learning experience. While the College would benefit from a more integrated, formalised approach to enhancement, the review team was assured that there exists a strategic commitment to the enhancement of the College's higher education provision.

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

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1 The College places strategic emphasis on engaging with, and supporting, student employability from a whole-College perspective, and recognises the significance of enabling students to be ready for work, or for those already at work to enhance their work-based practice. The majority of the higher education students at the College are part-time and employed, or volunteers working within areas of practice linked to their programme of study. This enables them to draw on their work-related experience and inform their academic outcomes, and to enhance their practice through engagement with theoretical and technical developments.

5.2 The College infrastructure for supporting student employability is well established. The College policy is to appoint subject specialists with practice-based expertise, which serves to ensure that they can reflect work-based practice, support students with accreditation of experiential learning and advise on vocational and professional requirements. Students also benefit from specific careers advice and guidance from specialist staff, whose work has been awarded a Career Mark (Gold Award) accreditation.

5.3 Student employability is also promoted through the flexible delivery of courses for those who want to work and engage with higher education study at the College. The flexible delivery includes one day a week delivery of Engineering courses to meet employer needs, and alternative modes of delivery to meet the needs of shift workers on Health and Social Care and Education programmes. The College is developing further initiatives in the flexible delivery of the HNC/D Computing which is planned to be delivered electronically on a fully blended delivery basis.

5.4 The higher education curriculum outcomes also support the development of skills in information technology, research, peer-review presentations, and communication and interpersonal areas all of which are transferrable to work-related practice, and support and develop student employability. The use of guest speakers and practice-based specialists to deliver specific curriculum areas, such as safeguarding to health and social care students, fully support the development of student employability in the relevant disciplines.

5.5 Collectively, these criteria allow the College to respond to the strategic focus on its role in developing employability outcomes for students, and existing practices are effective in supporting the continuing drive to develop student employability.

Glossary

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

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

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

Academic standards

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

Award

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

Blended learning

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

Credit(s)

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

Degree-awarding body

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

Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

Dual award or double award

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

e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning

Enhancement

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

Expectations

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

Flexible and distributed learning

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

See also **distance learning**.

Framework

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

Framework for higher education qualifications

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

Good practice

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

Learning opportunities

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

Learning outcomes

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

Multiple awards

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

Operational definition

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

Programme (of study)

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

Programme specifications

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

Public information

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

Quality Code

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

Reference points

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

Subject Benchmark Statement

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

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)

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

Threshold academic standard

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

Virtual learning environment (VLE)

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

Widening participation

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

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