



# Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of The College of Integrated Chinese Medicine

October 2017

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## About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at The College of Integrated Chinese Medicine (the College). The review took place from 23 to 25 October 2017 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Professor Christopher Clare
- Professor Simon Pallett
- Dr Sandra Summers.

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

In Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) the QAA review team:

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

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

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

<sup>2</sup> QAA website: [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk).

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

## Key findings

### Judgements

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

- The maintenance of the academic standards of the awards offered on behalf of its degree-awarding body **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the provider's information about learning opportunities **requires improvement to meet** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities **requires improvement to meet** UK expectations.

### Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following feature of **good practice**.

- The integration of widespread Regional Support Groups into the student support system, enabling local access to tutor support across cohorts (Expectation B4).

### Recommendations

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

By February 2018:

- clarify and communicate the policy in respect of the timing of feedback on assessed work (Expectation B6)
- ensure that the policy in respect of recognition of prior learning is consistent with the awarding body's requirements (Expectation B6)
- implement appropriate and proportionate due diligence procedures for each practitioner at which clinical observations take place (Expectation B10)
- take steps to ensure that information for all intended audiences is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy (Expectation C, A1, A2.2, B6 and B8).

By September 2018:

- formalise the requirement for students to demonstrate fitness to practise in order to be awarded a degree (Expectation A2.2)
- ensure that teaching staff develop a continuing awareness of current developments in student learning and assessment in higher education (Expectation B3)
- build on the culture of responsiveness to students in order to strengthen the engagement of students as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience (Expectations B5 and Enhancement)
- build on existing initiatives to develop a strategic approach to the enhancement of learning opportunities (Expectation Enhancement).

## About the provider

The College is a specialist college of acupuncture delivering a single programme leading to the award of a BSc with Honours in Acupuncture from its awarding body, Kingston University (the University). Established in 1993, it aims to provide a safe, guided, high quality professional learning environment in which students can be educated in acupuncture within the context of an integrated approach to Chinese medicine. The College's programme is accredited by the British Acupuncture Accreditation Board (BAAB).

The College has two intakes per year, and its study patterns, based on attendance at its premises in Reading for two days per week, allow students from a wide geographical area to enrol on its programme. At present the College has 148 students, and 39 academic staff employed on a part-time basis.

Since the last QAA review in 2014, the College has experienced no major organisational or structural changes. It has undergone a Subject Review by the University in 2016, a monitoring visit by QAA the same year, as well as a re-accreditation visit by the BAAB in 2017.

Student numbers have shown a gradual decline, and the College regards it is a priority to continue to recruit students in sufficient numbers. The College is also conscious of impending changes in the regulatory regime for higher education in England, and of the uncertainty which this creates with respect to the costs of compliance.

The previous review of the College was a Review for Specific Course Designation in January 2014, which resulted in positive outcomes, identified seven features of good practice and made one advisable and three desirable recommendations. Since then the College has continued to build on the features of good practice and has taken steps to implement the recommendations. In particular, the College has addressed student concerns in relation to the accessibility of material in its virtual learning environment, has introduced a formal appraisal system for teaching staff and has taken steps to align its policies and procedures with the UK Quality Code for Higher Education. The monitoring visit in January 2016 found that the College had made commendable progress with implementing the action plan arising from the review.

## Explanation of findings

This section explains the review findings in greater detail.

### **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 recognises that the primary responsibility for academic standards rests with the University as the awarding body, which determines that the requirements of the credit framework and of Subject Benchmark Statements are met. There are no Statements for acupuncture, but the programme is benchmarked against the BAAB standards of training and acupuncture practice.

1.2 The College's responsibilities checklist indicates that it understands its responsibilities in respect of the maintenance of the academic standards of the award. Programme learning outcomes are specified in the University programme specification and module learning outcomes are set out in module guides available to students.

1.3 The processes and procedures outlined in the checklist, which relate to the University academic regulations, if implemented securely would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.4 The review team considered the University's regulations, external examiners'

reports, and the programme and module specifications. The team also held meetings with senior staff, academic staff and professional support staff.

1.5 College staff demonstrated understanding of and compliance with the academic framework of the University. Staff displayed awareness of the Quality Code and of the FHEQ. Staff make use of the appropriate programme and module specifications, and the learning outcomes align appropriately with the FHEQ. However, the College's lack of awareness of the need to ensure that its proposed postgraduate diploma programmes are aligned with the FHEQ supports the recommendation in Expectation C.

1.6 The College is drawing upon and applying appropriate external and sector reference points in accordance with the requirements of its awarding body. 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**

1.7 The College's committee structure and its committees' terms of reference specify a number of committees reporting to an Executive Committee that in turn reports to the Governing Body of the College. The committees reporting to or feeding into the Executive Committee are: Joint Executive Committee; Board of Studies; Finance Committee; Student Consultative Committee; Award Boards; Marketing Committee; Programme Leaders meetings and staff meetings.

1.8 The academic framework and regulations governing the award of qualifications delivered at the College are specified by the University. This, together with the College Governance and organisational structures would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.9 The review team tested the Expectation by considering the terms of reference and minutes of the College's committees and its organisational structures, and by discussion in meetings with senior and academic staff, and professional support staff.

1.10 The University's regulations are comprehensive and clear. The terms of reference of the College's committees clearly define their roles in the governance structure. The responsibility for academic standards within the College is placed in the Board of Studies, with the Executive Committee responsible for implementing required actions. Students are included in the membership of the Board of Studies, but not the Governing Body.

1.11 Minutes of committees illustrate the implementation of the committee reporting structures and demonstrate their effectiveness in addressing operational issues, including the formation of clear actions that are followed up.

1.12 Assessment procedures, including moderation and the use of external examiners, are based on the University's regulations and procedures and are articulated through the College Assessment and Monitoring Policy. There is evidence of the effective operation of assessment boards.

1.13 The College's frameworks and regulations are effective and proportionate in scale to the College's provision. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.14 The programme specification and module guide provide the reference point for the delivery and assessment of the programme as well as for monitoring and review. The University maintains the programme specification, which was most recently updated in April 2016. Module specifications are contained in the student handbook, while the programme specification is available to prospective students on the website and is provided to external examiners in their briefing pack.

1.15 The arrangements for maintaining and updating the programme specification, if securely implemented, are sufficient to allow the Expectation to be met.

1.16 The review team considered documentation including the programme specification, the student handbook, the external examiners' briefing pack, and the University's procedures in respect of changes to fields and modules. Meetings were held with senior staff, academic staff, professional support staff and students. The team additionally witnessed a demonstration of the College's virtual learning environment (VLE).

1.17 The programme specification is clear and is available to students in the handbook and to prospective students on the website. The arrangements for approval of modifications to the programme are described in Expectation A3.1.

1.18 The review team heard that, while the College requires students to demonstrate fitness to practise as an acupuncturist as a prerequisite for the award of the degree, the University does not have the same requirement. This requirement is not explicit in the programme specification. The College acknowledged that the status of a student who has gained all of the credits required for the award of the degree but who has failed to demonstrate fitness to practise would be unclear, while affirming that this circumstance has never arisen. The review team **recommends** that the College formalise the requirement for students to demonstrate fitness to practise in order to be awarded a degree. The manner in which students are made aware of the requirement to demonstrate fitness to practise is unclear: fitness to practise is mentioned in the programme specification, and the Clinical Handbook contains the College's Fitness to Practise Policy, but neither document makes it explicit that fitness to practise is a prerequisite to the award of the degree. This shortcoming contributes to the recommendation in Expectation C.

1.19 The programme specification is detailed and clear and there are secure arrangements for maintaining it. The Expectation is met. However, the lack of transparency in the fitness to practise requirement is indicative of a weakness in the operation of the College's governance structure. The level of risk is moderate.

**Expectation: 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**

1.20 The College is subject to the University's procedures for the approval of programmes. The College's programme was originally validated by the University in 2004 and is subject to periodic review by the BAAB every six years. The University's programme approval procedure covers alignment with threshold standards and draws on external expertise as part of the validation panel.

1.21 These procedures would allow the Expectation to be met in principle.

1.22 The review team tested this Expectation by considering University procedures, in particular its programme approval policy, and external examiners' reports, as well as in meetings with senior staff and teaching staff.

1.23 Although no new programmes have been validated since 2004, the University's process ensures the alignment of standards with the FHEQ and relevant external reference points. It also makes appropriate use of external expertise in ensuring standards are correctly set, through external membership of the validation panel and through consideration of external examiners' reports.

1.24 The College follows the University's procedure for approving changes to modules and to the programme. Major changes are noted by the Board of Studies and are subject to approval by the relevant faculty of the University, while minor changes can be approved by the relevant school. Changes to indicative text, such as detailed curriculum content or teaching delivery, can be made by the College, and are notified to the University. There has recently been one formal application to the University to reduce the assessment on one particular module, which was in process at the time of the visit.

1.25 The College relies on the University's procedures to ensure that standards are secure when programmes are approved or changed but has needed to make little use of these procedures in recent years. The Expectation is met and the 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 College's programme is subject to the University's Academic Regulations which set out the rules for the conduct of module and programme assessment boards and for progression and classification. In principle, these procedures allow the Expectation to be met.

1.27 The review team tested this Expectation by considering the programme and module specifications, external examiners' reports, minutes from module and programme assessment boards and the University's Academic Regulations. It also held meetings with senior staff and teaching staff.

1.28 Learning outcomes are detailed in the module and programme specifications, which use the University's templates. The programme specification also contains a matrix showing how the modules contribute to the achievement of the learning outcomes of the programme. These documents are referenced to the FHEQ and approved as part of the programme validation process. External examiners are asked to confirm that standards are appropriate to the level of the award and their reports feed into the annual monitoring process. The College follows the University's Academic Regulations, which set out the rules for progression, classification and the conduct of module assessment boards (MABs) and programme assessment boards (PABs). MABs and PABs take place at the College, with external examiners present, and are chaired by senior staff from the University. Their minutes show that procedures are correctly followed.

1.29 The University has procedures in place which ensure that credit and qualifications are awarded only when learning outcomes have been demonstrated through assessment, and that UK threshold and its own academic standards have been satisfied. The Expectation is met and the 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**

1.30 The programme is subject to the University's Annual Monitoring and Enhancement procedures, which sets out the requirements for module and course enhancement plans (MEPs and CEPs) and the follow-up procedures within the University. Additionally, the University conducts periodical internal subject reviews, the most recent of which took place in 2016. If implemented securely, these procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.31 The review team tested the Expectation by considering documentation relating to annual monitoring and internal subject review including external examiners' reports, monitoring reports, MEPs, CEPs and the University's Academic Regulations. The team held meetings with senior staff and with a member of staff of the University.

1.32 CEPs take account of external examiners' reports as well as data on progression and achievement, thus ensuring that the security of standards is part of annual monitoring. MEPs also review progression and achievement and feed into CEPs. Any issues identified are included in the action plan and follow up is monitored by the Board of Studies and by the University. The review team noted evidence that CEPs include updates on the previous year's action plan. The course summary report takes account of feedback from BAAB and from external examiners. The University uses a 'traffic light' system to monitor its validated awards, taking account of external examiners' reports and data on progression and achievement. Internal subject review scrutinises the evidence on the security of standards.

1.33 Procedures for annual monitoring and for internal subject review address whether UK threshold academic standards are being achieved and whether the University's requirements are being met. The Expectation is met and the 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**

1.34 The College recognises the importance of reference to external expertise in setting its curriculum, in particular the BAAB and the British Acupuncture Council. As well as being accredited by the BAAB, the College's provision is aligned with the professional values and principles of the British Acupuncture Council's Standards of Practice for Acupuncture. The University's processes for external examining and the operation of assessment boards are intended to ensure that assessment decisions meet national standards.

1.35 In its Staff Day meetings, the College makes use of the expertise of its associate and visiting tutors, deriving from their experiences at their home institutions and from practice. External expertise contributes, through membership of the review panel, to the University's internal subject review of the College's provision.

1.36 The University and College processes for engaging external expertise would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.37 The review team tested the Expectation through consideration of BAAB reports and letters, external examiners' reports, assessment board minutes and the report of the University's internal subject review in 2016.

1.38 In the development and presentation of its provision, the College makes full use of external reference points, in particular the FHEQ and of professional body standards. The College implements the University's regulations with respect to external examining and review, and uses its relationship with the BAAB to help maintain standards of professional practice. The BAAB reports on programme management and resource allocation, monitoring and evaluation, curriculum standards, clinical practice standards and assessment. Its most recent report concluded that the BAAB was satisfied that the College was meeting its requirements and those of the British Acupuncture Council.

1.39 The College makes effective use of independent external expertise in respect of assessment processes and the award of credit. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

1.40 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All Expectations in this judgement area are met. The level of risk is moderate for Expectation A2.2 and is low for all other Expectations.

1.41 There are no features of good practice or affirmations in this judgement area. The single recommendation relates to the need to formalise the requirement for students to demonstrate fitness to practise in order to be awarded a degree.

1.42 There are secure frameworks to ensure that standards are maintained at appropriate levels and that the definitive record of each programme is used to govern the award of academic credit and qualifications.

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

## 2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.1 The College's programme is subject to the University's validation process, which covers changes to programmes and modules as well as new programmes. In principle, this arrangement is sufficient to allow the Expectation to be met.

2.2 The review team tested the application of the policy by considering documentation relating to changes to the programme and the University's policies and procedures. The team also held meetings with staff of the College and with students. Although there was no evidence available of a recent process of programme approval, the team did see a current application for a change to the programme.

2.3 The University's programme approval process involves an initial strategic approval stage before it moves on to full validation and the appointment of a validation panel including external advisers. The panel checks the module specifications and the programme specification as well as considering the market for the award, the coherence of the curriculum, engagement with the University's policies and procedures and the assessment strategy. It also requires specific confirmation that aims and learning outcomes are set at a level appropriate for the standards of the award.

2.4 With the exception of one case currently under consideration, all changes to the programme have so far been made within the College's delegated authority, subject to notifying the University of amendments to programme documentation. However, the College failed to provide evidence of a secure process for the internal consideration and approval of proposed changes to the programme prior to notification of the University.

2.5 The College is subject to the University's procedure for approving changes to the programme. However, the lack of a secure process for consideration and approval by the College itself of proposed changes is indicative of a weakness in the College's governance structure. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is moderate.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.6 The College's admissions policy is contained on its website. While entry criteria are aligned with the requirements of the University, the College takes decisions about the admission of individual candidates. Prospective students complete an application form and attend an interview.

2.7 In addition to showing a genuine interest in studying, prospective students should have at least two years' experience working with the general public, show a keen interest to study acupuncture, conform to ethical and practice codes, show a desire to assess and attend to health needs of others, demonstrate the ability to develop, and value and look after their own health. Prospective students may attend an open day, which includes presentations from senior staff of the College and an opportunity to meet current students.

2.8 The College's processes and procedures are clear and if securely implemented would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.9 The review team examined the College's application process, the application form, interview form, and the student feedback forms. The team also held meetings with students and with the staff responsible for admissions.

2.10 The College takes care to admit only students who show an interest in acupuncture. The candidate's intention to study is assessed through the interview process, conducted by two senior staff. The interviewers ascertain how candidates will manage their study time, how they will access the College's learning resources, and how they intend to finance their studies, as well as assessing their knowledge of the course and curriculum. If a student does not fit the criteria or there are doubts about suitability, a second interview with different interviewers may be held. Candidates who are not accepted have access to an appeals process.

2.11 Students confirmed that they found the application process helpful, that the application form is clear, and that they received valuable information and advice during the admissions process.

2.12 The College has clear and sound processes and procedures for the admission of students. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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



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

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

**Findings**

2.13 The College recognises the importance of a range of teaching and learning approaches, supported through staff development days, and through the College's scheme for staff appraisal, which takes a developmental-based approach. The Teachers' Handbook contains guidance on the range of teaching and learning activities that are appropriate in the College. The College monitors the quality of teaching through teaching observations.

2.14 Students provide their views on the quality of teaching through early module feedback, end of module feedback, and student representative meetings. The feedback is also used in discussions at Staff Day meetings and, further, at Teaching Development Days. The College has policies to support teaching staff in respect of staff recruitment and induction, and in respect of retention, development and promotion. In addition, the College makes specific provision for training staff on clinical supervision.

2.15 Support for students' learning is provided by the College's library and by student access to the library of the University. The College's VLE is intended for staff and student use: the VLE is in the process of being replaced by a system based on a different software platform which is as yet only partially operational.

2.16 The processes and policies outlined above would, if securely implemented, allow the Expectation to be met.

2.17 The review team assessed the implementation and effectiveness of the College's approach by considering a variety of documentation. This included staff recruitment and induction policies and procedures, details of teaching observation, discussions at Staff Day meetings and at Teaching Development Days, and the appraisal process. The review team also discussed approaches to teaching and learning with senior staff, with teaching staff and with professional support staff.

2.18 The College has an approach to the development of students as independent learners through both the academic and the practical content of modules. Students are encouraged to adopt reflective practice through research and observation, and through the clinical practice observations in the first two years of the course. Students commented positively on the quality of teaching at the College and on the breadth of knowledge, the extent of experience and the commitment to student support displayed by teaching staff, which they believed helped them to develop independent learning skills and prepared them for professional practice. Students also expressed satisfaction with teaching and library resources available to them.

2.19 Staff recruitment and induction processes are clear. Although there is no formal mentoring system for new members of staff, the small size of the College enables staff to approach a variety of colleagues should help be required. The Teachers' Handbook contains useful information about the College's policies and practices, and reference to this forms much of the staff induction.



2.20 The staff appraisal process uses feedback from students and from teaching observation to inform discussion. Output from the appraisals inform individual staff development and feeds into the College-wide development days. The output is also used in staff personal development planning as well as other staff development.

2.21 Although there is evidence of the development of practical expertise and clinical supervision skills in staff, the scope of the staff development days offered by the College is primarily practical and operational. There is only limited evidence of staff undertaking development in pedagogy or quality assurance in higher education, and only limited evidence of teaching observations being used developmentally, for instance to identify and share good practice. Teaching staff showed neither any awareness of the activities of the Higher Education Academy nor any aspiration to achieve Fellowship of it. Although staff of the College are permitted to attend training events offered by the University, attendance requires a significant outlay of time and expense, and there was evidence of only very limited uptake of these opportunities. The review team **recommends** that the College ensures that teaching staff develop a continuing awareness of current developments in student learning and assessment in higher education.

2.22 Teaching resources are monitored by the Executive Committee through annual resources reports, and also by the BAAB. The University's VLE has recently been replaced and the College is currently implementing the new system. Although much of the system is yet to be populated, it has the potential to provide improved access to support for students' learning. Students welcomed the College's provision of back-up support on memory sticks in order to ensure continuity during the transition to the new system and commented favourably on its effectiveness.

2.23 The College has satisfactory procedures for assuring, reviewing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, including processes for reviewing the quality of teaching. The Expectation is met. However, the shortcoming in respect of staff awareness of current developments in student learning and assessment in higher education is indicative of insufficient priority being given to assuring quality in planning processes. The level of risk is moderate.

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

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

**Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement**

**Findings**

2.24 The College has a variety of arrangements for identifying and meeting support needs. Data on student progression and achievement is considered at the Executive Committee and commentary is provided in the course annual report and enhancement plans. There is also discussion of progression and achievement at Boards of Studies meetings and at Joint College/University Executive Committee.

2.25 The College's personal tutoring system entails timetabled sessions for each student with a member of staff identified as personal tutor. Students complete a self-evaluation form and, at the end of each session, a summary record is completed. These records are considered at the Executive Committee, to ensure that appropriate actions are identified and followed up.

2.26 The College supports the development of study skills by provision of a Study Skills Handbook and through learning support tutors managed by a Learning Support Coordinator.

2.27 The College supports a number of Regional Support Groups that provide opportunities for additional tutor support and for mutual support and networking among students at locations near their homes. Each group meets typically about once per month for about two or three hours.

2.28 The College's practices to monitor and support student development are, if implemented securely, sufficient to enable the Expectation to be met.

2.29 The review team tested the effectiveness of the College's approach to student development and achievement by considering guidance provided to students, documentation relating to the personal tutoring system and minutes of meetings of the Executive Committee. The team also held meetings with senior staff, teaching staff and students.

2.30 Students commented positively on the quality of support and personal tutoring. Regular timetabled meetings with personal tutors are supplemented by the support of designated learning support tutors. In addition, students commented that they felt able to approach any member of College staff should they have academic or personal problems.

2.31 College staff confirmed the provision of a variety of mechanisms for student support. Due to the small size of the College, students were encouraged to approach their tutors or the member of staff responsible for student welfare. The committed approach to student support shown by staff was indicative of a supportive organisation with a tightly-knit team.

2.32 The College has set up a number of Regional Support Groups as an additional local facility for students to meet tutors and students from other cohorts. There are 13 groups currently available and all students have access to a Regional Support Group. The College indicated its willingness to respond to students' wishes by setting up new groups in areas where they do not already exist. To allow the College to monitor their effectiveness, each group prepares a report after each meeting, with details of who has attended and with feedback from the group on its progress. Students expressed very positive views of the support provided by the groups and their tutors. The integration of widespread Regional

Support Groups into the student support system, enabling responsive local access to tutor support across cohorts, is **good practice**.

2.33 Students confirmed that the College provides study skills sessions and that they have access to a study skills handbook. Module guides show that independent learning and reflective practice are widely developed across the curriculum. Students expressed positive views about the usefulness of business support skills, including business planning, marketing and finance, which are covered at level 6 and which prepare students for independent practice after graduation.

2.34 The College has a small library for the use of students, who may also use a wide range of online resources as well as those of the University's library. The new VLE contains a variety of information to help support individual module sessions, assessment tasks and provide more general information on College policies and procedures.

2.35 The College's arrangements for students support and development are effective in developing students' academic, personal and professional potential. 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**

2.36 The College's agreement with the University obliges it to arrange for the election and training of student representatives for each cohort. Each class has a nominated student representative who attends Student Enhancement and Consultative meetings four times a year. In addition, the composition of the Board of Studies includes student representation.

2.37 Feedback from students is collected by early module feedback, by end of module feedback, and by personal tutors and class representatives. Students complete feedback forms for Acupuncture Skills, Chinese Medicine, Conventional Medical Sciences, Point Location, Professional Practice, and Research and Reflective Practice. Learning Support Tutors provide contact, support and advice. Students also feed back to tutors and this feedback is passed to the management team. Feedback from students is used to inform Module Enhancement Plans (MEPs) and Course Enhancement plans (CEPs).

2.38 These processes, if securely implemented, are sufficient to allow the Expectation to be met.

2.39 The review team considered student feedback forms, CEPs, MEPs, and minutes of committee meetings. The team also met student representatives, academic staff and professional support staff.

2.40 The College's arrangements for gathering and acting on student views are effective. Feedback from students is collected by forms completed for each module at 10 weeks and at the end of the module, as well as from personal tutors. The College has an open-door policy for students to feed back directly to any member of staff and students all have access to members of the Executive Committee: students confirmed that staff are accessible and responsive. Module outlines indicate what issues were raised by students in the previous year and how these have been addressed, and MEPs contain actions raised by student feedback as well as reporting positives from the student evaluations. For example, the restructuring of the level 4 module in 'Acupuncture Skills and Techniques' following students' requests for more opportunities for practical work; continuing consideration of the length of the journal required in 'Chinese Medicine 2' following the expression of student views that it was required to be excessively long; and a reordering of the Clinical Handbook which students had found to be confusing.

2.41 Students expressed the view that the student representative system worked well and that representatives communicated well with the student body. Although the College does not offer formal training to representatives, they do have informal discussions with the Dean about their role.

2.42 The College does not formally involve students in its quality assurance processes, including those for monitoring and evaluation and for development and approval of programme changes. Students, including student representatives, expressed no awareness of these processes. The review team **recommends** that the College build on the culture of responsiveness to students in order to strengthen the engagement of students as partners in the enhancement of their educational experience.

2.43 The College has effective systems for gathering and responding to student views. However, the lack of student involvement in its quality assurance processes is indicative of a

weakness in the operation of part of the College's governance structure. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is moderate.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

**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**

2.44 The College is subject to the University's academic regulations which set out how module and programme assessment boards operate, how progression and classification decisions are made, the criteria for the recognition of prior learning, how mitigating circumstances should be dealt with and the rules relating to second attempts at assessments. The College's Student Assessment and Monitoring Policy is contained in the Student Handbook and sets out the rules and procedures relating to forms of assessment, marking criteria, resits, mitigating circumstances and degree classification, as well as providing a module assessment map. The Field Liaison document confirms the College's responsibilities in respect of a range of matters relating to assessment, including the setting and marking of assessments, feedback to students, and moderation of assessments.

2.45 In principle these arrangements, if securely implemented, would be sufficient to allow the Expectation to be met.

2.46 The review team tested the Expectation by considering the College's policies and procedures, reviewing MAB and PAB minutes, external examiners' reports and samples of feedback, and in discussion with senior and teaching staff, professional support staff and students.

2.47 In most areas practice is sound, and policies and procedures are properly implemented. Students confirmed that assignments are scheduled clearly in advance and that bunching of submission deadlines is avoided. Students also confirmed that submissions were scheduled so that they receive feedback in time to inform later assessments. Students also expressed the view that the assessment workload was excessive: staff of the College acknowledged that the volume of assessment is sometimes too great and affirmed that the College has been taking steps to reduce it.

2.48 A wide variety of forms of assessment are used and the University's programme approval process maps all the assessments in a programme. Both formative and summative assessment is offered. Wherever possible, work is marked anonymously; for practical reasons, clinical work and the dissertation are the exceptions to this.

2.49 Assessment tasks have clear and detailed briefs and students confirmed that they knew what they had to do to get good marks. In some cases the marking descriptors provided to students and used by staff provide grade descriptors and sometimes set out a detailed mark scheme, element by element without relating this to grades. Staff acknowledged that level descriptors are not provided for each module.

2.50 The Student Handbook contains good coverage of sound practice in referencing and the avoidance of plagiarism; students confirmed that they have a good awareness of how to avoid plagiarism in assessed work. First year students have to take and pass an online test provided by the University to demonstrate their understanding of the principles of plagiarism avoidance.

2.51 Assessed work is moderated in line with College policy, which covers all types of assessment including clinical work. Moderators produce a written report on the moderation process. Staff confirmed that where there are marking discrepancies, the whole cohort's work would be remarked rather than changing the marks on the chosen sample only.

2.52 Feedback is provided in a number of formats. In addition to annotation on the script, students receive written feedback on an individual and on a whole class basis, and additionally have the opportunity to seek face-to-face feedback. Students confirmed that the feedback they received was helpful and allowed them to improve the standard of their work. The team found that samples of assessed work showed evidence of thorough and constructive feedback.

2.53 The University's Field Liaison Document confirms that the College is subject to its policy that coursework should be returned to students with feedback within 20 working days of its submission. Nevertheless, in discussion with staff and students, the review team found lack of clarity about the College's policy and practice in this regard. Staff acknowledged that some assessed work is not returned within 20 working days. Neither the Student Handbook nor the Teachers' Handbook mention the 20-day policy; this absence may contribute to the lack of clarity. The review team **recommends** that the College should clarify and communicate the policy in respect of the timing of feedback on assessed work.

2.54 Module assessment boards and programme assessment boards operate in alignment with the University's academic regulations and are chaired by senior staff of the University. Their minutes show that these boards are well run in accordance with the regulations.

2.55 The College's policy on recognition of prior learning is available on its website. However, the review team observed a lack of consistency between the College's written policy and the way the policy is applied in practice. Although the University's policy contains no restriction on the levels of study at which exemptions may be granted, staff from the College and the University expressed the view that the University's policy on the recognition of prior learning restricts the College's ability to offer exemptions beyond level 4, but this is not clear from the policy. The review team **recommends** that the College should ensure that the policy in respect of recognition of prior learning is consistent with the awarding body's requirements.

2.56 The College has processes for managing its responsibilities for assessment that are generally secure but with shortcomings identified above in the rigour with which they are applied. The shortcomings in respect of policy for the timing of feedback on assessed work and of recognition of prior learning relate to the information provided to current and prospective students, and contribute to the recommendation in Expectation C. The Expectation is met and the 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**

2.57 The University is responsible for defining the role of external examiners and for their appointment and management. Its Academic Quality and Standards Handbook includes clear descriptions of the role and responsibilities of external examiners. External examiners are provided with copies of the Academic Regulations that govern the Course.

2.58 External examiners undertake standards verification through scrutiny of assignments and examinations before they are set and through sampling assessed work. They check that timely and effective internal moderation has been carried out on assessment decisions and on feedback to students. They attend assessment boards at module and course level. External examiners are required to submit an annual report to the University.

2.59 These arrangements, if securely implemented, are sufficient to allow the Expectation to be met.

2.60 The review team tested this Expectation by considering assessment board minutes, external examiners' reports, as well as course and module enhancement plans. The team also met senior staff, teaching staff and professional support staff.

2.61 There are sound mechanisms in place to receive and consider external examiners' reports. The College is responsible for communicating with external examiners regarding the samples of assessed work to be provided, arrangements for their visits, and for responding to external examiner reports. Minutes of Board of Studies indicate that comments and reports are considered fully and resulting actions are formulated. The reports are also considered as part of the annual monitoring process.

2.62 Although students expressed lack of awareness of how to access external examiners' reports, student representatives on the Board of Studies have access to such reports, and all students may access them through the University; additionally the College intends that the reports will become available on the VLE.

2.63 The team concludes that the College has in place effective processes for the management of the work of external examiners. The Expectation is met with low risk.

**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**

2.64 The College follows the University's Annual Monitoring and Enhancement policy for taught awards and is subject to its internal subject review process. The twice-yearly joint Board of Studies meeting of the University and the College and an annual Joint Executive Meeting review the past year and draw on the same data as the CEP. The University also provides an annual monitoring report, which summarises its view of the College, the partnership and the programme. These arrangements, if securely implemented, would be sufficient to meet the Expectation.

2.65 The team tested the Expectation by considering evidence including CEPs and MEPs and the report of the 2016 internal subject review. In addition, it held meetings with senior and teaching staff, professional support staff and students.

2.66 The College's annual monitoring process is informed by feedback from student evaluations, both mid-module and end-of-module, by issues raised in the Staff-Student Enhancement Committee, by external examiners' reports, by module enhancement plans and by annual reports to the BAAB, as well as by data on progression and achievement. MEPs are developed by the teaching team and draw on student achievement, student views and student evaluations to develop a plan for action. Course level review also results in an action plan. The annual CEP and course review shows how actions from the previous year's action plan have been followed up. An example of action arising from annual monitoring relates to the identification of student misunderstandings of fundamental concepts in Chinese medicine leading to a review of assessment feedback that informed a staff development day and subsequent teaching strategies.

2.67 Although the preparation of CEPs may involve only a small number of senior staff, the University's policy is that MEPs should be prepared in conjunction with module teams. Nevertheless, teaching staff showed a low awareness of annual monitoring. No description of the annual monitoring process is available for teaching staff, a weakness which contributes to the recommendation in Expectation C.

2.68 Students failed to show any awareness of annual monitoring, and the review team did not meet any students who had contributed to monitoring.

2.69 The annual monitoring report from the University makes good use of available management data to inform its judgements and shows appropriately detailed oversight of the outcomes of the monitoring process.

2.70 The report of the University's most recent internal subject review of the College in March 2016 shows that it involved staff from the University and an external adviser. The review covered learning and teaching, assessment, student support, student feedback and resources. It resulted in four commendations and two recommendations, one in relation to exit awards at levels 4 and 5 and the other concerning the inclusion of business, practice development and marketing skills in programme learning outcomes. Each of these recommendations has been adopted and the programme specification has been amended accordingly.

2.71 The joint Executive Committee meets annually and reviews how liaison is working, student progression and completion, and comments from external examiners and the BAAB, as well as looking at future developments. The Board of Studies is the committee formally charged with oversight of the quality of the programme and its composition includes the liaison officer from the University. Although the Board of Studies does not monitor the fulfilment of action plans during the course of the year, it is effective in reviewing course summary reports, and in receiving and reviewing external examiners' reports and minutes from the Student Enhancement and Consultative Committee.

2.72 The BAAB carried out a major review in March 2017 that resulted in several commendations and continuation of the programme's accreditation. In addition, the College makes annual returns to BAAB and in return receives an annual letter confirming that the College's programme continues to be recognised by the BAAB and meets the relevant professional standards.

2.73 In practice, annual monitoring and periodic review processes operate effectively, despite the apparent lack of involvement of students and low levels of teaching staff awareness. These processes result in action plans which draw on relevant data and make careful use of external examiners' reports. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.74 The College has its own policy for handling student complaints, while a student wishing to appeal against an academic decision has access to the appeals procedure of the University. These policies are available in the Student Handbook. These arrangements, if securely implemented, are sufficient to enable the Expectation to be met.

2.75 The review team tested the Expectation by considering the appeals and complaints policies, and in meetings with students and teaching staff.

2.76 The College endeavours to resolve issues informally in the first instance, and to date has not received any formal appeals or complaints from students. Students confirmed that they are aware of and have access to the procedures for appeals and complaints.

2.77 The College has no history of appeals or complaints. Its policies are readily accessible to students, are appropriately based on the policy and practice of the awarding body and are set out in procedures which are fair and timely. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

2.78 The College requires each student to undertake 30 hours of clinical observation of a qualified acupuncturist each year. In order to establish the suitability of the learning opportunities offered by these observations, it requires practitioners to complete two forms. The first confirms the hours and number of treatments a student has seen on any given day while the second is a report on how the student has conducted himself or herself during the observation. Students themselves are required to find opportunities for observations, although the College provides details of practitioners willing to accept student observers. In certain circumstances, the College will also help students find a practitioner. Students are required to keep a log which shows their reflections on the experience of each period of observation.

2.79 Given the limited nature of the practitioner arrangements, the College's procedures would, if implemented securely, be sufficient to enable the Expectation to be met.

2.80 The review team tested this Expectation by reviewing the Clinical Observation pack and in meetings with senior staff, teaching staff and students.

2.81 Students commented positively on the experience of undertaking practitioner observations. Students are required to produce a reflective report on their experience and the report forms part of the assessment.

2.82 Although the College provides students with a list of potentially willing practitioners and requires such practitioners to be registered with the BAAB, it does not involve itself in any monitoring of the observations themselves and does not undertake visits to the practitioners involved. The review team recognised that practitioner observations form only a small part of the course and that the requirement that practitioners be registered with the BAAB offers some assurance of their suitability. Nevertheless, the team considered that the College should be more closely involved in the monitoring of the arrangements for observations to ensure that they provide appropriate learning opportunities and that they offer a safe learning environment for students. The team **recommends** that the College implement appropriate and proportionate due diligence procedures for each practitioner at which clinical observations take place.

2.83 The College's arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with other organisations are broadly adequate but have some shortcomings in the rigour with which they are applied. The Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is moderate.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

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

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

**Findings**

2.84 The College does not offer research degrees.

**Expectation: Not applicable**

**Level of risk: Not applicable**

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

2.85 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All applicable Expectations in this judgement area are met. The level of risk is low except in Expectations B1, B3, B5, B6 and B10 for which the level of risk is moderate.

2.86 There is one feature of good practice, relating to the local access to tutor support enabled by Regional Support Groups.

2.87 There are five recommendations in this judgement area. The first arises from the need to ensure that teaching staff develop continuing awareness of current developments in student learning and assessment in higher education. The second relates to the need to strengthen the engagement of students as partners. The third is in respect of the clarification and communication of the policy for the timing of feedback on assessed work. The fourth relates to the consistency of the policy for the recognition of prior learning with the requirements of the awarding body. The final recommendation is to ensure appropriate and proportionate due diligence in respect of practitioner observations.

2.88 There are no affirmations in this judgement area.

2.89 There are secure arrangements to manage the quality of student learning opportunities. The review team concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the provider **meets** UK expectations.

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

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

#### **Quality Code, Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision**

##### **Findings**

3.1 The College's website provides publicly-available information about its provision including information about governors, management, teaching and administrative staff, information about accreditation and inspection and the College formation and ethos. The College intends that the website will also include data from the National Student Survey and from Unistats when these are available. The Joint Principal is responsible for signing-off public information.

3.2 For prospective students the website has information on course content, weekend and weekday courses, fees, the application process and selection criteria, and additionally includes the College's policies on equality of opportunities and on recognition of prior learning. Information intended for current students is provided on the website and on the VLE, as well as in the Student Handbook and in the Student Newsletters published three times per year. The Teachers' Handbook provides information for teaching staff about their role in the College.

3.3 These arrangements would, if implemented securely, be sufficient to enable the Expectation to be met.

3.4 The review team tested the Expectation by considering the information on the College's website and in student and teachers' handbooks. The team additionally held meetings with students, senior staff, teaching staff and professional support staff.

3.5 Students confirmed that the Student Handbook is helpful and accurate, and expressed very positive views about information available on the website.

3.6 The College is in the process of changing the platform for its VLE to a new system which is not yet fully operational. Although the new system is partly populated and is already in use, the College did not offer evidence of systematic plans for its further development including for the provision of module information, assignments, and College policies.

3.7 All applicants for admission are invited to an Open Day, and students undertake a three-day induction programme following enrolment. Students confirmed that the information provided at Open Days is accurate and helpful, and that the induction programme was a useful introduction to the College.

3.8 The review team noted several omissions and errors in the information available to students and to staff. The requirement for students to demonstrate fitness to practise to be awarded a degree is not explicit in the programme specification. The College does not provide information to teaching staff about their responsibilities in respect of their role in quality assurance procedures, and it failed to recognise the importance of this in assisting staff to engage with these procedures. Although the College's newsletters advertise its forthcoming delivery of two postgraduate diplomas, the College has failed to consider how these programmes align with the FHEQ and showed no recognition of the need to do so. The College's policy in respect of the timing of feedback on assessed work is not clearly

communicated to staff or to students. The information on the website in relation to the recognition of prior learning is not consistent with the description of the policy offered in discussion, and bears a date prior to that of the current version of the College's policy.

3.9 The geographically distributed nature of the student body and of teaching staff lends particular weight to the need for secure processes for the management of information. While the College provides much information for students and for staff which is helpful and supportive, there are nevertheless shortcomings that are indicative of a lack of effective and systematic processes for the management of information. The review team **recommends** that the College should take steps to ensure that information for all intended audiences is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.

3.10 The shortcomings in the provision of information are indicative of insufficient emphasis being given to assuring quality in the College's planning process and of shortcomings in the rigour with which its procedures are applied. The Expectation is not met and the level of risk is moderate.

**Expectation: Not met**  
**Level of risk: Moderate**



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

3.11 The single Expectation for this judgement area is not met and is associated with a moderate level of risk.

3.12 There are no features of good practice or affirmations. The single recommendation in this judgement area is that the College should take steps to ensure that information for all its intended audiences is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The weaknesses which give rise to this recommendation are indicative of insufficient emphasis to assuring quality in the College's planning processes and of shortcomings in the rigour with which its procedures are applied.

3.13 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. It found weaknesses which could, without action, lead to serious problems in the management of this judgement area.

3.14 The College showed lack of awareness of some weaknesses and of their significance and had only under-developed plans for addressing other weaknesses. Although the College intends to continue to develop its VLE, its plans for doing so are under-developed. The College's failure to recognise the need to provide clear information to teaching staff about their role in its quality assurance processes is a weakness which could, without action, lead to serious problems in the management of this area. The College is publicising programmes described as postgraduate diplomas before taking steps to ensure their alignment with the FHEQ and failed to show awareness of the significance of this issue. The College failed to show awareness of the lack of consistent information for students in respect of the recognition of prior learning, and of the lack of clear information in relation to the timing of feedback on assessed work. Information for students on the requirement to show fitness to practise is not transparent.

3.15 The review team concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the College **requires improvement to meet** 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 does not have an enhancement policy that enables it to present a coherent and consistent approach to the enhancement of its provision. Nevertheless, it has drawn attention to specific examples of improvements to its provision in practice.

The location of responsibility for enhancement is not clearly established, and there is no evidence of a strategic approach to sharing good practice although individual examples are apparent. Because of these shortcomings, alongside the lack of a policy or a governance framework which would enable deliberate steps to be taken to enhance learning opportunities, the College's arrangements are not sufficient to meet the Expectation.

4.2 In the absence of documents and policies in respect of a strategic approach to the enhancement of learning opportunities, the team relied heavily on the evidence of meetings with senior and teaching staff, and professional support staff. It also took account of the College's own documentation, the student submission, individual examples of enhancements, and the outcomes of annual monitoring and internal subject review including MEPs and CEPs.

4.3 Although senior staff affirmed that the enhancement strategy is the responsibility of the Executive Committee, the review team also heard that the Executive Committee has not established priorities for enhancement but is driven by issues raised by students and by the need to maintain academic standards. The minutes of the Executive Committee show that its focus is very operational with a strong emphasis on problem-solving, but without any evidence of deliberate steps at College level to establish a strategic approach to enhancement, nor of steps to identify good practice.

4.4 The College is responsive to student views and wishes, and has secure mechanisms for gathering and assessing the views of students as detailed in Expectation B5. Students confirmed that the College is responsive to issues raised by them. The student submission affirms that students are 'aware of an ethos of continual improvement'. The review team noted examples of improvements made in response to student feedback, from setting up new regional support groups, to the sensitive response to student concerns about going paperless, and to minor changes to modules to meet student demands.

4.5 The College also has policies on peer observation and on appraisal of academic staff which, although having the potential to inform enhancement, are not systematically used to identify needs. Some identification and dissemination of good practice takes place at teaching development days, but this is not linked to any explicit strategic approach.

4.6 The University's annual monitoring process is based on MEPs, CEPs and course summary reports that draw on a wide range of sources including external examiners' reports, student feedback and data on progression and achievement. Although CEPs are detailed and are followed up by the University, there is no evidence in the Board of Studies' minutes that they are used to identify strategic enhancement priorities or as a basis to identify and share good practice. This shortcoming contributes to the recommendation in Expectation B5 relating to the engagement of students as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience.

4.7 The College is currently unable to articulate a strategic approach to the

enhancement of learning opportunities, or to demonstrate how it takes deliberate steps to do so. The responsibility for enhancement has been identified as resting with the Executive Committee, but there is no evidence that it manages enhancement in a strategic way. The College has failed to show awareness of the significance of these weaknesses in the operation of its academic governance structure. Noting the absence of deliberate steps towards enhancement, the team **recommends** that the College builds on existing initiatives to develop a strategic approach to the enhancement of learning opportunities. The Expectation is not met and the level of risk is moderate.

**Expectation: Not met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

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

4.8 The single Expectation for this judgement area is not met and is associated with a moderate level of risk.

4.9 There are no features of good practice or affirmations. The single recommendation in this judgement area, arising from a weakness in the operation of the College's governance structure, relates to the development of a strategic approach to the enhancement of learning opportunities.

4.10 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. While the College is responsive to student needs in implementing improvements in its provision of learning opportunities, it has not adopted a strategic approach to the enhancement of these opportunities and has failed to show awareness of the significance of this weakness. Its use of internal quality assurance processes to inform enhancement is not fully embedded in operational planning through the identification and dissemination of good practice or the identification of priorities for enhancement. These weaknesses could, without action, lead to serious problems in the management of this judgement area.

4.11 The review team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the College **requires improvement to meet** UK expectations.

## Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 21-24 of the [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\) handbook](#).

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

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

### Academic standards

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

### Award

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

### Awarding organisation

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

### Blended learning

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

### Credit(s)

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

### Degree-awarding body

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

### Distance learning

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

### Dual award or double award

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

### e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

### **Enhancement**

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

### **Expectations**

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

### **Flexible and distributed learning**

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

### **Framework**

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

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

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

### **Good practice**

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

### **Learning opportunities**

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

### **Learning outcomes**

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

### **Multiple awards**

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

### **Operational definition**

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

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

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

**Programme specifications**

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

**Quality Code**

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

**Reference points**

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

**Self-evaluation document**

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

**Subject Benchmark Statement**

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

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

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

**Threshold academic standard**

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

**Virtual learning environment (VLE)**

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

**Widening participation**

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

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