



# Higher Education Review of West Nottinghamshire College

June 2015

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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 West Nottinghamshire College. The review took place from 9 to 11 June 2015 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Mrs Catherine Hill
- Professor Alan Howard
- Ms Caitlin Oliver (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 6.

In reviewing West Nottinghamshire 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 2014-15 are Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement and Student Employability,<sup>2</sup> and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

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

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

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

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

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

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about West Nottinghamshire College

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

- The maintenance of the academic standards of awards **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 West Nottinghamshire College.

- The extensive range of support services for higher education students, enabling students to develop personal, academic and professional potential (Expectation B4).
- The dedicated resources to support a distinctive higher education learning environment (Expectation B4).
- The range of ways in which students and staff engage to enhance the educational experience (Expectation B5).

### Recommendations

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

By October 2015:

- fully involve employers in the annual review of foundation degree programmes (Expectations B8, A3.4)
- articulate and fully implement the College's strategic approach to enhancement of higher education provision (Enhancement).

By January 2016:

- work with awarding bodies to ensure that the provision of work-based learning in all foundation degree programmes is aligned with the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark* (Expectations A1, B10)
- establish policy and implement procedures to secure effective management and oversight of the quality of learning opportunities in the workplace (Expectation B10).

### Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms** the following action that West Nottinghamshire College is already taking to improve the educational provision offered to its students.

- The steps being taken to support staff development and scholarship at higher education level (Expectation B3).

## **Theme: Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement**

The College takes active steps to involve students in the quality assurance and enhancement of their learning opportunities and provides a wide variety of platforms for student engagement.

Students are represented in deliberative committees at a range of levels in the College, and there is a strong level of awareness of the student representative system on the part of the student body as a whole. Students also have opportunities to comment on proposals for new programmes and for changes to existing programmes.

The College has effective systems, both formal and informal, for receiving and recording the views of students about the provision, and for identifying and monitoring actions for improvement arising from them. These systems have served to build a strong academic and pastoral relationship between staff and students.

The College has a solid foundation for the involvement of students in quality assurance and enhancement. It values the student voice to inform improvements to provision, and offers an effective range of opportunities for this voice to be heard.

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

## About West Nottinghamshire College

West Nottinghamshire College (the College) provides further and higher education to areas of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire, centred on its campus in the town of Mansfield. Its student body numbers in excess of 30,000, of whom about 500 are in higher education. Its vision is to be a college for aspiring communities, with students at the heart of its goal of attaining excellence.

The population served by the College faces significant challenges in terms of a low level of achievement in secondary education and low aspirations in the community at large. The College sees its role as being to re-engage young people to complete their education and to work with employers to develop solutions for business success.

The College's higher education provision is based on its main campus in Mansfield. Its programmes of higher education lead to awards from the University of Derby and Birmingham City University, and from Pearson Education.

Since the previous review in 2010, the College has established a University Centre as the focus for higher education in the College. The Centre provides physical resources dedicated to higher education students including study areas and social space, as well as a base for the College's Higher Education Team which the College regards as providing a clearly student-focused service to support its higher education students. The College has expanded its higher education provision by creating several new top-up programmes leading to the award of honours degrees entirely by study at the College itself, and has continued to expand its provision of foundation degrees and higher national awards.

The College is conscious of the uncertainty at national level in the future environment for higher education. It regards maintaining and developing its partnerships with its awarding bodies, employers, the Local Enterprise Partnership and with local schools and training organisations as being critical to its strategy for continuing to offer higher education.

The outcomes of the last QAA review in 2010 were positive and resulted in the review team identifying four features of good practice and one recommendation relating to the monitoring of student success rates. The College has taken steps to address the recommendation and now monitors performance data at both programme level and School level.

## Explanation of the findings about West Nottinghamshire 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 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* 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 programmes in partnership with the University of Derby and Birmingham City University as its degree-awarding bodies and with Pearson as its awarding organisation. Where a programme is developed under a validation model, the College's programme team begins the process of programme design with reference to the FHEQ, the relevant Subject Benchmark Statement and, where applicable, the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark*. Link tutors appointed by the awarding bodies ensure that College staff are aware of the requirements of the approval process and the relevant academic frameworks and guidance.

1.2 In theory this approach enables the College to meet Expectation A1. The team sought to test the College's understanding of their responsibilities for the maintenance of standards through meetings with senior staff and teaching staff. The team also reviewed relevant documentation relating to partnership agreements, programme specifications and module handbooks.

1.3 Key College staff are conversant with external reference points, and articulate an understanding of their responsibilities for maintaining academic standards as agreed with the awarding bodies. Programme specifications cite external reference points including Subject

Benchmark Statements and the FHEQ. However, reference to the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark* is variable across relevant programme specifications, module-level information does not always articulate the learning objectives of work-based learning activities within modules and students do not consistently understand the learning objectives of their work placements or the methods of assessment used for them.

1.4 In considering the contribution of work-based learning to foundation degree programmes, the review team found a lack of rigour in respect of the contribution made by work-based learning to programme learning outcomes. Although programme specifications set out programme learning outcomes and practical and subject-specific skills, they do not consistently make clear the relationship between them. For instance, in the Foundation Degree in Criminal Justice, work placements are not essential to the programme, although students are encouraged to identify and carry out a relevant work-related activity. In the Foundation Degree in Business Management, while the majority of students are already in relevant employment, should students lose that employment or work placement, the College will offer a relevant work experience opportunity, generally project-based, to enable students to remain on programme. In these examples there is however a lack of clarity about the importance, purpose or intended learning outcomes of the work-related learning activity and how these outcomes are assessed. Students told the review team that it was not always clear to them how work-based activity is assessed, although in other respects students spoke positively about their work-based experiences.

1.5 Recognising that the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark* affirms that 'Authentic and innovative work-based learning is an integral part of Foundation Degrees and their design' and affirming the part played by clearly articulated learning outcomes in securing the maintenance of standards, the review team **recommends** that the College work with its awarding bodies to ensure that the provision of work-based learning in all foundation degree programmes is aligned with the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark*.

1.6 Noting the significance of the contribution of foundation degree programmes to the College's higher education provision and the lack of robustness in respect of the contribution of work-based learning to learning outcomes, the review team concludes that Expectation A1 is not met and the associated level of risk is moderate.

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

**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 adopts the academic frameworks and regulations of its awarding bodies. These are made available to staff and students via partners' websites signposted in the College's academic handbook and its virtual learning environment (VLE). The College has a Higher Education Team and a higher education committee structure headed by the Higher Education Academic Standards Committee (HEASC) that provides oversight of higher education programmes delivered in schools. Within Schools, the delivery of higher education is managed and organised separately from that of further education provision, and for each programme there is a specific course coordinator or equivalent. Schools provide annual programme review and other reports to the HEASC, which in turn reports to governors via the College's Standards Committee, a subcommittee of the Corporation Board. The Heads of School and the Head of Higher Education and International report to the Deputy Principal (Teaching and Learning) who has overall responsibility for higher education at senior management level. Link tutors are appointed by each university and are responsible for the management of academic links with the College. Assessment boards are organised for each programme according to the requirements of the awarding bodies and awarding organisation. These arrangements allow Expectation A2.1 to be met in theory.

1.8 The review team evaluated the effectiveness of the College's processes by scrutinising documents relating to its agreements, reading minutes of the HEASC, and holding meetings with senior management, teaching staff and students.

1.9 The review team found that governance of higher education programmes is appropriately distinct and separated from that of further education provision. The committee structure supports programme-level management and monitoring of provision while enabling the HEASC and Higher Education staff to ensure appropriate College oversight of activity and consistency between Schools. Staff at all levels articulated an understanding of the higher education governance structure and how the College engages with the regulations and frameworks of its awarding bodies. External examiners' reports confirm that assessment boards operate effectively and ensure the appropriate award of academic credit and qualifications.

1.10 The review team was satisfied that the College exercises sufficient oversight of the frameworks and policies of its awarding partners. Expectation A2.1 is 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**

1.11 All awards offered at the College are underpinned by programme specifications, which are available to staff and students from the College's VLE. For Pearson awards, the overarching programme specification is contextualised to the College in line with QAA guidance.

1.12 The College provides 'pocket programme specifications' for students at an applicant event prior to commencement of the programme. Students confirmed that they are able to access programme information via the VLE and that they find this information to be a useful guide to their studies and to the College's expectations of them.

1.13 Programme specifications for degree programmes are integral to the documentation prepared at the time of programme approval. The definitive copy of each programme specification is held by the College's Higher Education Team.

1.14 The College maintains a course log which comprises details of modules and assessment strategy of all courses as well as key contacts at awarding bodies and contact details for external examiners and standards verifiers. The course log, reviewed annually to ensure that modifications are recorded, is used to inform the College's published information.

1.15 The College's system for maintaining records of programmes and for the annual review of the course log are sufficient to ensure that it has a reference point for the delivery and assessment of each programme. Expectation A2.2 is met, and the level of risk is low.

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

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

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

**Findings**

1.16 The College's higher education provision consists of higher national, foundation degree and honours degree top-up programmes at Levels 4 and 5 of the FHEQ, offered in full-time and part-time modes.

1.17 The College's degree-awarding bodies ensure, through their own programme approval processes, that programmes meet UK threshold academic standards. The College is an approved centre for Pearson programmes. The processes and procedures of the College allow Expectation A3.1 to be met in theory.

1.18 The review team considered documentation including minutes of meetings and reports arising from the College's quality assurance processes. The team met senior staff, awarding body representatives, programme leaders, academic and support staff and students. Members of staff of the College were able to demonstrate a commitment to and an understanding of Subject Benchmark Statements, the FHEQ and alignment with the Quality Code.

1.19 Programme approval takes place in accordance with the frameworks and regulations of the College's awarding bodies and awarding organisation. Validation is managed by awarding bodies with the exception of Pearson awards, which are validated internally within the College. The HEASC monitors the validation and revalidation of all higher education programmes.

1.20 The College produces outline planning proposals for new programmes which are reported to the HEASC before progressing to the awarding bodies for approval. Outline approval comprises consideration of the proposed curriculum on the basis of academic rationale and analyses of market demand, mode of delivery, staffing and resource requirements. Subject to approval by the HEASC, the outline planning process will be carried out using a template designed for this purpose.

1.21 Validation documentation comprises programme specifications and module records that describe the level of the qualification or credit and the intended learning outcomes. Programme learning outcomes are defined in relation to the knowledge and skills that students will have achieved on completion of the programme.

1.22 The validation process considers the appropriateness of programme aims and intended learning outcomes for the level of the qualification. Validation panels make use of external academic expertise to benchmark subject standards. Employers' participation in programme development is effective and valued by the College.

1.23 The review team considers that the College's higher education provision is designed and approved in accordance with the frameworks and regulations of the College's

awarding bodies. The processes for internal approval of new programmes are systematic and clearly understood by staff. Expectation A3.1 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**

1.24 The College's Academic Handbook 2014-15 sets out expectations in relation to assessment practice. It makes suitable reference to the reasonable adjustments required by students with protected characteristics and provides helpful guidance on inclusive assessment strategies for staff. Staff confirmed their understanding of inclusive assessment and how they use these strategies to address students' individual needs.

1.25 The review team considered a range of documentary evidence and met academic staff of the College and of awarding bodies. The partnership agreements between the College and its awarding bodies are supported by effective structures and processes. Subject assessment panels and progression and award boards operate in accordance with the regulations of the awarding bodies and confirm that students have achieved the standards set for the award of credit and qualifications. This allows the Expectation to be met in theory.

1.26 Programme specifications describe the assessment by which students will demonstrate achievement of the intended learning outcomes at programme and module levels. This information is reproduced in both the programme and the module handbooks that are made available to students.

1.27 External examiners confirm that the standards set at validation are being maintained and are comparable with those of similar programmes of other providers. Most of the external examiner reports seen by the review team made explicit reference to the Quality Code, the FHEQ and/or Subject Benchmark Statements when evaluating standards. External examiner reports confirm that UK threshold academic standards are being met.

1.28 The College's Higher Education Team receives and reviews external examiners' reports to ensure that the College is immediately aware of outcomes of assessment boards. Reviewers found that the HEASC appropriately fulfils its responsibility for monitoring reports and the responses of course teams to them.

1.29 The College has systems to ensure that its processes are aligned with the academic regulations of its awarding bodies and the team found that these are working effectively. Expectation A3.2 is met and 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**

1.30 The College follows its awarding bodies' policies and procedures regarding the monitoring and review of programmes. The Pearson programmes adopt an internal system which aligns with other programme monitoring and review arrangements. The monitoring process at the College draws together feedback from students, staff, external examiners and link tutors, together with performance data produced from central College systems. Programme monitoring takes place termly within course committees, and culminates in the production of annual programme reports which consider shortfalls and good practice informing the production of School summary reports. These processes allow Expectation A3.3 to be met in theory.

1.31 Annual School summary reports are informed by programme monitoring and comment on standards in relation to student achievement and progression and the effectiveness of assessment. School summary reports provide the basis for the College's annual self-evaluation. The College makes effective use of these summaries, as they form the basis for monthly curriculum management meetings to assess progress against actions and developments during the course of the teaching year. Course committee meetings during the academic year are also instrumental in monitoring and reviewing actions at this level, and students are engaged in this provision.

1.32 The HEASC has oversight of the standards of the College's higher education programmes and contains standing items on review and monitoring. The minutes of these meetings demonstrate deliberation on external examiners' reports and on the College's annual self-evaluation and that the College undertakes the monitoring of action plans arising from them. The terms of reference for this committee indicate that the School summary reports are considered but minutes of meetings do not reflect this.

1.33 The College carried out its first review of its Pearson programmes in January 2015. For other programmes the responsibility for conducting periodic review is through the awarding body. The periodic review process was cited by staff as providing an effective forum to review and evaluate the programmes with other staff from both the College and where appropriate, the awarding body.

1.34 Programme monitoring and review operate effectively and take due account of the reports of external examiners and link tutors. The systems and processes are fit for purpose and include effective oversight at institutional level. Expectation A3.3 is met and the associated risk level 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**

1.35 The College uses external expertise in programme development, validation and review. It seeks external academic and industry input during new programme development and there is external membership of validation panels in programme approval. External examiners are employed on all programmes and report explicitly on the setting and maintenance of standards. Link tutors from both universities provide ongoing academic support and advice to higher education staff and curriculum leaders. The use of external academic expertise at key stages in the programme cycle enables the College to meet Expectation A3.4 in theory.

1.36 The team tested the use of external expertise by reading external examiners' reports, validation and annual review documentation, and in meetings with staff and students.

1.37 External examiners' reports comment in appropriate detail on the setting and maintenance of academic standards and sometimes offer constructive challenge to established practice. For example, one external examiner suggested that course team meetings should be more deliberative, formalised and minuted to enable their effective use in programme review. External examiners' reports are included in annual monitoring packs to support programme review at School level. Minutes of meetings of the HEASC confirm appropriate consideration of external examiner and programme review reports. Issues of wider concern and/or good practice are disseminated across Schools by the Head of Higher Education and International.

1.38 External views are used to inform both the approval of new programmes and periodic reviews. The composition of university validation panels includes external academics, and universities' link tutors typically participate in periodic review, although the review of Pearson programmes which took place in January 2015 did not include external representation. However, the absence of a formal process by which employers contribute to the annual review of foundation degree programmes contributed to the recommendation in Expectation B8 in this regard. Link tutors from both awarding bodies attend course committees or equivalent and offer support and guidance to staff. The review team found that a constructive working relationship exists between the College and its partners.

1.39 Overall, the review team found that the College sufficiently engages external expertise in a variety of ways to support the maintenance of standards. Expectation A3.4 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 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 of the Expectations for this judgement area have been met with the exception of Expectation A1. The associated level of risk was judged to be low except for Expectation A1 for which the level of risk was judged to be moderate.

1.41 Close liaison with its awarding bodies (University of Derby and Birmingham City University) and the awarding organisation (Pearson) ensures that the College fulfils its requirements in respect of programme approval. The review team found inconsistent alignment with the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark* in the College's provision of work-related and work-based learning for foundation degrees, and a lack of rigour in respect of the contribution made by work-based learning to programme learning outcomes.

1.42 The College has transparent and comprehensive frameworks to ensure that standards are set at appropriate levels within institutional frameworks and that the definitive record of each programme is used to govern the award of academic credit and qualifications.

1.43 There are no findings of good practice relating to this judgement area. The review team made one recommendation relating to this judgement area, in respect of the alignment with the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark*, as noted above.

1.44 On the basis of the documentation provided and meetings with staff and students, the review team concludes that the maintenance of the academic standards of awards 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 and Approval**

#### **Findings**

2.1 The College's strategy for higher education asserts that it is 'underpinned by a commitment to widening participation and increased local access to university level provision'. Its provision is intended to align with progression needs and patterns of demand, specifically for students progressing from Level 3 and for those seeking professional courses and higher level apprenticeships. The College's current higher education portfolio consists of foundation degrees and Higher National Diplomas/Certificates, as well as Level 6 programmes offering progression from selected foundation degrees, available for the first time in the academic year 2014-15.

2.2 New programme developments are reported by the Deputy Principal (Teaching and Learning) to the HEASC which considers their alignment with College strategy. Planning for new programme development, together with possible amendments and programme withdrawals, is discussed under a standing item at meetings of the Higher Education Management Forum which reviews them to identify and share good practice. The planning approval process considers the proposed curriculum on the basis of academic rationale and evidence of market demand, mode of delivery, staffing and resources for teaching. The Deputy Principal (Teaching and Learning) takes final responsibility for approval of new programmes within the College. Subject to approval by HEASC at its meeting in June 2015, a new template for the internal approval process is intended to capture these themes with a view to formalising new programme approval through a business case model.

2.3 Validation processes are operated by awarding bodies, except for Pearson programmes which are validated internally within the College. Validation sets the standards of the proposed curriculum and considers how students will be taught, assessed and supported. Supporting documents typically comprise programme specifications and additional evidence that describes: the academic and market rationale for the programme; the curriculum and intended learning outcomes and their alignment with national level descriptors; programme structure, including modules and credit; teaching, learning and assessment strategies; staff and resources for teaching; student support; programme organisation and management; and arrangements for quality assurance and assessment boards. Module handbooks describe the level and credit, module aims and intended learning outcomes, content, teaching, assessment and learning resources for each module.

2.4 The College's guidelines for teaching, learning, training and assessment form a reference point for programme approval and are generic for all aspects of delivery. They do not, however, promote scholarship-led delivery or make any explicit references to the FHEQ, to relevant Subject Benchmark Statements, or to the Quality Code.

2.5 Programme specifications make broad reference to the FHEQ and to Subject Benchmark Statements and the College promotes staff knowledge and awareness of the Quality Code through professional development activities and higher education conferences. Notwithstanding some variations, programme specifications define programme learning

outcomes in respect of the knowledge, understanding and skills that students will have demonstrated on completion of the programme. However, programme specifications only rarely defined programme learning outcomes at the interim stages of an award.

2.6 Programme handbooks describe the assessment by which students demonstrate achievement of the programme learning outcomes. Module specifications and handbooks describe the module learning outcomes and the assessment by which students demonstrate their achievement.

2.7 Programme modifications are permitted by awarding bodies within pre-defined limits and are used by the College to adjust and refresh existing curricula. The process for approval of modification to a programme requires consideration by HEASC following programme-level discussions with the Head of Higher Education and International. Modifications to programmes of the University of Derby and of Birmingham City University are also subject to approval by the relevant university.

2.8 Validation panels for new programme approval comprise academics from the awarding body and, subject to nomination and approval by the awarding body, academic subject experts from external higher education institutions together with a chair and administrative officer from the awarding body. The panel typically meets with a range of staff from the College and with link tutors.

2.9 Students contribute to programme development and validation through participation in discussions and meetings with programme teams. During programme development, the College actively seeks and acts upon employers' views. This engagement with students and employers is effective and valued by the College through programme design and approval.

2.10 The team concludes that the College operates effective processes for the design, development and approval of higher education programmes. Expectation B1 is met and the 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***

**Findings**

2.11 The College's Higher Education Strategy informs its processes for recruitment, selection and admissions, with particular emphasis on widening participation in the local community. Entry requirements for each programme are determined during the approval process and are published in the College's prospectus and on its website. Entry requirements may be changed by the College if there is evidence of a misalignment between achievements of applicants and the demands of the programme.

2.12 Recruitment and admissions are managed centrally through an admissions team in liaison with the Higher Education Team to ensure fairness and transparency. The College's Higher Education and International Manager meets regularly with the admissions team to monitor applications and offers, and the Head of Higher Education and International meets regularly with the Deputy Principal Teaching and Learning to review numbers of applications against targets. Applications, recruitment and admissions processes are reviewed annually by the Higher Education Team. The College's prospectus and its website make clear the recruitment, selection and admissions processes. The fee policy is explained to prospective students in the joining instructions and again at enrolment, and is also available via the College website. Admission to a programme leading to an award of the University of Derby is subject to approval by the programme leader at the University. These arrangements allow the Expectation to be met in theory.

2.13 Every applicant is invited to an event at the College, which presents information regarding higher education study provided by a member of the Higher Education Team as well as a briefing by a member of the relevant programme team. Every applicant is interviewed, and those who have applied for performance-based programmes also undergo an audition, thereby providing the College with the opportunity to make judgements about student potential, particularly of mature applicants or those from a non-traditional educational background. Additionally, each applicant receives an applicant's guide and a pocket programme specification. Students confirmed that they found these processes to be supportive and straightforward.

2.14 To further support applicants' transition to higher education, the College offers Summer Schools which focus on study skills. Some courses also offer pre-course workshops such as the mathematics workshop in summer 2014 delivered specifically for engineering students. Students were positive regarding the Summer School experience, particularly with regard to their development of referencing skills and the provision of reading lists.

2.15 The interview process, outlined in the applicants' guide, allows applicants to receive immediate informal feedback prior to receipt of an offer letter. Where an applicant is advised to undertake further study prior to undertaking a higher education programme, this is normally discussed at interview and, where possible, the applicant is transferred to other suitable provision.

2.16 The College engages in a range of recruitment activities, including UCAS fairs, as well as community-based events such as stands in supermarkets and shopping centres.

It has held three higher education information evenings in the course of the academic year 2014-15 to offer impartial advice to internal and external audiences. The open evenings include talks from the Head of Higher Education and International on higher education at the College, on university life and student finance from representatives of local universities, as well as stands promoting higher education at the College and at other local providers. The College has stated that around 200 visitors attended the most recent event in February 2015.

2.17 Internally, the College uses student social spaces to hold general awareness-raising events about its higher education provision, currently themed Dare to be Different. Additionally, talks are given to Level 3 students regarding progression to higher education.

2.18 The College's recruitment, selection and admissions policies and procedures adhere to the principles of fair admissions and appear transparent, reliable, valid, inclusive and underpinned by appropriate organisational structures and processes. Meetings with academic and support staff confirmed information regarding application, recruitment and admissions as provided by the College. Students confirmed that the application, recruitment and admissions processes are straightforward and supportive. Expectation B2 is met, and the level of risk is low.

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

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

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

#### **Findings**

2.19 The College's approach to the learning experience of its students is articulated in its Guide to Outstanding Teaching, Learning, Training & Assessment. Students experience a blend of learning opportunities with an emphasis on developing employability across all programmes through a non-credit-bearing Future Focus Award. Students on foundation degree programmes are required to undertake work-related activity at each level of study in a variety of possible forms.

2.20 Teaching staff are normally required to hold a qualification at least one level above the level of any module they are delivering, or to bring substantial industrial/vocational experience to the course team. All teaching staff are additionally required to hold qualified teacher status, or to be working towards it. Staff development to support higher education teaching is an integral part of the annual appraisal process, and events such as conferences and workshops take place in collaboration with the awarding bodies. The College has a strategy for scholarship in higher education including potential support for conference attendance for staff who are presenting papers and for journal subscriptions.

2.21 In theory, the approaches taken should enable the College to meet Expectation B3. The review team tested this by talking to students and to teaching staff, professional support staff and senior staff and by reading a range of documentation.

2.22 Outcomes of the National Student Survey (NSS) in 2014 demonstrate strong levels of overall satisfaction, echoed by students who, in meeting the review team, praised the knowledge, enthusiasm and accessibility of teaching staff. Deliberate steps are taken to consider and, where necessary, respond to NSS outcomes through programme committees, annual review and resultant action plans. The HEASC provides oversight and enables consistent responses to be implemented across Schools. For example, while the 2014 NSS outcome indicated that only 62 per cent of respondents believed that their course was well organised and running smoothly, the College's analysis of the reasons for this enabled it to implement steps to ensure consistently good communication with students on programmes across Schools.

2.23 Students value links between their studies and the workplace, and praised the College's efforts to develop employability, particularly through the introduction of the Future Focus Award. This non-credit-bearing addition to their programmes of study is intended to encourage students to engage with their personal and professional development planning and activity in a structured, self-directed way. Various activities contribute to its completion and students maintain a log book. Staff alluded to plans to develop it further as an area of technology-enhanced learning.

2.24 External examiners consistently praise the quality of feedback on assessed work given to students. Good use is made of formative feedback and most courses offer post-feedback tutorials or group feedback in class to ensure that any common themes are highlighted and discussed. While the College has only recently begun to deliver modules at Level 6, external examiners' reports generally indicate that there is further scope to

encourage students' use of academic literature in helping to develop a depth of critical understanding necessary to achieve higher marks at this level. The College may wish to consider adding to its Guide to Outstanding Teaching, Learning, Training and Assessment to give greater emphasis to issues particularly relevant to higher education, such as development of independent learning and critical thinking.

2.25 Teaching staff possess qualifications conveying qualified teaching status, but typically do not hold accreditation or qualifications specifically oriented to the delivery of higher education. In considering the professional development of staff, the review team noted that those teaching on University of Derby programmes hold associate lecturer status with the University and are subject to peer observation of teaching organised by the University. The College proposes to strengthen its own scheme for teaching observation by the adoption of guidelines that are specific to higher education and that reference the Quality Code. Both awarding bodies organise staff development events which College staff may attend, and practitioner groups organised by the College are open to all staff involved in higher education delivery. In the course of 2012-13 and 2013-14, a total of 12 staff of the College attended at least one staff development event at the University of Derby.

2.26 Annual appraisal of individual staff includes consideration of individual development plans and opportunities for further training and professional development including scholarly activity. However, the College acknowledged a poor understanding on the part of some teaching staff of what scholarly activity in support of higher education entails, and some reluctance to undertake such activity despite the potential opportunities available in the College's Strategy for Scholarship in Higher Education. The review team heard examples of curriculum development being informed by activities such as conference attendance and field visits and noted that the College, recognising the scope for further development and with the intention of further supporting its scholarship strategy, has recently successfully bid as part of the Association of Colleges' Higher Education Scholarship Project. The College has been confirmed as a second-stage lead in recognition of the work done to date. The review team affirms the steps being taken to support staff development and scholarship at higher education level.

2.27 Overall, staff at all levels demonstrate a strong sense of their investment in, and commitment to, the delivery of effective learning and teaching to enable student achievement. Expectation B3 is met; recognising the work in progress to develop the College's scholarship strategy, the associated 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**

2.28 The higher education tutorial policy affirms that all students are entitled to support and guidance to enable their academic and vocational progress. The College provides a range of services and opportunities to support students and to enable them to develop their personal, academic and professional potential. Student induction takes place at School level and through the College's Hello to HE event, which introduces students to the services available. Each student has access to a personal tutor who is a member of the teaching staff, and with whom they can discuss and seek advice on their academic progress. Students also have access to a range of support services including study skills, careers and additional learner support.

2.29 Higher education students are based in a dedicated University Centre containing learning and social spaces. In addition, students use the College's learning resource centre to access books, DVDs, journals and more specialist electronic resources and software. The VLE provides access to information in support of students' learning. The College's services and systems provide a support framework which enables Expectation B4 to be met in theory.

2.30 To test the operation of these policies and services, the review team spoke with staff and students, and scrutinised relevant policies, external examiners' reports and annual monitoring data.

2.31 Students expressed positive views about the tutorial system and the accessibility of teaching staff, and confirmed that tutors are effective in supporting students with personal or academic problems. Some variability is evident between subjects in terms of the organisation of tutorial meetings but students did not identify any specific problems with access. Attendance at tutorial meetings is routinely checked and heads of Schools are responsible for monitoring the implementation of the higher education tutorial policy. Students identified as being at risk are discussed in course team meetings with a view to identifying any further desirable support. The tutorial policy ensures systematic and formal discussion of academic progress to help students develop their academic potential.

2.32 Students are encouraged to disclose any disabilities and, if necessary, to seek support from the College's Additional Learning Support (ALS) team. The ALS team makes arrangements for students to attend an assessment centre as necessary, and discusses individual cases with curriculum managers as appropriate. Reasonable adjustments to assessments and other support requirements are discussed and agreed with staff as part of an individual student's action plan. Students who had made use of the services of the ALS team confirmed that they found it to be very helpful and effective in making and communicating support arrangements that were suitable and timely.

2.33 Students have access to study skills sessions oriented specifically towards higher education. The Study Skills Coordinator meets all classes and students may self-refer or may attend sessions on the recommendation of a tutor. Workshop sessions are held covering a range of skills and a mathematics support project has recently been introduced. The review team heard that support is provided both for students experiencing difficulties with academic work and for those who wanted support to attain a higher level of achievement. The team also heard evidence of how library and career advisers build relationships with student groups: students expressed satisfaction with this level of support.

Learning advisers run workshops on accessing resources in liaison with teaching staff as required. Although some students expressed the view that the College's careers service is oriented more towards the needs of further education than of higher education students, students also acknowledged that the individualised support for career progression provided by the College is very helpful.

2.34 The extensive range of support services for higher education students, enabling students to develop personal, academic and professional potential is good practice.

2.35 The College's dedicated University Centre provides study and social space for higher education students. A study room provides access to PCs and wireless connectivity; students may borrow laptops from the Learning Resource Centre. The higher education reception and office for professional support staff is located in the University Centre and provides a valued first point of contact for help or assistance for students. Students expressed very positive views about the willingness of the Higher Education Team to offer individual support to students and about the value of dedicated higher education resources in supporting their learning and in developing a higher education ethos within the College. The dedicated resources to support a distinctive higher education learning environment are **good practice**.

2.36 The College's guidelines for teaching staff on the use of the VLE are intended to ensure that it provides items deemed to be essential including recommended reading lists and an assessment planner, as well as a link to the University Centre's VLE which includes online study skills materials. Students drew attention to a range of informal and formal means to provide feedback on resources and facilities and noted that the College is often willing, resource permitting, to respond to requests for specific learning resource items to be provided.

2.37 Overall, the review team found that there are effective resources and support to enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential and that the College appropriately monitors and evaluates resource provision. Expectation B4 is therefore 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 has developed a range of strategies to involve students in the management and enhancement of their educational experience and is committed to seeking the views of students; the student charter makes the importance of student feedback explicit.

2.39 The review team evaluated the effectiveness of the steps taken by the College to engage students as partners by meeting with students and staff, and reviewing evidence including the student charter, minutes of HEASC and the Corporation Board, as well as survey responses.

2.40 Students are informed about student engagement opportunities during induction as well as in the Complete HE package. These opportunities include Babble On! sessions, Track 10 and the Dare to be Different student conference, as well as Pulse surveys and the NSS survey. Students may also feed back about their educational experience to student representatives and/or student advocates. Students were positive about the range of opportunities available to express feedback and felt that their views and opinions were valued and listened to.

2.41 Student representation at College level takes place through the higher education student governor on the College's Corporation Board and a student advocate on the HEASC. Minutes from HEASC demonstrate that the student advocate was effective in expressing student views to the committee.

2.42 Course representatives are integral to programme committees and take part in quality management processes including annual monitoring, programme reviews, consideration of external examiners' reports and consideration of the outcomes of the range of student voice activities.

2.43 Students confirmed that they have opportunities to comment on programme development, for instance through involvement in the development of module content for the new Foundation Degree in Tourism and Event Management, and through consultation regarding planned changes to the Foundation Degree in Sports and Leisure.

2.44 To supplement the outcomes of the NSS, the College has introduced a Pulse Survey which mirrors the questions of the NSS, but targets first-year and top-up students who are not included in the NSS. The outcomes of the Pulse Survey, available earlier in the year than those of the NSS, inform the College's student conference, which in 2015 had a particular focus on areas with lower NSS scores and considered issues such as the development of a Higher Education Guild and alternatives to student surveys. Outcomes and actions following this conference are not yet fully developed.

2.45 The College's Babble On! sessions, organised regularly by the Higher Education Curriculum and Communications Officer, offer an informal approach based on dialogue for students to talk about positive aspects of their programme as well as areas for improvement. Students reported that they felt engaged by these sessions.

2.46 The College introduced its Track 10 scheme this year. Ten students from diverse programmes and modes of study were identified and invited to take part in five meetings with members of the Higher Education Team to discuss a range of themes. The aim of the Track

10 project is to gain more in-depth information from higher education students with different and diverse backgrounds. The College hopes that this will provide a more detailed view of the student journey to inform future development of services provided for students.

2.47 The College holds a number of internal surveys of its higher education student body each year, including the induction survey, module surveys and the end-of-year survey. Outcomes of these surveys are forwarded to course teams and school managers for action. The Higher Education Curriculum and Communications Officer distils the results into a report, prepared twice per term, along with other responses from Babble On! and Track 10 sessions, which is circulated to staff and students and discussed at HEASC. The report provides an effective means of recording the views of students about operational aspects of the College's provision and of identifying and monitoring actions for improvement arising from them.

2.48 The College employs students as student advocates with a remit to participate in outreach and extracurricular events, and to act as student representatives. Training is provided for all student representatives and advocates and regular mixer events are held to support communication with other student representatives.

2.49 Students confirmed that they feel fully engaged with their educational experience and that they have sufficient opportunity to feed back to the College about all aspects of their course. Through the formal representation system, and supported by student advocates, students play an effective part in a range of quality management processes. The College has effective systems for capturing and responding to student views. Additionally, students confirmed that they find members of staff to be readily available and willing to listen to and take note of their views on an informal basis. The range of ways in which students and staff engage to enhance the educational experience is **good practice**. Expectation B5 is met with a low level of risk.

**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**

2.50 The College's provision follows the assessment regulations of its awarding bodies. Students are made aware of the assessment requirements and academic regulations of their programme through programme handbooks and through The Complete HE Package given to each student. While working within the regulations of the awarding bodies, the College has a policy and procedure for the recognition of prior learning which has been used effectively by students.

2.51 The College's higher education Academic Handbook references the Quality Code, the FHEQ and the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark*. It provides guidance for staff on the purpose of assessment; its design; formative and summative assessment; marking and feedback; internal moderation; and external examining. New teaching staff work with a mentor and the Head of Higher Education and International to ensure that they are competent to assess at the relevant levels of the FHEQ. Learning consultants and academic staff with education experience who lead, develop and drive forward learning, teaching and assessment, work with other teachers, particularly those new to teaching at higher education level, to promote improvements in assessment practice.

2.52 Programme learning outcomes and assessment strategies are described in programme specifications and handbooks. Module learning outcomes and assessment strategies are described in module handbooks. Working within the regulations and procedures of its awarding bodies, the College has developed a standard approach to the production of assessment briefs which describe learning outcomes, assessment tasks and grading criteria. Assessment briefs are internally moderated and external examiners comment on their appropriateness. Students commented favourably on the College's approach to assessment, and on the use of real work scenarios and the opportunity to work at a professional level, particularly the live briefs used in assessment in the Creative and Digital Industries and Engineering.

2.53 The College operates marking and internal moderation processes in accordance with the requirements of its awarding bodies. The moderation events held by the University of Derby for its college partners are seen by College staff as an effective forum for sharing good practice and engaging with other practitioners in the sector.

2.54 Students receive written feedback within the guidelines set out by awarding bodies and confirmed that grading criteria are used in the awarding of marks and that feedback to students is constructive and developmental. The College has set out clear expectations regarding the use of formative assessment throughout a programme. Curriculum areas tailor the approach to formative assessment to best suit the students and the type of assessment instruments: for example, some areas provide formative feedback on draft versions of work, while other areas use different types of assessment instruments to help prepare students for final summative assessment tasks.

2.55 Students expressed very positive views about their experience of assessment and feedback. A survey of student representatives found that students perceived coursework to

become more academically challenging as they progressed through their programmes. The same survey indicated satisfaction with the relevance of assessment to module content and the clarity of grading criteria, although some students felt the use of plagiarism-detection software resulted in 'generic' comments and feedback. Students who responded to the survey as well as those who met the review team were positive about the usefulness and timeliness of written feedback.

2.56 The Higher Education Academic Handbook provides guidance to teaching staff on developing students' understanding of the purpose and process of assessment. The 2013 College Annual Planning Day provided an opportunity for teachers and assessors to review their assessment practice. Staff are supported to carry out their roles and responsibilities in respect of assessment through the link tutor with the relevant awarding body or the College's Higher Education and International Manager. For new programmes all assessments are second-marked and course teams can draw on expertise across other programmes: for example, the business modules in the Foundation Degree in Tourism and Events Management made use of the experience of tutors from the Business School. Two staff members were able to outline how access to external scholarship had positively impacted on their design of assessments for students.

2.57 A review of the classification of awards achieved by students shows that, while 15 per cent of those completing their programme in 2014 achieved the highest classification available, the proportion achieving this was lower in programmes involving Sports, in Children's and Young People's Services and in some Higher National programmes in Engineering. Staff have acknowledged comments from external examiners' reports indicating that redesign of some assessment instruments may improve opportunities for students to gain higher marks. The contextualisation of assessment instruments in other areas is also proving to help students achieve better marks, particularly in Engineering.

2.58 Procedures for managing cases of academic malpractice are implemented by the College in accordance with the regulations of its awarding bodies. Students are advised of the regulations in programme handbooks and The Complete HE Package. The College operates a process for managing claims for extenuating or mitigating circumstances in accordance with the regulations of its awarding bodies.

2.59 Subject assessment panels and progression and award bodies for Birmingham City University and Pearson programmes are held at the College with University representation. Boards for University of Derby awards are held at the University with College representation. External examiners attend assessment and award boards. Actions taken in response to examination board discussions are considered at the annual monitoring review meetings in December of each year. External examiners provide written endorsement of assessment processes including the management and outcomes of assessment boards. The outcomes of assessment boards are summarised and reported to the HEASC which uses them to consider cross-College themes for development.

2.60 The College has clear processes for assessment which are well understood across programme teams. Assessment methods are designed or approved by the awarding body to provide opportunities for students to demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes. Criteria and expectations for assessment are clearly presented to students and feedback is regarded by students as being helpful and timely. Cross-marking and moderation ensure that standards are being met and annual reviews using evidence from external examiners and student feedback provide evidence of appropriate assessment practices. Expectation B6 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

### **Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining**

#### **Findings**

2.61 The awarding bodies and Pearson appoint external examiners for each programme delivered by the College. The College provides an induction for new external examiners and is responsible for providing external examiners with the information, documentation and evidence they request. External examiners verify coursework assignments prior to release to students, moderate marked work and attend assessment boards. External examiner feedback is considered as part of the annual programme review, and external examiners' reports are made available to students at course committees and on the VLE. Formal responses to external examiner reports are made by course coordinators using a standard template. The use made of external examiners enables the College to meet Expectation B7.

2.62 To verify the use made by the College of its external examiners, the review team scrutinised selected external examiners' reports, minutes of relevant committees and held meetings with staff and students.

2.63 External examiners' reports provide evaluative comments on the quality and standards of programmes delivered by the College. Positive comments often relate to the good quality of teaching and feedback, pastoral care and excellent links with industry. Specific areas of favourable comment include the applied nature of the BA Business and Management programme and the effective integration of theory and practice on BA Education Studies. Issues raised include the need, accepted by the College, to encourage students' engagement with academic literature in order to enable the highest marks to be achieved.

2.64 The College considers external examiners' reports at School level through course committees attended by student representatives. There is a deliberative process whereby summary reports provided by Schools are considered at the HEASC to ensure institutional oversight. The Head of Higher Education and International ensures the wider dissemination across Schools of good practice or relevant cross-subject issues requiring attention. Teaching staff drew attention to examples of changes made in the light of external examiners' feedback including increased attention to improving students' drawing skills on the Interactive Media programmes and an exercise to review contextualisation of grading to support students to achieve higher grades.

2.65 Students have access through the VLE to external examiners' reports, which are also made available to student representatives at programme committee meetings. Student representatives expressed generally good awareness of this.

2.66 The College is making appropriate and scrupulous use of external examiners. Expectation B7 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

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

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

**Quality Code, Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review**

**Findings**

2.67 The College has a system of programme monitoring and review, which is aligned to the requirements of each awarding body. This process is clearly set out in the College's Higher Education Academic Handbook. The HEASC has oversight of the process and reports via the Deputy Principal to the Standards Committee. The process allows the Expectation to be met in theory.

2.68 Programme monitoring takes place at three points in the year, in December, March and at the end of the academic year in line with the College's awarding bodies. Teaching staff and students attend programme monitoring meetings, as do Heads of School and representatives of the Learning Resource Centre. Programme committee meetings held in December review the action plan from the previous monitoring cycle and consider the most recent end-of-year data on: student recruitment, retention and progression; external examiner reports and programme responses; module leader reports; student responses to module questionnaires; issues from the internal Student Perception Questionnaires and the NSS; issues raised by examination boards; and opportunities for quality enhancement. Action plans summarise matters for attention and designate actions, responsibility and target dates for completion. Programme committee meetings in March revisit the action plans to evaluate progress. Minutes of programme committee meetings show that they discharge their monitoring responsibilities appropriately and that while their focus is predominantly on quality there is also due attention to standards through consideration of student progression data and feedback from external examiners and assessment boards. The College makes effective use of student feedback for review purposes, and students commented that student representatives are involved in the course committees and the final annual review meeting.

2.69 The review team noted that employers are not routinely involved in the annual review of foundation degree programmes. Noting that the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark* includes an expectation in this respect, the review team **recommends** that the College fully involve employers in the annual review of foundation degree programmes.

2.70 The annual monitoring process results in the production of Higher Education School Summary Documents (SSDs), which provide commentary and evaluation relating to academic standards, quality of learning opportunities, enhancement and information. SSDs are received and monitored by the Head of Higher Education and International, and feed into the College's higher education self-evaluation document and action plan. School improvement plans are received and monitored by the Head of Higher Education and International, and are updated as part of the annual monitoring process.

2.71 The HEASC meets termly and is chaired by the Deputy Principal for Teaching and Learning. Its composition includes two Heads of School, a nominated student advocate, the Head of Higher Education and International, the Quality Manager and Director of Standards and Student Support. Its remit is to monitor, evaluate and assess risk in relation to: student recruitment, retention, progression and achievement; student engagement and feedback; issues raised by external examiners and assessment boards; and planned development and validations.

2.72 The annual higher education self-evaluation document is produced by the Head of Higher Education and International for consideration by the HEASC, whose minutes, along with the document, are received by the Standards Committee. While acknowledging that these committees discharge their responsibility with regard to oversight of academic standards for the College's higher education provision, the review team noted that the terms of reference of the Standards Committee do not clearly define the overseeing body for the self-evaluation of higher education.

2.73 The College participates in the periodic review and reapproval of its programmes by awarding bodies. Programme teams produce documentation that critically evaluates the continuing appropriateness of the curriculum and effectiveness of teaching, assessment and student support in the context of programme performance data. Periodic review panels meet with students and identify areas for improvement and features of good practice. Periodic review confers continuing approval of programmes subject to conditions and recommendations.

2.74 The College has systems to enable the oversight and regular review of the standards of provision within the College. Programme-level monitoring takes place annually, and periodic reviews take place in line with awarding body requirements. Student involvement in the reviews is appropriate and consistent. Noting the lack of involvement of employers in annual review and the lack of clarity in respect of responsibility for institutional oversight, the review team concludes that Expectation B8 is met, but that the 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**

2.75 The College's processes for making complaints about its provision and for making appeals against the outcomes of assessments are signposted to students in The Complete HE package and on the VLE. Additionally, students are able to seek advice from the Higher Education Team or the Student Support Team regarding these processes.

2.76 For most programmes the responsibility for dealing with complaints is shared by the College and the awarding body or the awarding organisation. However, for students on Higher National programmes or on programmes of Birmingham City University the primary responsibility for handling complaints lies with the College, although the awarding body or the awarding organisation would review any unresolved complaints. Complaints to the College are usually handled by the Head of Higher Education and International.

2.77 Academic appeals from students on the majority of programmes are directed to the awarding body. However, the primary responsibility for handling appeals on higher national programmes lies with the College, although Pearson would review any unresolved appeals.

2.78 Monitoring and evaluation of the complaints procedure is carried out by the Director for Communication, Marketing and Learner Engagement. Termly reports regarding complaints are produced for the Standards Committee. Complaints data is also reported in the annual school summary.

2.79 The College's complaints and appeals procedures are fair, accessible and timely. While students told the review team that they have ready access to staff who are very approachable and helpful with informally addressing issues relating to their studies, students confirmed that they are also aware of how to access procedures for complaints or appeals. Although there have been only three instances of complaint and no instances of an appeal on the part of higher education students of the College, its processes are sound and known by both staff and students. Expectation B9 is met with a low level of risk.

**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**

2.80 The College has responsibility for the effective management of its arrangements with employers and placement providers where learning takes place within the work environment and constitutes an integral aspect of the student's programme of study. Work-related learning contributes to the learning experience of many students and all foundation degree programmes include a component of work-related learning ranging from work experience and placements to more project-oriented work. Students are expected to take the initiative in finding a placement or work experience prior to School approval. Schools provide support including provision of staffing to allow visits to students while on work placements.

2.81 The review team examined documentary evidence including available module and placement handbooks and met senior managers, teaching staff, and professional support staff to discuss the way in which the College demonstrates awareness of its responsibilities for managing work-based learning opportunities.

2.82 Students are involved in a range of activities in the workplace including self-employment, employment and work placements, any of which may contribute towards the work-based learning component of foundation degree programmes. For the programmes in Children's and Young People's Services, a work placement handbook provides relevant information and documentation related to the practicalities of placements, as well as detailing the learning opportunities provided. The provision of similar handbooks in most other foundation degree programmes is less evident, and module templates and module handbooks similarly lack information on the organisation of work-based learning. The review team did not find evidence of College-wide expectations in terms of organisation and management of such learning opportunities at School level: the consequent inconsistencies between programmes contributed to the formation of the recommendation in Expectation A1 in respect of the alignment of provision with the *Foundation Degree Qualification Benchmark*.

2.83 Reviewers found a lack of awareness on the part of staff of the College of its responsibility for managing work-based learning, and noted some variability between schools in respect of arrangements for managing provision delivered in the workplace. The review team found that College-wide policy and procedures are lacking, and could not find evidence at College level of systematic monitoring and oversight of work-based learning or of appropriate safeguards to manage the risks of arrangements made for individual students. The team recommends that the College establish policy and implement procedures to secure effective management and oversight of the quality of learning opportunities in the workplace.

2.84 In view of the lack of consistent arrangements for oversight and management of work-based learning opportunities, the review team concludes that the Expectation is not met, and that the associated level of risk is moderate.

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

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

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

### **Findings**

2.85 This Expectation is not applicable because the College does not offer research degrees.

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

2.86 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All of the relevant Expectations for this judgement area have been met with the exception of Expectation B10. The associated level of risk was judged to be low except for Expectations B3, B8 and B10 for which the level of risk was judged to be moderate.

2.87 There are three features of good practice in this judgement area: the extensive range of support services enabling students to develop their personal, academic and professional potential; the dedicated resources to support a distinctive higher education learning environment; and the range of ways in which students and staff engage to enhance the educational experience.

2.88 The review team makes two recommendations in respect of the quality of student learning opportunities. The first relates to the full involvement of employers in the annual review of foundation degree programmes. The second follows from the lack of policy and practice to secure effective management and oversight of the quality of learning opportunities in the workplace.

2.89 The review team affirms the steps being taken by the College to support staff development and scholarship at the higher education level.

2.90 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 uses a variety of platforms to provide information to its intended audience, such as the prospectus and website for external audiences as well as the VLE and course handbooks for internal use. While ensuring a consistent and coherent image for all marketing materials, the College follows its awarding bodies' protocols regarding such materials, and consistently makes clear which awarding body offers each award. The College has a clear process for the preparation, approval and sign-off of all marketing materials.

3.2 The College's prospectus provides information about its higher education provision including details about programme content and structure, the application process and student finance information. The prospectus is approved by the awarding bodies prior to publication, while changes to the prospectus are agreed in consultation between the Higher Education Team, course coordinators, curriculum managers and the relevant awarding body prior to final sign-off by the Head of Higher Education and International.

3.3 The College's website has a specific higher education area titled Ready for HE? which contains information for prospective students, and links to the online application process and contact details for the Higher Education Team. Additionally, details of the College vision, mission, values and strategic objective are provided on the College website. The process for approval and sign-off of changes to the College website is the same as that for the prospectus, as described above.

3.4 In addition to its prospectus, the College provides a range of materials specifically for prospective students, including an Applicants Guide and Pocket Programme Specifications. Students confirmed that they had access to sufficient and helpful information prior to applying for admission.

3.5 Information for students is provided through the VLE and by means of handbooks at College, programme and module level. Students find the VLE to be a comprehensive and accessible source of information, particularly citing the timely availability of teaching materials after each class. Students regard handbooks as being helpful sources of information, and welcome their availability in hardcopy as well as electronically.

3.6 Awarding bodies are responsible for issuing transcripts of achievements and award certificates, which are received and checked by the Higher Education and International Coordinator. Graduates who do not attend the graduation ceremony receive their transcripts/certificates by post.

3.7 While students who do not complete their programme of study may be awarded a 'fall-back' award such as a Certificate of Higher Education, the review team noted that the College does not make the existence of such awards known to students prior to admission.

3.8 Students confirmed that information received prior to application and induction was helpful and clear and that information provided during study, on the VLE and otherwise, is

accessible and useful. The College provides information that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy. The Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

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

3.9 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The College effectively manages its responsibilities for the production of information for its various audiences. The Expectation for this judgement area is met and the associated level of risk low.

3.10 The College consistently provides accessible and clear information about its higher education provision, and has developed systems and procedures for designing and publishing information, leading to the availability of paper-based and electronic information for current and future students. The review team recognises this information as being clear and appropriate.

3.11 The review team therefore concludes that the quality of the information produced 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's commitment to enhancement is captured in its single strategic objective: 'To be an Outstanding College'. The College has embraced higher education within this commitment via its Higher Education Strategy and the Higher Education Action Plan which informs improvement plans at course and School level.

4.2 Although the College does not have a formal enhancement strategy, the review team was able to identify the College's enhancement approach in meetings with academic staff and students who described how the College's committee structure, staff development and support for the learning environment comprised deliberate steps to improve the quality of learning opportunities. This allowed the review team to conclude that the College has a set of strategic aims and policies that allow the Expectation to be met in theory.

4.3 The College intends to expand its University Centre to strengthen the focus on its higher education activity. The expanded centre, planned to open in September 2016, is regarded by the College as being integral to its strategic commitment to growth in its higher education provision.

4.4 Guidelines for teaching and learning observations of higher education integrate the Expectations of the Quality Code with existing College guidance and focus on enhancement. The system for higher education teaching observation provides opportunities to enhance individual practice and share good practice more widely within the College. Observers have relevant experience of higher education teaching including external learning and teaching experts. A conference for higher education staff is held annually with enhancement-focused themes that align directly with the Quality Code. Conference themes have included good practice carousels, scholarship, employability and assessment. There are also opportunities offered by the awarding bodies. Opportunities for staff to meet are now available through the monitoring meetings, the practitioner groups and staff development activities specific to higher education.

4.5 The College is active in seeking external partners and funding to support future improvements in the quality of learning opportunities. For instance, it has secured funding from the National Union of Students for a joint project with New College Nottingham on making use of NSS outcomes with students, from the Higher Education Funding Council for England via the Sigma Project for the development of mathematics support, and from the Association of Colleges' Scholarship Project for which it is a second-stage lead College. It also participates in a North East Midlands Collaborative Outreach Network project on outreach work which is led by the University of Derby and funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England.

4.6 The College's pursuit of its strategic objective is evident in a range of initiatives and actions which contribute to the formation of an ethos in its Higher Education Team that expects and encourages the enhancement of learning opportunities. This ethos would be strengthened by a clearer articulation from senior managers of the College's strategy for enhancement. While the review team has seen evidence to show that the College's enhancement approach is effective, it recommends that the College articulate and fully implement its strategic approach to enhancement of higher education provision.

4.7 The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is moderate.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Moderate**

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

4.8 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The single Expectation in this judgement area is met, with a moderate level of risk.

4.9 The team found that the College has an approach to enhancement that is effective in forming an ethos in which the enhancement of learning opportunities is expected and encouraged. However, this ethos would be strengthened by a clearer articulation from senior managers of the College's strategy for enhancement. This led the team to the single recommendation that the College should articulate and fully implement its strategic approach to enhancement of higher education provision.

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

## 5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

### Findings

- 5.1 The College takes active steps to involve students in the quality assurance and enhancement of their learning opportunities and provides a wide variety of platforms for student engagement.
- 5.2 Students have the opportunity to complete a variety of survey-based opportunities to express views about their provision, including module evaluation surveys, the Pulse Survey and the NSS. The outcomes of these surveys contribute to programme monitoring and evaluation, and are discussed at course committee meetings. The regular reports of the outcomes of these surveys provide an effective means of recording the views of students about operational aspects of the College's provision and of identifying and monitoring actions for improvement arising from them.
- 5.3 Students are represented in deliberative committees at a range of levels in the College, including programme committees, the Higher Education Standards Committee and the Corporation Board. Student representatives are suitably briefed for their role and play an active part particularly in programme monitoring through membership of programme committees. There is a good level of awareness of the student representative system on the part of the student body as a whole.
- 5.4 The College offers students opportunities to comment on programme development, for instance through involvement in the development of new module content for foundation degrees and through consultation regarding planned changes to foundation degrees.
- 5.5 The College's Babble On! and Track 10 sessions, which comprise innovative informal occasions where students can air issues or opinions regarding their educational experience, are actively used by the College to inform improvements to its provision.
- 5.6 Academic staff are enthusiastic and committed to student involvement at programme level, and have built a strong academic and pastoral relationship with students. Students find staff to be approachable, and informal dialogue is seen as a valuable tool for quality enhancement by both staff and students.
- 5.7 Overall, the College has a solid foundation for the involvement of students in quality assurance and enhancement. It values the student voice to inform improvements to provision, and offers an effective range of formal and informal opportunities for this voice to be heard.

## 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 29 to 32 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](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.

### Blended learning

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

### Credit(s)

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

### Degree-awarding body

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

### Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

### Dual award or double award

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

### e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning

### **Enhancement**

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

### **Expectations**

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

### **Flexible and distributed learning**

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

See also **distance learning**.

### **Framework**

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

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

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

### **Good practice**

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

### **Learning opportunities**

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

### **Learning outcomes**

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

### **Multiple awards**

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

### **Operational definition**

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

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

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

### **Programme specifications**

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

### **Public information**

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

### **Quality Code**

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

### **Reference points**

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

### **Subject Benchmark Statement**

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

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

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

### **Threshold academic standard**

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

### **Virtual learning environment (VLE)**

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

### **Widening participation**

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

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