



Higher Education Review of Bedford College

January 2016

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About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at Bedford College. The review took place from 12 to 14 January 2016 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Eric Macintyre
- Ms Penny Renwick
- Mr Scott Thomas (student reviewer).

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

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

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

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. [Explanations of the findings](#) are found on page 5 with numbered paragraphs starting on page 6.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Key findings

QAA's judgements about Bedford College

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

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

Good practice

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

- The strategic and market-led approach to the development of the provision to meet the needs of local employers and students (Expectation B1).
- The wide range of opportunities to work with employers to enhance student learning (Expectation B4).

Recommendations

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

By September 2016:

- provide students with timely and full information on their progress on individual units for all Higher National courses (Expectations B6 and A3.2)
- ensure systematic oversight and governance of the annual monitoring process for Pearson provision to provide clarity and effectiveness (Expectations B8 and A3.3)
- ensure that published information on Higher National courses is revised to reflect accurately details about work-related learning (Expectations C and B10).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The steps taken to build upon the Engaged Student Learning Strategic Enhancement Programme to develop further student engagement as partners (Expectation B5).
- The actions taken to improve the clarity and differentiation of assessment criteria (Expectation B6).

Theme: Student Employability

The College has a strategic focus on employability which is highlighted in the College Strategy for Working with Employers. The College has developed strong links with local employers which have contributed to embedding employability skills and opportunities in much of the College's higher education provision. Opportunities for students include work experience, work placements and live briefs and there are higher apprenticeship schemes

available to College students with local employers. The College recently commissioned a research report which touched on how employability informs student decision making when it comes to choosing courses.

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

About Bedford College

Bedford College, founded in 1969, is currently the largest provider of further education in Bedfordshire and is situated in the centre of Bedford town although it has sites in Luton, Kempston and Old Warden. In 2009 it acquired Shuttleworth College, a small land-based College which delivers some of its higher education provision. In 2014 the Secretary of State asked the College to sponsor the Central Bedfordshire University Technical College. The College has around 15,000 students with 746 of these enrolled onto higher education programmes.

The College's mission is to support the local and national economy through the promotion, development and delivery of excellent skills training and education. The College promotes itself as a genuine alternative to university through its higher education programmes and seeks to promote social inclusion and personal advancement in the local communities. The College purports to have strong links and relationships with local employers and is actively involved with the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership (SEMLEP). The Principal of the College established an area-wide further education partnership which feeds into the board of SEMLEP.

Bedford College's Draft Strategic Plan 2017: Excellence as Standard outlines how the College intends to achieve excellence in its: leadership, curriculum, teaching, learning and curriculum, services and management and its position in relation to the College's aspirational vision, mission, aims and values.

The College Strategic Plan is informed by market intelligence ensuring curriculum development priorities aligned with the needs of the local community and regional employment opportunities. Within the College's aims to be recognised as a leading advocate for learning within the local community with strong and productive links with partners, the College ensures a consistent and coherent approach to its higher education strategic objectives through working closely with its university partners, Pearson and more recently with a specialist performing arts college.

The College underwent a QAA Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review in 2011 with a confidence judgement. Since then it has established an additional partnership with an awarding body in line with its strategic direction to increase higher education provision. The College delivers programmes on behalf of Pearson and the University of Bedfordshire, with whom it has had a successful relationship since 1994, and will deliver programmes on behalf of the University of Northampton from September 2016.

The College has addressed the recommendations from the last review and has continued to build on the areas of good practice. Developments arising from the recommendations include the implementation of revised quality processes, the availability of external examiner reports to students, the appointment of new roles specific to higher education, and providing dedicated study and common room space for higher education students.

Explanation of the findings about Bedford 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 (FHEQ)* are met by:

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

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

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

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

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

Findings

1.1 The College operates under the remit of Pearson for Higher National awards and the University of Bedfordshire and the University of Northampton for the validation of its foundation degrees and Level 6 provision. Agreements are in place to cover the management of these courses at the College.

1.2 The College has made some minor amendments to module content in awards validated by the two awarding bodies, an example being in FdSc Animal Management, and these are carried out by a clear process and liaison with the link staff at the awarding bodies.

1.3 The College has entered into an agreement with Stella Mann College for this institution to deliver a Higher National Certificate and Higher National Diploma on its site. This partnership is fully discussed under Expectation B10 in this report.

1.4 The agreements in place and the adherence of the College to the processes of the awarding bodies and awarding organisation would allow the Expectation to be met, and ensure that awards are correctly positioned at the relevant FHEQ level and aligned with Subject Benchmark Statements.

1.5 The review team tested the effectiveness of the arrangements and resources through the examination of the documentation presented, such as validation reports, course

documentation and external examiner reports, and in requests for further clarification in advance of the visit. The review team also met College staff and staff from the awarding bodies.

1.6 The process of programme selection is clear and robust from initial ideas and discussion right through to final approval for an award to be offered. Link staff from the validating awarding bodies are involved at all stages of the process and this communication process is valued by staff from both the College and the partners. All of the documentation reviewed included full reference to Subject Benchmark Statements and staff demonstrated their awareness of these in meetings. Applications to offer Higher National awards are submitted to the awarding organisation in a standard format following internal approval processes in the College.

1.7 Through the College's adherence to the policies and procedures of the awarding bodies and the awarding organisation, the review team concludes that this Expectation is met and the risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.8 The College is required to adhere to the academic framework and regulations of the University of Bedfordshire and the University of Northampton for awards validated by those universities. For Higher National programmes, the College is required to adhere to the Pearson frameworks and regulations. The College has its own quality processes for the management and annual review of its provision which includes annual monitoring processes that are applicable to all higher education programmes delivered. Academic regulations are made available to staff and students through course handbooks and the virtual learning environment (VLE).

1.9 The design and operation of the awarding bodies' and awarding organisation's academic regulations and the adherence of the College in following those regulations would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.10 The review team tested the effectiveness of the arrangements and resources through the examination of the documentation presented, a survey of the College VLE and discussions with staff and students. The meetings involved staff from the awarding bodies.

1.11 Examination boards are convened for both the validated and licensed provision under the remit of the awarding bodies. The College operates a cycle of end-of-year boards for its Pearson programmes. Students confirmed that they had been briefed on the academic regulations for all their awards and were clear on how these operated.

1.12 External examiners appointed by the awarding bodies and Pearson external examiners comment on all aspects under this Expectation and any recommendations made by them are fully addressed and actioned, as required, through the course team and whole College annual review and monitoring processes.

1.13 The College complies with the regulations and frameworks of its awarding bodies and awarding organisation, supported by its own internal processes. Therefore, the review team concludes that the College is effective in securing academic standards for all higher education awards and that the Expectation is met with low risk.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.14 The College maintains definitive records for all its higher education programmes with each course having its own programme specification. These programme specifications are approved by the respective awarding body. Programme specifications are made available to students through the College's VLE and occasionally in printed form. Programme learning outcomes can be found in assignment briefs and are mapped against modules. Minor changes can be made to the provision validated by the awarding bodies using their procedures. Changes are also subject to the College process which involves discussion at course team meetings. All students are provided with a certificate upon completion of their course and this is done at the College award ceremonies each year.

1.15 The evidence submitted to the review team, including the course handbooks and assignment briefs, would allow this Expectation to be met.

1.16 The review team examined the effectiveness of maintaining definitive records for programmes of study through examining course handbooks, assignment briefs and the Higher Education Quality Processes document. The review team also met students, student representatives, teaching and senior staff.

1.17 In practice, both students and staff are clear on what is expected of them from the information provided in course handbooks, programme specifications and assignment briefs. Staff are aware of the requirements from the awarding bodies and awarding organisation. Programme specifications in courses awarded under Pearson appear to be copied directly from Pearson documentation without any attempt to contextualise the learning to the relevant subject area. This practice has led to a recommendation in Expectation B6. Apart from this concern, students were satisfied with the definitive records that were provided to them and were clear on how to access these.

1.18 The College adheres to the requirements to maintain definitive records of each programme of study on behalf of its awarding bodies and organisation. Staff are clear about their responsibilities in providing accurate programme documentation to students, and students were satisfied with the quality of the documentation. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

1.19 The College has been approved by its awarding bodies through institutional approval to deliver the programmes considered within this review. There was a reapproval of the institutional partnership with the University of Bedfordshire for a period of five years in 2014. The degree-awarding bodies and awarding organisation have procedures in place for programme approval and are responsible for confirming that programmes meet the qualification descriptors and threshold standards in the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements. The Higher Education Steering Group provides oversight of the approval of new courses. For the Higher National awards the College has a Higher Education Code of Practice for HN Approval that references the Quality Code and works to a Higher Education Quality Processes document. These are designed to ensure alignment with UK threshold standards. Major modifications for the University of Bedfordshire provision are managed through reapproval events. The College uses awarding body protocols for the management of minor modifications.

1.20 The responsibilities of the College in maintaining academic standards are set out in responsibilities checklists. These processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.21 In considering this Expectation, the review team examined course approval documentation and associated guidance for its completion, together with sample reports of course approvals and modifications, and committee minutes. The team discussed the course approval process and supporting guidance with senior and academic staff.

1.22 The Higher Education Steering Group, reporting to the College Executive, considers the market and viability of new programme proposals and maintains oversight of course approvals with each awarding body. Curriculum documentation provides details of course structure including learning outcomes and assessment and is mapped to Subject Benchmark Statements and Sector Skills Council standards. Agreement has been reached with the University of Northampton for a BSc Engineering, which has been approved but has not yet recruited.

1.23 The Higher Education Code of Practice for HN Approval sets out the processes that must be adopted in relation to the approval of new Higher National programmes. The Code also enables the College to meet its responsibilities in the governance of their standards, ensuring the course is designed to enable students to meet the intended learning outcomes and in the meeting of external reference points. There is provision for the involvement of external panel members. The awarding organisation confirms that new programmes meet their requirements through the Pearson Vocational Qualification Approval Form. Approval of Pearson provision is documented and confirmed by Pearson.

1.24 The College is effectively fulfilling its responsibilities for programme approval to ensure that learning outcomes are aligned with qualification descriptors and its qualifications are allocated to the appropriate level of the FHEQ. The College works closely with its

awarding partners and contributes effectively to the approval process. Therefore, the team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

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

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

Findings

1.25 The College operates within the assessment regulations of the awarding bodies. The responsibilities of the College and awarding bodies are set out in responsibilities checklists. For Pearson programmes, the College uses the BTEC Centre Guide for Assessment and Standards Verification and for the University of Bedfordshire provision their Quality Handbook, as central reference points. The awarding bodies define the credit required for progression and award at each level. Module learning hours are aligned with credit, with module learning outcomes mapped against assessment. For University of Bedfordshire provision, programme learning outcomes are mapped against modules and documented in programme specifications (course information forms). University of Bedfordshire approval and review processes ensure the contribution of individual modules to the programme and verify the alignment of learning outcomes with internal and external points of reference. Assessment is designed to ensure that learners have the opportunity to demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes. When assessments are conducted these are subject to internal verification and ultimately to scrutiny by external examiners. The College holds examination boards for Pearson courses and the University of Bedfordshire convenes examination boards for their programmes.

1.26 These processes and procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.27 The review team tested the systems in place by considering the requirements set out by the awarding bodies, the University of Bedfordshire Partnership Procedures Manual, approval documentation, programme specifications, module descriptors, course and unit handbooks and assignment briefs. In addition, the team met academic staff during the review to explore their approach to assuring academic standards and discussed assessment with a range of students.

1.28 Within its Quality Handbook and Regulations, the University of Bedfordshire identifies the key purpose of assessment as to objectively measure a student's achievements against the intended learning outcomes of the unit and course, and assessment tasks are designed to test the achievement of stated learning outcomes at an appropriate level. All programmes are required to provide opportunities for all the intended learning outcomes for the course to be achieved and assessed.

1.29 Assessment design is approved through internal verification and involves the University's link tutor or the Pearson lead internal verifier to ensure they enable the learners to meet the learning outcomes. External examiners are explicitly required to state whether the assessment design enables the intended learning outcomes to be met. Students agreed that a diverse range of assessment opportunities enable them to achieve the learning outcomes.

1.30 The awarding bodies have appropriate measures in place to ensure that the awards are granted only when the achievement of the learning outcomes has been assessed as meeting the UK threshold standards. Internal moderation/verification is thorough and there is clear evidence of the internal verification processes operating effectively. External examiners report satisfaction with the internal moderation processes, though one suggests that this could be more clearly evidenced.

1.31 The University of Bedfordshire Course Information Forms (CIF) identify the FHEQ levels and relevant external benchmarks, and they specify course learning outcomes but only at the award level. Of the sample provided, the CIF for IT Networking and Security also mapped unit assessments to the course learning outcomes. In addition, their provision maps module learning outcomes against assessments within module descriptors. For Pearson provision, this detailed mapping takes place in assignment briefs. Course learning outcomes are not provided for students in course handbooks.

1.32 Assignment briefs refer to the intended learning outcomes for the units, and for the Pearson provision the learning outcomes being tested in a particular assignment are made clear. For the Pearson provision, students are also given information on what is required to achieve pass, merit and distinction but these are not always clear to students and the differentiation of assessment criteria is subject to an affirmation in Expectation B6. The achievement of academic standards is confirmed in reports by external examiners.

1.33 Higher education course team meetings provide a forum for the discussion of assessment-related matters and there is clear evidence of training in assessment and in internal verification for Pearson provision.

1.34 As well as consistently following the awarding bodies' guidelines for assessment, the College has clear and well-understood assessment procedures, allowing students the opportunity to demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes, which is confirmed by external examiners. Therefore, the team concludes that the Expectation 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

1.35 The College has collaborative agreements with its awarding bodies which define the responsibilities of both parties for monitoring and review. The responsibility for the overall monitoring and review of awards lies with awarding bodies. The University of Bedfordshire Partnership Procedures Manual provides guidance on the monitoring procedures which is supplemented by their comprehensive quality handbook. The awarding bodies require external expertise to advise on whether the provision remains aligned with external reference points. Oversight of monitoring and review at the College is provided through higher education course team meetings within the higher education quality processes under the remit of the HE Course Review Policy and the periodic review process for Pearson provision.

1.36 These monitoring and review processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.37 In its review of the evidence, the review team explored annual monitoring and periodic review processes through consideration of guidance documentation, monitoring and review reports, minutes of relevant committees, and discussions with senior and academic staff and student representatives.

1.38 The College participates in the periodic review processes for the University of Bedfordshire provision and the documentation provides assurance that academic standards are secure. Employers and external panel members serve on periodic review panels. Periodic reviews are considered through the University of Bedfordshire committee structures, where there is evidence of Bedford College student and staff involvement. The College's periodic review process for the awarding organisation provision uses the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements as reference points. The first Pearson periodic reviews took place shortly before this review and attention was given to the maintenance of academic standards and the meeting of external reference points. Periodic reviews are considered at the Higher Education Steering Group meeting. An evaluation of the first periodic review in Engineering identified the need to strengthen attention given to the FHEQ. The process makes provision for the inclusion of externals and students as members of periodic review panels.

1.39 Annual monitoring of University of Bedfordshire provision operates under their procedures. Unit leaders complete unit enhancement plans that include reflection on external examiner reports, academic standards attained and proposed enhancements. Detailed course review reports are produced including reflection on standards achieved and feedback from external examiners and students. Some student representatives confirmed that they had attended meetings at the University of Bedfordshire to discuss course reviews. For Pearson provision, comprehensive course reviews are written and these include reflection on external examiner and student feedback. The processes for the consideration of the awarding organisation course reviews are overly complex and lack sufficient governance and oversight. This is subject to a recommendation under Expectation B8.

1.40 External examiners affirm that standards are being maintained in all programmes and that they are aligned to the FHEQ and external reference points.

1.41 The College complies with and understands the University of Bedfordshire mechanisms for regular programme monitoring and periodic review, which are used to secure and maintain academic standards. For Pearson provision there is an effective periodic review process in place. Although there are weaknesses in the oversight of the Pearson annual monitoring processes, external examiners confirm that academic standards continue to be met. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

Expectation (A3.4): 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

1.42 Ultimate responsibility for using externality in setting academic standards for degree-level programmes lies with the awarding bodies, and with Pearson for Higher National provision.

1.43 The academic procedures of the awarding bodies require the use of external expertise in setting academic standards. Programmes delivered by the College are subject to this process in the development, design and review of programmes.

1.44 The College is currently reviewing its future strategic priorities and has undertaken some relevant research. This has followed on from consultation with employers, the Local LEP and sector skills bodies, thereby ensuring that College course proposals have been tested against independent, external frameworks and priorities. Employer involvement in course planning and review is seen as central to future planning of provision.

1.45 The views of external examiners are summarised in the higher education self-assessment report (SAR) and the resultant higher education quality improvement action plan.

1.46 The processes, mechanisms and future plans the College has in place to engage with external experts would enable this Expectation to be met.

1.47 The review team tested the effectiveness of the arrangements for this Expectation through the examination of the documentation presented, such as new course proposals and validation documentation, and meetings with staff, employers and staff from the validating awarding bodies.

1.48 The College operates an internal approval process when new course proposals are being considered. The initial idea is generated at course team level and is considered at the Higher Education Steering Group before final approval by the College's senior management. The documentation does not clarify the role of external stakeholders in this process, but during the review the team was presented with evidence of how employers contribute to course developments, particularly on higher apprenticeship schemes. It was confirmed that employers were involved in the validation event of the Foundation Degree in Animal Management. When new course proposals are being considered or module amendments proposed, which is done internally at the College Higher Education Steering Group, the staff from the validating awarding body become involved at an early stage and this collaboration ensures that all such proposals meet threshold academic standards.

1.49 The College summarises the findings from external examiner reports as another means of gathering an external viewpoint and ensuring the currency and quality of the awards being offered.

1.50 The College makes satisfactory use of relevant external experts at key stages of maintaining academic standards, although many of the current processes are largely informal. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Low

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

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

1.52 All of the applicable Expectations in this area have been met and the risk is judged to be low in each case. There are no features of good practice or recommendations in this area.

1.53 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, Development and Approval

Findings

2.1 Programme approval is the responsibility of the awarding bodies. Through its Higher Education Strategic Plan, the College seeks to provide a flexible, accessible and responsive programme offer that meets the needs and expectations of students and supports local economic regeneration. The Higher Education Quality Standards Approval of New Programmes process ensures alignment of new course proposals with the College's Strategic Plan and acquired market information. Industry practitioners, clients and employers have input into course design.

2.2 The establishment of these systems and procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.3 The team reviewed the effectiveness of these practices and procedures by examining documentation including partnership agreements and terms of reference of key committees and validation reports. The team also explored the programme approval process and supporting guidance through discussions with academic managers, employers and staff.

2.4 The College Higher Education Strategy clearly sets out its overall mission and vision in relation to higher education. The College takes a strategic approach to the development of new provision as demonstrated by the role of the Principal in establishing the FUSE group for the LEP. The College has commissioned research to better understand the needs of its learners for higher education awards and this has recently been presented to the College Executive. In determining whether to take forward a new programme for approval, the College undertakes a detailed and thorough market evaluation. A recent example in agriculture included a customer analysis, market share analysis and labour market information provided by the College Sales and Marketing Department, together with UCAS data and relevant sector skills and government publications. This detailed work has enabled the College to take a proposal for a new programme in agriculture forward for approval with the University of Bedfordshire in the spring term of 2016. The review team regards the strategic and market-led approach to the development of the provision to meet the needs of local employers and students as **good practice**.

2.5 The Higher Education Steering Group, reporting to the College Executive, maintains oversight of course approvals with the different awarding bodies. Local oversight of preparation for course approvals is provided at higher education course team meetings. The College's Curriculum Department is responsible for the submission of approval documentation to the awarding body. College staff participate as course team members in the approval of University of Bedfordshire programmes. Bedford College is responsible for ensuring that staff teaching University of Bedfordshire courses are aware of their published policies for course approval, together with external benchmarks such as the FHEQ, and this is supported by link tutors.

2.6 The College operates a Higher Education Code of Practice for Higher National awards. The College approved a Higher National Diploma in Specialist Makeup in which it produced detailed documentation including a programme specification, staff curricula vitae, a student handbook and support for work experience opportunities from a local employer. The report of the approval event gives attention to external reference points. Employers the review team met during the review would welcome the opportunity to have more involvement in course approval.

2.7 The College takes a strategic approach to the development of new courses to support the development of the local economy and the aspirations of its learners that the review team has identified as good practice. The College works effectively with the awarding bodies to discharge its responsibilities for the design, development and approval of courses. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.8 The College has an Admissions Policy and associated procedures in place, supported by a dedicated Higher Education Admissions administrator to support applicants through any stage of the process. This is all overseen by the Director of Student Services. In turn, admissions data is provided to the Higher Education Steering Group. Most applicants come through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, but a small number apply directly to the College. Those applicants who are successful are invited to an applicant day. Applicants who apply late or through clearing are supported by College staff. Those applicants who are unsuccessful are given further support through information about alternative provision. In addition to this the College works with its awarding bodies, principally the University of Bedfordshire, to put on admissions events that aim to widen participation. Finally, the College is accredited against the matrix Standard for information, advice and guidance, being first accredited in 2004 and reaccredited in 2013.

2.9 The evidence submitted to the review team, including the Admissions Policy and the provision of a specialist Higher Education Admissions administrator, would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.10 The review team examined the effectiveness of the recruitment, selection and admissions policies and procedures through analysis of documentation including the Admissions Policy and admissions letters, and by analysing the information made available to applicants and prospective students. It also held meetings with students, teaching and professional staff including those responsible for admissions.

2.11 The review team found that the policies and procedures for recruitment, selection and admission work effectively in practice. As most of the students apply to the College through UCAS, staff are clear on the requirements that are set out and have taken the opportunity to take relevant courses run by UCAS. Students are clear about the admissions process both with the support received from staff and the information available to them throughout the process. Students did not present any complaints or issues with the admissions process or procedures, and there are no complaints recorded against admissions decisions. In addition to this the admissions team gather feedback from students to monitor the processes they have in place.

2.12 The College adheres to the principles of fair admissions and has appropriate systems in place to ensure an effective admission experience for students from application to offer. Staff are clear about their responsibilities and provide additional support if required. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching*

Findings

2.13 The Teaching and Learning Policy is aligned with the strategic aims of the College. Annex 1 of the policy is specific to higher education teaching. Staff are encouraged to take part in industrial and other updating professional activities and there is a process for recording scholarly activity. All teaching staff are observed and formally graded each year by a member of the cross-College observation team.

2.14 The policies, procedures and mechanisms in place provide a basis for effective learning and teaching, which would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.15 The review team tested the effectiveness of the arrangements through examination of the documentation presented such as teaching and learning strategies, observation records, external examiner reports and validation reports, an audit of the VLE site and discussions with staff and students.

2.16 All new teaching staff are assigned a mentor who is an advanced practitioner. A new initiative, Higher Education Walkthroughs, has been launched with a specific remit to improve the quality of learning and teaching on all higher education courses. Peer observations are conducted and the project leader visits curriculum areas to observe all aspects of teaching and learning on both a formal and informal basis. The lessons from the project will be evaluated as they emerge and discussed at the Higher Education Steering Group.

2.17 All staff are observed annually by a member of the cross-College observation team and this is graded. This process uses Ofsted criteria, but consideration is taken to ensure that higher education teaching factors, for example the subject knowledge of staff and student self-reflection on learning, are deliberated. The College places much emphasis on the subject knowledge of staff and a research network has been set up which is attended by teaching staff from all curriculum areas and where ideas and good practice are shared. At the time of the review visit around 49 per cent of staff teaching higher education courses have or are currently studying for higher awards, many with College support. The College is an active member of the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and staff are encouraged to participate in its activities. Staff value these opportunities to enhance their subject knowledge and teaching practices. There is a process for recording scholarly activity by teaching staff.

2.18 Student focus groups are held regularly to monitor the quality of teaching. Students confirmed that this was a robust process and overall they were highly satisfied with the quality of teaching on offer. The latest National Student Survey scores are high in relation to teaching and learning.

2.19 The University of Bedfordshire offers staff development opportunities and the College also stages many staff development events for its higher education staff. These include weekly Golden Hours where staff across the College can share information and internal development, an annual three-day staff conference and internal College opportunities for staff to gain additional relevant awards such as Teaching Mathematics

(Numeracy CPD) in the Lifelong Learning Sector Level 5 University Certificate, Teaching English (Literacy CPD) in the Lifelong Learning Sector Level 5 University Certificate and CPD in Teaching Learners with Additional Needs Level 5 University Certificate. All possible opportunities are taken in meetings, staff development activities and review sessions to share good practice in teaching and learning across programme areas. Staff development is actively considered at the Governing Body Quality, Standards and Achievement Committee.

2.20 The College has effective mechanisms and oversight in place to ensure that the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices are appropriate for the level of students on its higher education programmes. Teachers are appropriately qualified, are observed, and have opportunities for staff development and sharing good practice. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement

Findings

2.21 The College provides students with a variety of higher education resources, learning spaces and services to support their learning including the library resource centre and a range of online learning resources housed on two virtual learning platforms, one belonging to the College and the other hosted by the University of Bedfordshire. Students also have access to resources provided by the University of Bedfordshire.

2.22 All students have a named course manager and tutor to monitor their overall progress.

2.23 Induction activities for higher education students are held at both the College and the validating awarding bodies. Transition and other activities are held to facilitate such aspects as progression from Level 3 to Level 4 study at the College.

2.24 Students have access to specialist equipment such as laboratories, sports testing equipment, libraries and media equipment, either directly from the College or through relationships with local universities or industry. The resources and other student services are annually reviewed through College processes.

2.25 The availability of resources and support mechanisms for students would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.26 The review team tested the effectiveness of the arrangements and resources through examination of the documentation presented such as resource bids, external examiner and validation reports, course annual monitoring reports, the results of student surveys, a demonstration of the College VLE and discussions with teaching and support staff, students and employers.

2.27 The College operates a robust system for support and teaching teams to bid for resources for teaching, learning and student support. The process begins where requests are generated at course team level before being incorporated into whole school bids which are then considered by senior management for final approval. Staff confirmed that both the process and the outcomes were clear and fair within the overall budgeting process of the College. Recent examples of successful bids were the library resource centre upgrade and the creation of the Games and Multi-Media Design Studio.

2.28 The review team found that students are generally satisfied with both the academic and tutorial support available to them. They specifically valued the support from their tutors with current and recent industrial and vocational experience. Students spoke favourably of the specialist facilities available which, along with good teaching, industry contacts, live briefs and work-related activities and experience, enable them to develop their academic and professional skills. This was also the case for employed students and higher-level apprentices studying part-time at the College. Therefore, the review team considers the wide range of opportunities to work with employers to enhance student learning to be **good practice**.

2.29 The College operates two VLEs to which teaching and learning resources are uploaded; one run by the College and 'BREQ' run by the University of Bedfordshire.

Students were satisfied with the availability, range and quality of the resources housed on these platforms and the range of resources available through validating awarding bodies.

2.30 The content of the various online sites is ultimately the responsibility of Heads of Department. Teaching staff work with IT support staff on training sessions for online resources and audits are carried out on the range and effectiveness of resources housed on teaching team pages.

2.31 The College has in place, monitors and evaluates a wide range of resources, support services and opportunities for students to develop their potential. The review team identified good practice in the opportunities available to students to work with employers. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student Engagement

Findings

2.32 The College has a number of formal ways in which students can become involved as partners in the enhancement of their educational experience. Students can volunteer to be a student governor, although there is no requirement for the student governor to be a higher education student. This is a role that is available to all students, at all stages of the College's provision. Student engagement is referred to at induction by the Director Student Services, the Higher Education Student Handbook and in some induction programmes on courses. At course level student representatives attend higher education student representative meetings and a student representative attends the Higher Education Steering Group meetings. Student representatives are trained by the College in their role, and representatives are provided with a handbook. In addition to this the College appoints students as ambassadors for the College and they assist on various events and activities around the College. Student representatives are used in focus groups across the College.

2.33 The existing mechanisms would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.34 The review team examined the effectiveness of the policies and procedures in place to engage students by examining documentation including the Quality Processes Document, Student Representative Handbook, programme handbooks, and representative training. The team also held meetings with teaching and support staff, senior staff, the Principal, students, and student representatives.

2.35 The review team found that the policies and procedures for engaging students in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience work effectively in practice. Students and student representatives feel confident enough to engage with College processes to enact change, such as the introduction of an exclusive higher education learning space within the College. This change came about from student representation to tutors through the representation processes. In addition to this the College is taking active steps to improve the engagement with students. While still in its initial phase, student representatives are aware of the improvements being planned and the direction of student engagement at a higher education level. This is further supported by the College's commitment with the Engaged Student Learning Strategic Enhancement Programme of which stage one has been completed and the College plans to continue with the programme further. There are clear developments in motion which will allow this to advance further including the planned Higher Education Student Voice Conference that is scheduled for the end of the academic year 2015-16. Therefore the review team **affirms** the steps taken to build upon the HEA's Engaged Student Learning Strategic Enhancement Programme to further develop students as partners.

2.36 The College has appropriate and effective systems in place which allow students to engage as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience. The College is also working on further strategic developments which will enable increased student engagement. Therefore the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.37 While the College conducts all internal assessments, the ultimate responsibility for ensuring the reliability and validity of assessment decisions rests with the awarding bodies. Assessment regulations and expectations about assessment are clearly set out by the relevant awarding body. Assessment requirements are set out in the College's Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy, and assessment is designed to ensure that learners have the opportunity to demonstrate achievement of the learning outcomes. The Higher Education Student Handbook and course handbooks provide students with an overview of assessment including how to avoid plagiarism. Assessments are designed to be inclusive and support a range of assessment methodologies to meet the needs of a diverse student population. Moderation is informed by an Internal Verification Policy and oversight of internal and external verification is provided through higher education course team meetings within the higher education quality processes. Management of the recognition of prior learning (RPL) is supported by an RPL policy. The College's Higher Education Quality Processes document sets out terms of reference, agendas and membership (including external examiners) for College-constituted examination boards.

2.38 The design of these policies and procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.39 In its review of the evidence, the team read a range of documents related to assessment and studied course handbooks and assessment processes in operation. It reviewed the College VLE and also spoke to academic staff and students.

2.40 The Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy supplemented by the Higher Education Assessment Policy Annex provide the overarching framework for the management of assessment. As mentioned, course handbooks provide students with high-level assessment information and advice regarding assessment and how to avoid plagiarism. Students reported that they are clear about how to avoid plagiarism. The Higher Education Assessment Policy allows for formative feedback prior to summative submission. Each assessment has a formative and summative hand-in date. If work does not meet the criteria at the formative hand-in, students receive a referral. Assignments that do not meet the required standard after the summative deadline are recorded as a fail. Students studying for University of Bedfordshire awards can submit a sample of their work for formative feedback. Students spoke positively about the role of formative assessment in supporting learning and attainment.

2.41 Unit handbooks provide students with specific information about the learning outcomes to be assessed. For the University of Bedfordshire these handbooks also provide information on assessment criteria, while for Pearson provision this is found in assignment briefs. Some students were clear about the assessment criteria that are used while others found them to be vague. External examiner reports also raised concerns with assessment criteria in their reports; the issue was largely due to a lack of differentiation of assessment criteria for merit and distinction in Pearson provision. In addition, an external examiner for provision validated by the University of Bedfordshire comments that assignment marking criteria in some modules are confusing in that they need to be closely aligned to the learning outcomes and clear weights assigned to each of the tasks in the assignments. A review of

the VLE found several examples of a lack of differentiation in assessment criteria. Staff confirmed that the College has been taking a number of operational steps to address the issue with a number of inputs including course team meetings, staff development events and cross-team staff development. The review team therefore **affirms** the work underway to improve the clarity and differentiation of assessment criteria.

2.42 External examiners comment positively on the quality and variety of assignment briefs, though an external examiner for Pearson provision comments that consistency in documentation could be improved. Students spoke very positively about the use of live briefs to enhance their learning and employers confirmed their involvement in assessment. Assessments are designed to be inclusive and meet the needs of a diverse student population with clear guidelines in support of inclusive assessment.

2.43 College staff work closely with link tutors and external examiners in cross moderation to ensure assessment is fair. Through a review of a sample of assignments it is evident that internal verification is thorough and robust and this is confirmed by external examiners, though one comments that evidence of marking and second marking could be made clearer and another that internal verification had not taken place. Training in assessment is provided through a number of mechanisms including team meetings and detailed specific sessions for Pearson provision.

2.44 Feedback on written assignments is detailed and clear. There is a policy for the return of student work within three weeks and students reported that this was mostly met, though provided several instances of the return of work taking longer. Students spoke positively about staff supporting them in assessment. Students studying University of Bedfordshire courses consistently understood their achievements to date, but for Pearson provision this was more variable. The College has recently introduced a grade tracking tool in the VLE and where this is being used it is providing students with clear and timely information about their progress. There is an issue in the Higher National Engineering where students are led to understand that they cannot know their interim overall progress because of generic merit and distinction criteria that apply to a number of units, and this is causing unnecessary uncertainty as the outcomes for each unit are clearly identified. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College provide students with timely and full information on their progress on individual units.

2.45 Examination boards are held by the University of Bedfordshire and external examiners comment positively on their effectiveness. For Pearson provision there are College-constituted examination boards that are required to consider feedback from external examiners, but external examiners are not in attendance. External examiners express satisfaction with the standard of assessment achieved across the provision.

2.46 The College makes provision for the RPL. For Pearson provision there is an RPL policy and for University of Bedfordshire awards their procedures are followed.

2.47 The College is operating the assessment processes required by the awarding bodies and the maintenance of academic standards is confirmed by external examiners. Therefore the review team concludes that the Expectation is met but there are weaknesses in the support for student learning and achievement through the provision of appropriately differentiated assessment criteria, together with inconsistency in the lack of information on progress in Pearson provision. Therefore, the associated level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining

Findings

2.48 External examiners are appointed by the validating awarding bodies and awarding organisation. They are required to provide standards advice and identify good practice for the relevant higher education programmes.

2.49 College staff work with external examiners throughout the academic year for both awarding bodies' validated courses and awarding organisation awards. It is the responsibility of the external examiners to consider and apply standards and subject critique on the relevant College team's draft assignments and examination documentation.

2.50 Following the receipt of external examiner reports, responses and action plans are developed by the Quality Manager and distributed to course managers, and these in turn form part of the College annual review process.

2.51 All external examiner reports are published for students on the higher education VLE or BREO sites.

2.52 The College processes underpinning the role of external examiners would allow the Expectation to be met and ensure that the College makes the correct use of external examiners for all higher education awards.

2.53 The review team tested the effectiveness of the arrangements and resources through the examination of the documentation presented, such as external examiner reports, College responses to these and action plans, a survey of the College VLE and discussions with staff from the College and validating awarding bodies and students.

2.54 The process for appointing external examiners and for using their reports to inform improvements in the quality of provision is robust and fit for purpose.

2.55 On receipt of an external examiner report in the College, the Quality Office staff summarise the main findings on a template and distribute these to course teams. Action points are then developed and the action plan document forms an important aspect of annual course review. This is a robust process which addresses some major external examiner recommendations such as those on the contextualisation of assessment and grading criteria, which is further highlighted in Expectation B6.

2.56 With regard to students being informed of the findings of external examiner reports and discussions by course teams involving students, the review team found some variation in approach and practice across the provision. Some course teams hold formal meetings with students where external examiner reports are discussed, while others direct students to the reports in a more informal manner. However, all reports are published on the higher education VLE or BREO sites, therefore ensuring students have consistent access.

2.57 The College has mechanisms in place which allow effective and scrupulous use of external examiner reports. Staff use the reports to identify and address issues in provision which forms part of the cyclical system of programme monitoring, and students are aware of the process of external examining and the subsequent reports. Therefore the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the 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

2.58 Awarding bodies set out requirements for annual monitoring and periodic review within formal agreements with the College. Guidance on the annual reporting procedures and requirements for the completion of annual reports are provided in the University's Quality Handbook or by Pearson through a documented Quality Management Review process. The College considers course review as a foundation of its self-assessment process with evaluative reviews containing areas of strengths and areas for improvement.

2.59 The design of and adherence to these processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.60 The review team reviewed annual monitoring and periodic review reports. They also examined the minutes of committees where the reports were received and considered and also explored monitoring and review processes and supporting guidance through discussions with academic managers, staff and students.

2.61 The College participates in the periodic review processes for their University of Bedfordshire provision, and there is evidence of Bedford College student and staff involvement. As part of the HEA's Engaged Student Learning Strategic Enhancement Programme, the College has developed a periodic review process for Pearson provision. The first Pearson periodic reviews in Business and Engineering took place shortly before this review. The process makes provision for the inclusion of externals and students as members of periodic review panels. An evaluation of the first periodic review in Engineering identified the need to strengthen attention given to the FHEQ. Oversight of periodic reviews is through consideration at the Higher Education Steering Group meeting where there is student representation. Periodic review is due to take place every five years.

2.62 Annual monitoring of University of Bedfordshire provision operates under their procedures. Unit leaders complete unit enhancement plans that include reflection on external examiner reports, academic standards attained and proposed enhancements, but enhancement plans would be improved with the inclusion of completion dates and the use of measurable targets. Detailed course review reports are produced where attention to the student voice is evident, but learning from unit reviews does not clearly feed through to the course review reports. Course review reports can include both University of Bedfordshire and Pearson provision by including a number of courses within a programme area.

2.63 For Pearson provision, there is an expectation that unit statistics are considered at examination board meetings. Formal unit review forms are not produced and the College recognises this is an area for improvement. There is a published timeline and moderation schedule that underpins annual course review. Comprehensive course reviews are produced. Staff are provided with guidance on completing course review and SARs.

2.64 The higher education course team terms of reference include consideration of course reviews and minutes of meetings identify that course reviews are discussed with students at these meetings. Programme areas produce SARs that include relevant data and quality improvement operational plans, but make no reference to external examiner feedback. These undergo a process of moderation, to which a College governor is invited.

Brief notes of the moderation meeting are kept, but moderation does not form part of the Higher Education Quality Processes documentation. A higher education annual report and action plan is produced and there is an expectation within the higher education quality process that this is considered by the Higher Education Steering Group, but this was not evidenced in the meeting minutes. The report is signed off by the Governing Body Quality and Standards Committee.

2.65 A College higher education self-evaluation report/self-evaluation document is also prepared, and forms part of the College SAR that covers further and higher education provision that is reported to the College Board. A confusing number of terms are used to describe reports and this further adds to the complexity of the processes. Although there is clear evidence of course review reports being produced, the processes in operation are not those set out in the College's Higher Education Quality Process documentation and are overly complex. There is a lack of governance over arrangements and so it is not possible for the College to know whether the annual review processes for Pearson provision are fit for purpose in realising the full opportunities for enhancement in the provision. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that the College ensure systematic oversight and governance of the annual monitoring process for Pearson provision to provide clarity and effectiveness.

2.66 The College is maintaining its responsibilities to its awarding body in the monitoring and review of provision that is validated by the University of Bedfordshire. For Pearson provision, the introduction of a periodic review process is a clear enhancement to the College's quality assurance procedures. However, for the annual monitoring of Pearson provision, the College does not follow its own processes and the processes that are followed are overly complex and lack sufficient governance and oversight. Therefore the review team concludes that the Expectation is met, but the associated level of risk is moderate because although the quality assurance procedures for the Expectation are broadly adequate, there are some shortcomings in terms of the rigour with which they are applied (though this is confined to the annual review of Pearson provision).

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

2.67 The College has a complaints policy that is readily accessible to staff and students via the College website and staff intranet. The complaints system is known as Have Your Say and combines complaints, comments and compliments. Appeals made against academic judgements is covered separately by the Academic Appeals Policy. This policy is available to students via the VLE and, as with the complaints policy, on the staff intranet. All complaints data is reported to both Higher Education Steering Group and the Quality and Standards Board of the Governing body. If, however, students are not satisfied with the outcomes of the College's complaints process, they are able to take their complaints up with the university partner or, if the case requires, with the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA).

2.68 The College has appropriate policies in place which are communicated to staff and students that would enable the Expectation to be met.

2.69 The review team examined the effectiveness of the policies and procedures in place to engage students by examining documentation including policies for complaints and appeals, student handbooks, the VLE and reports to Higher Education Steering Group and Quality and Standards Board. The team also held meetings with teaching staff, students and student representatives.

2.70 There have been no formal complaints or appeals recorded in the past two years. The review team found evidence of a positive working relationship between students and tutors which has explained the lack of official complaints. Any initial complaints are usually dealt with informally by staff, and students expressed satisfaction in the main with these arrangements. However, students are aware of formal complaints procedures they could use if the informal route was not appropriate. Students are also aware that they could appeal against academic judgements. Students confirmed that they knew they could approach the awarding bodies with a complaint once it had been through the College's own internal complaints procedure.

2.71 The evidence from documentation and meetings shows that the College, staff and students are clear on the procedures in place, and on where to access this information should it be required. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.72 The College has recently entered into a delivery agreement with Stella Mann College for the partner to deliver a Pearson HNC/D in Performing Arts-Production (Make Up). An application was made to Pearson to initiate the partnership and the approval was granted on the basis of Pearson allocating one centre number (which denotes the site of responsibility), with Bedford College being the main centre responsible for the award. The College undertook a validation process for this partnership and a signed agreement was drawn up in 2014-15, and an operational manual was produced.

2.73 The College alludes to several vocational areas offering work experience placements and notes that those curriculum areas have a work experience coordinator. There is a Strategy for Working with Employers which covers all aspects of employer relationship management.

2.74 The processes supporting the partnership with Stella Mann College, the agreements in place and the College's Strategy for Working with Employers would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.75 The review team tested the effectiveness of the arrangements and resources through the examination of the documentation such as partnership agreements and work placement documentation presented, and discussions with staff from the College, employers and the course coordinator from Stella Mann College.

2.76 The partnership with Stella Mann College has been set up following all aspects of due diligence and the partnership agreement has been correctly drawn up and signed by both parties. Bedford College has the main responsibility for quality assurance and the partnership operates under one centre number with Pearson. Staff at Stella Mann College carry out the teaching on the course. The course coordinator at Stella Mann College confirmed to reviewers that communication was good between the two partners and that staff development had been provided by Bedford College for Stella Mann College delivery staff. As it is the first year of operation, the partnership is being kept under continual review.

2.77 The College has one course where formal arrangements are in place to ensure assessed work-based learning is managed effectively. The Foundation Degree in Animal Management programme includes a work placement opportunity for students and a detailed handbook has been produced for employers who are providing this opportunity to students on the award. The handbook includes placement agreements and fully outlines the responsibilities and expectations for employers and students regarding the work experience placement. Discussions with College staff, employers and students confirmed that on other courses formal work experience placements were not being undertaken by students. However, inaccurate information about work-related learning was found in the College's prospectus which has led to a recommendation under Expectation C.

2.78 The College confirmed that more informal arrangements with employers are established to provide students with opportunities for relevant and valuable work-related experiences including undertaking live briefs with employers or being taken on as interns.

College staff make contact with employers and develop and establish the relationship with employers, but as no formal assessed learning is carried out at these workplaces, no formal documentation or regulatory framework applies. Both the employers and the students confirmed that they benefited from these informal arrangements.

2.79 The College has developed a partnership with a local arts college which has been appropriately established and is effectively managed. The College also has some work-based learning delivery which is being managed within the framework of the award, and guidance and information are offered to both the employer and students. There are also informal arrangements with employers offering work experience activities which students find useful. The review team found that all these opportunities were suitably managed and therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees*

Findings

2.80 The College does not offer research degrees, therefore this Expectation does not apply.

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

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

2.82 Of the 10 applicable Expectations in this area, all are met. Eight Expectations have a low level of associated risk, while the remaining two have a moderate level of associated risk. There are two features of good practice in this area, two recommendations and two affirmations.

2.83 The features of good practice relate to Expectations B1 and B4. The team found that the College had developed a thorough strategic approach with regard to the development of its higher education which ensured that the provision reflected the aspirations of students and met the needs of local employers. Expectation B4 highlights the considerable and comprehensive opportunities for students to engage with work-related activities through local employer engagement and professional networks. Various examples of work-related activity which enhanced the students' learning were found. In conjunction with positive employer relationships, industry-experienced teaching staff and access to specialist facilities, the students were very positive about the employer-focused activities embedded in the curriculum.

2.84 The review team found inconsistencies across the Higher National provision in the information given to students about their progress throughout their course despite mechanisms being in place to ensure regular updates. There is also a recognition that feedback on the individual units within the courses could be timelier on certain programmes. Therefore, a recommendation in Expectation B6 to provide students with timely and full information on their progress on individual units for all Higher National courses is included in the report. As this recommendation only relates to part of the Expectation and other procedures for assessment are sufficient, the Expectation is met.

2.85 The review team found the governance of the College's higher education provision to be overly complex and lacked clarity and focus which could allow an inconsistency of monitoring across all programmes. Current monitoring and review procedures are effective for courses validated by awarding bodies and although there is adequate reporting and action planning for the monitoring of the Higher National provision, effective governance structures are not easily identifiable. Therefore, the review team recommends that the College ensures systematic oversight and governance of the annual monitoring process for Higher National courses to provide clarity and effectiveness. As the weakness relates to only a part of the overall provision and part of the Expectation, the Expectation is met.

2.86 There are two affirmations in this area. The College has carried out stage one of the Engaged Student Learning Strategic Enhancement Programme which has resulted in further engagement with students. Senior staff at the College acknowledge that further work is necessary and the implementation of stage two of the programme is planned to be carried out later in 2016. Therefore the review team affirms the steps taken to build upon the Engaged Student Learning Strategic Enhancement Programme to develop further student engagement as partners which relates to Expectation B5. The review team found that there are issues across all programmes around grading criteria which has lacked clarity for students and has been highlighted by external examiners. The College has acknowledged the issue and has already started work in addressing it but acknowledged that further staff development has been planned, which results in the affirmation of the actions taken to improve the clarity and differentiation of assessment criteria relating to Expectation B6.

2.87 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 produces most of its information to both prospective students and current students through its website and associated intranets. On the website the College outlines its aims and values. In addition, the College publishes its annual review that contains significant information on the composition of both staff and student populations, governance and all annual reports. Furthermore, the College submits information to the Higher Education Statistics Agency which allows the display of Unistats data for their provision.

3.2 For prospective students, the College publishes a discrete higher education prospectus. Information contained within it is at a high level; it contains information on degree-level study, application, support available and the fees charged. However, the prospectus is brief on course description as it is expected that students benefit from more detail in attending open days. There are open days for higher education courses and these are advertised locally. All students who attend the open days receive an Open Day booklet. Students confirmed that they found the booklet to be useful to visit the College, but commented that they would like to see more of the facilities relevant for their courses on the open days.

3.3 For current students, the College provides learners with a higher education student handbook upon arrival. In addition to this, all students are provided with a course handbook to accompany their course, which is available electronically on the VLE. The College's VLE is the main source of information for current students and various College policies can be found there including Equality and Diversity, Student Support and support relating to both academic and pastoral information.

3.4 The evidence that was seen by the review team would allow the Expectation to be met.

3.5 The review team examined the effectiveness of the policies and procedures in place for information by examining documentation including the policies for oversight, reviewing the website, VLE and handbooks and the 2016 prospectus. The team also held meetings with teaching staff, students, professional staff and the provider facilitator.

3.6 Students and student representatives were satisfied with the quality of information available to them. They were confident in their knowledge of College policies and procedures, and if unsure would know where to look to find that information. Students have opportunities to feed back on the quality and availability of information given to them regarding their courses and support through regularly held focus groups on the prospectus and open days. Oversight of the flow of information is clearly marked in the documentation received by the review team while on the visit and was clarified in meetings with staff.

3.7 During the visit the review team found conflicting information over work placements and work-related learning. The College prospectus refers to students undertaking work experience placements on some Higher National courses. However, the review team found

that students were undertaking work-related activities through informal arrangements. This finding also relates to Expectation B10. Staff and students confirmed that work placements were not a requirement of those courses which was further acknowledged by the College after exploration. Therefore, the review team **recommends** that the College ensures that published information on Higher National courses is revised to reflect accurately details about work-related learning.

3.8 The College makes available clear and accurate information to prospective and current students which they need to make informed choices about programmes of study. The College has appropriate mechanisms in place to check that information produced is accurate and although the team found some inaccurate course information, this does not pose a threat to the quality of learning. Therefore, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met, and the associated 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 positive judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The Expectation for this judgement area is met and the associated level of risk is low.

3.10 There is one recommendation confirmed for the Expectation. The review team found inconsistencies around the information available about work placements on Higher National programmes. Although staff and students confirmed that placements are not required on those courses, information contained within prospectuses consistently confirmed that these opportunities would be available. Therefore the review team recommends that the College should ensure that published information on Higher National courses is revised to reflect accurately details about work-related learning. As the recommendation related to a small part of the information produced by the College and the issue is easily rectifiable, the associated level of risk is deemed low.

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

4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1 Enhancement is explicitly addressed within the Bedford College Higher Education Strategy 2016-19 and the Student Engagement Strategy for Higher Education that forms a code of practice for the formal arrangement for students in the management of quality enhancement and assurance. Together, these provide a framework to embed enhancement across the higher education provision.

4.2 The implementation of these strategic approaches at senior management and throughout the College would enable the Expectation to be met.

4.3 The team evaluated the effectiveness of these arrangements by examining a range of documentation. The team also held meetings with the Principal, senior staff, teaching and support staff, employers and students.

4.4 Enhancement is a strong theme within the College's Higher Education Strategy, with a key objective being to ensure that enhancement features prominently in learning opportunities across all higher education programmes. Student engagement is a key aspect of the Higher Education Strategy and this was given a significant boost through participation in the HEA's Engaged Student Learning Strategic Enhancement Programme from October 2014 to July 2015 with the theme of 'Engaged Student Learning'. This project provided an important opportunity to review and further develop the College's quality assurance policies and processes and to further enhance student engagement arrangements including the development of cross-College student surveys; development of the College Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy and Process; the formation of periodic review for Pearson provision; learner involvement in the observation of teaching and learning; the development of the job description, responsibilities, election process and training of student representatives; and learner engagement in the development, review and approval of higher education courses.

4.5 The review team found clear evidence of the work being undertaken to strengthen student involvement in quality processes and this is subject to an affirmation in Expectation B5.

4.6 There is a high-level College student survey but not a survey at course or unit level. Students report low participation rates in surveys and indicated that they would like to have the opportunity to give feedback on their particular course. Students report a culture of responsiveness to the student voice to enable enhancement in their provision including a number of instances where improvements, particularly to physical resources, have been made in response to student feedback.

4.7 The Higher Education Strategy makes a strong commitment to work closely with the LEP and employers. To support this the College has a Strategy for Working with Employers that seeks to improve employer enhancement and so enhance students' employability. The review team heard how engagement with employers was enhancing the student experience. This commitment was exemplified by leadership provided by the Principal in creating the FUSE group for the LEP, through to the provision of work experience opportunities by local employers and the use of live briefs in assessment, which were very positively received by students. An employer forum within Construction and Building Services has led to course

improvements. Employers have also contributed to course development, though they would welcome the opportunity for greater involvement.

4.8 The Higher Education Strategy makes a strong commitment to staff development and this is supported throughout the organisation with the Principal strongly encouraging specialist subject development. Staff development is actively considered at the Governing Body Quality, Standards and Achievement Committee. Staff teaching on higher education courses are all qualified teachers and many are working towards higher degrees. Staff are actively working to enhance provision through a range of staff development activities including using 'Golden Hour' time to provide support for the development of the VLE and a project to identify good practice in higher education teaching through teaching observation. Staff provide informal support across disciplines to enhance provision, as demonstrated with cross-disciplinary support to improve contextualisation of assessment criteria. The College's annual Staff Conference focuses on teaching, learning and assessment, and during the last conference there were dedicated higher education sessions facilitated by the HEA on student engagement and scholarly activity. There is good attendance and thorough evaluation of the conference by staff.

4.9 The College is actively taking steps to enhance its provision through its review processes. It has recently introduced a process for the periodic review of its Pearson provision and has undertaken reviews in Engineering and Business. The College has conducted an early evaluation of the new process and made recommendations for improvement. A number of reports are produced as part of annual review ranging from unit and course reviews up to a higher education annual report and higher education self-evaluation document, but the value of this reporting in enhancing provision is not being fully realised in Pearson provision and this is the subject of a recommendation under Expectation B8.

4.10 The College's approach to enhancement is led by senior College staff and underpinned by the Higher Education Strategy. Clear progress to enhance student engagement is being made and there is good practice in employer engagement. An effective periodic review process has been introduced but improvement is needed in the annual review of Pearson provision for enhancement opportunities to be systematically realised. Therefore the review team finds that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.11 In reaching its judgement about the enhancement of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. There are no examples of good practice, recommendations or affirmations in this area.

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

5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability

Findings

5.1 The College has described its approach to employability as being strategically important in its curriculum planning. A recent research report commissioned by the College has focused on this aspect of College provision. Employer links are strong and well developed in most courses and there is a College Strategy for Working with Employers which details the strategic, marketing and operational aspects of employer relationships. These activities provide opportunities for students to gain practical skills and thus enhance their employability prospects. As new programmes are introduced, the good practice on existing awards is shared. The College operates several higher apprenticeship schemes with local employers.

5.2 Some units on courses are selected to develop employability skills. Several examples were provided of curriculum teams seeking to enhance the employability skills of their students. These include work experience placements in Animal Science, live briefs in Games Art and Animation and work-related activities in many other curriculum areas. Students value these opportunities which often lead to interesting and valuable work-related interaction with employers.

5.3 Live briefs are used on many higher education courses and allow students the opportunity to work directly with local and in some cases national employers. Students spoke highly of the value of these opportunities in enhancing their employability skills and career prospects. In some curriculum areas students can apply for internships with employers.

5.4 The College describes many examples under programme areas of enhancing student employability such as its involvement in higher apprenticeship schemes and an impressive range of work-related opportunities provided by employers. It also describes how employers are involved in curriculum delivery and development. Employers confirmed to the review team that they would be willing to engage in further liaison and discussion with College staff on course development and review.

5.5 Students state that they feel employability is embedded in their programmes and this was confirmed during the review visit. There is a College Job Shop and careers advice is also available through careers advisers in helping students to develop a career plan.

5.6 The overall finding is that the College has clear strategies and effective practices for developing and promoting employability skills and activities for its students and that these are valuable to, and valued by, the students on the programmes.

Glossary

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

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

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

Academic standards

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

Award

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

Blended learning

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

Credit(s)

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

Degree-awarding body

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

Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

Dual award or double award

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

e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning

Enhancement

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

Expectations

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

Flexible and distributed learning

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

See also **distance learning**.

Framework

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

Framework for higher education qualifications

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

Good practice

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

Learning opportunities

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

Learning outcomes

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

Multiple awards

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

Operational definition

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

Programme (of study)

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

Programme specifications

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

Public information

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

Quality Code

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

Reference points

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

Subject Benchmark Statement

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

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)

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

Threshold academic standard

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

Virtual learning environment (VLE)

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

Widening participation

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

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