



Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) of AA Hamilton College Ltd

February 2016

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About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers) conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at AA Hamilton College Ltd. The review took place from 1 to 4 February 2016 and was conducted by a team of three reviewers, as follows:

- Mrs Jane Durant
- Professor Christopher Clare
- Miss Sarah Bennett (student reviewer).

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by AA Hamilton College Ltd 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 (Alternative Providers) the QAA review team:

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

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

In reviewing AA Hamilton College Ltd 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 \(Alternative Providers\)](#).⁴ For an explanation of terms see the [glossary](#) at the end of this report.

¹ The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: www.qaa.ac.uk/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 (Alternative Providers): www.qaa.ac.uk/en/ReviewsAndReports/Pages/Educational-Oversight.aspx

Key findings

QAA's judgements about AA Hamilton College Ltd

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at AA Hamilton College Ltd.

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

Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to AA Hamilton College Ltd.

By June 2016:

- record and review previous minutes and outstanding actions from all meetings systematically (Expectation A2.1)
- develop a system for the regular, formal monitoring of the effectiveness of governance committees and their terms of reference (Expectation A2.1)
- complete the actions from the QAA Concerns Report (April 2015) in order to review and monitor rigorously the effectiveness and consistency of policies and procedures (Expectation A3.2)
- design and implement a comprehensive and rigorous process for the internal approval of new programmes (Expectation B1)
- adhere consistently and rigorously to the College's Recruitment and Admissions Policy to ensure that the principles of fair admission for all students are applied (Expectation B2)
- develop a strategic approach to staff development to enable the effective planning and delivery of higher education (Expectation B3)
- ensure that planning for learning is appropriate for Level 6 (Expectation B3)
- revise the approach to monitoring student progression at module and course level in order to ensure full consideration of retention and achievement (Expectation B4)
- develop systems to engage students formally as partners in their learning (Expectation B5)
- ensure that assessment regulations are clearly communicated to students and are applied rigorously and equitably (Expectation B6)
- review the format of assessment boards to ensure that all students' status and outcomes are documented and formally recorded (Expectation B6)
- further develop and embed the Annual Course and College Review (ACCR) process to incorporate detailed analysis of statistical information and student feedback (Expectation B8)
- devise and implement a process for the periodic review of programmes (Expectation B8)
- ensure that the process on academic appeals is clearly and consistently communicated to students (Expectation B9)

- ensure that a transparent and accessible appeals process is in place for student admissions (Expectation B9)
- develop procedures for checking that information is fit for purpose, accurate and trustworthy (Expectation C)
- develop and disseminate a deliberate, strategic and organisationally led approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities that is embedded at all levels (Enhancement).

Affirmation of action being taken

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

- The steps being taken to implement plans for a Students' Union as numbers increase (B5).

Theme: Digital Literacy

The review team found that while there are prospective plans to develop an understanding and awareness of digital literacy for future cohorts, the College is not currently promoting the concept or practice of digital literacy at this time.

About AA Hamilton College Ltd

AA Hamilton College Ltd (the College) is an independent, international College for further and higher education, located at Albert Embankment, London. The College was founded in 2005 with the primary aim of widening access to further and higher education in the UK.

AA Hamilton College Ltd's mission is to contribute to the worldwide community through the pursuit of high quality yet affordable education and learning, striving to achieve the highest level of excellence and performance for students.

Academic approval through the Department for Education and Skills was confirmed during 2005 and latterly, UK Visas and Immigration (formerly the UK Border Agency), endorsed the College for overseas students under Tier 4 sponsorship and provided the College with B rated sponsorship in March 2009. The A rating followed in August 2009.

The College has recently concentrated on UK students funded through the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and the Student Loans Company, allowing its Tier 4 licence to lapse. The College campus offers a range of business management programmes from Levels 4 to 7, along with the Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector through Oxford, Cambridge and RSA (OCR). The College has institutional accreditation through the British Accreditation Council (BAC) and has subsequently undergone a review for educational oversight by the Independent Schools Inspectorate, with a judgement of 'meets expectations'.

The College is accredited by a number of different awarding organisations for the delivery of its programmes, including Pearson Education and Awards for Training and Higher Education (ATHE). The College currently has a small number of students enrolled.

The College currently employs nine staff, of whom five are academic staff and the remainder are administrative management staff.

A QAA Concerns Investigation took place in April 2015. There were a number of recommendations for the College following this investigation and the College submitted an action plan. As part of the Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers), the team considered the College's progress. Work is continuing on the action plan, as some actions have not been completed within the anticipated timeframe. Further information relating to the outcomes associated with the Concern can be found on QAA's website.

Explanation of the findings about AA Hamilton College Ltd

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 currently has three programmes potentially available. The programmes are: ATHE Awards for Training and Higher Education Management; Pearson/Edexcel HND in Business Management programme; and OCR Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector/Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector. Currently, and as described on its website, the College is offering both the HNC/D and the ATHE Level 6. However, at the time of the review, only the ATHE Level 6 programme had recruited and five students had enrolled.

1.2 The setting of standards is primarily the responsibility of the awarding organisation, which determines that the requirements of the credit framework, subject benchmarks and any Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies are met. As the HND programme was 'off-the-shelf', the College relies on the awarding organisation to ensure that aspects of Expectation A1, including alignment with FHEQ, are covered. There are no Centre-defined modules. Similarly, the College uses ATHE specifications and, for the first session, ATHE assessments. These arrangements would enable the Expectation to be met.

1.3 The review team examined the evidence provided by the College. This included the Pearson annual monitoring reports (AMRs), the ATHE Health Check Report, the Quality Assurance Policy, Annual College and Course Review (ACCR) meeting minutes, course

handbooks, programme specifications and accreditation certificates, and other College documentation. The team also met staff and students.

1.4 Programme specifications, modules and learning expectations are outlined in the Pearson BTEC programme specifications and modules document, and on the ATHE Qualifications Guidance webpage. Programme specifications, aims and rationale are also outlined in the Staff Handbook and Student Handbook.

1.5 The programme specifications clearly state learning outcomes, modules and assessments for the programmes on offer. Module learning outcomes are appropriately specified at Levels 4 and 5 for the Pearson qualification and at Level 6 for ATHE.

1.6 To ensure compliance with the academic frameworks for each awarding organisation, the College compares its own effectiveness with respect to quality management, processes, procedures and systems against the standards, academic frameworks and regulations required by the awarding organisations. This is evidenced in the responsibilities checklist, which is comprehensive and clear.

1.7 There are plans for the College to partner other higher education awarding organisations, but these have yet to be developed.

1.8 Threshold academic standards are secured because the College was delivering programmes and modules approved by Pearson, and is currently delivering a programme approved by ATHE. All these programmes have been approved by the awarding organisation in accordance with their own standards which, in turn, align with national frameworks and standards. The team concludes that Expectation A1 is met and the associated 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

1.9 The College recognises that the primary responsibility for academic standards rests with the awarding organisation. There is a Governance Policy that sets out, broadly, the values, objectives, structures and arrangements for the strategic direction of the College, including the commitment to meet the expectations of the Quality Code.

1.10 There is also a Quality Assurance Policy, which sets out details of the approach to quality assurance and the principles underpinning the approach. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.11 The team examined evidence including Pearson AMRs and the ATHE Health Check Report, as well as other College documentation. It also scrutinised the organisation chart and the Governance Policy. A committee structure chart has been scrutinised; this was part of a document containing some committee terms of reference. Various sets of committee minutes were scrutinised, including Board, Student Representative Committee (SRC) and others.

1.12 As a general statement, the Quality Assurance Policy is comprehensive and clear. It also sets out the terms of reference for the Quality and Standards committee (QSC). These are full and cover many of the areas set out in the Quality Code. These are the only terms of reference of any of the governance committees that specify, in detail, the responsibilities of the committee.

1.13 External examiners' reports demonstrate the College's adherence to, and awareness of, the frameworks and regulations of the awarding organisations.

1.14 The College has procedures in place to monitor the standard of assessment and to record assessment outcomes. These are supported by effective internal verification, which in turn is supported by regular standards meetings of the assessment and internal verifier teams. The Quality Nominee for BTEC acts as a Lead Internal Verifier. Effective use is also made of standards verifiers and external examiners' reports. Assessment Boards take place at the completion of each module.

1.15 Committee meeting minutes demonstrates that discussion on issues of quality and standards does take place and actions are specified, albeit with inconsistencies in the style and detail of reporting. However, the majority of committee minutes show no systematic review of the actions from previous meetings. Consequently, it is difficult to determine whether all actions have been addressed and to see the results of those actions. The QAA Concerns report contained a recommendation that included a requirement to 'report on actions from previous meetings' and the College action plan included actions to address this. The team therefore **recommends** that for all committee meetings, there is a standard agenda item to record and review minutes and outstanding actions from all meetings systematically.

1.16 The terms of reference provided for the majority of the committees are general and there is a lack of clarity about responsibilities for each committee. In addition, there is no

systematic review of the committee terms of reference and effectiveness yet in place. Consequently, the team **recommends** that the College should develop a system for the regular, formal monitoring of the effectiveness of governance committees and their terms of reference.

1.17 Notwithstanding the recommendations, the team considers that the Expectation is met, but that the level of risk is moderate due to the continued lack of clarity about responsibilities.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Moderate

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

1.18 Pearson and ATHE are responsible for the definitive record of each programme. Programme specifications, modules, credits and learning expectations are outlined in the Pearson BTEC programme specifications and modules document and on the ATHE Qualifications Guidance webpage. Programme specifications, aims and rationale are also outlined in the Staff Handbook and Student Handbook. This would allow Expectation A2.2 to be met.

1.19 In testing this Expectation, the team examined evidence provided by the College, including Pearson AMRs, the ATHE Health Check Report, the Quality Assurance Policy, ACCR meeting minutes, course handbooks, programme specifications and accreditation certificates. The team met staff and students and was provided with a demonstration of the virtual learning environment, (VLE) including the content available to students and staff.

1.20 The College undertakes an ACCR meeting at the end of each academic year in order to review enrolments, courses, modules, attainment, pass/fail rates and learner feedback. An action plan is then developed for the following year. Staff confirmed that these meetings proved valuable in terms of reviewing courses and for future planning purposes.

1.21 Pearson and ATHE monitor the College's standards annually. Pearson's 2013-14 AMR confirmed that an accurate programme specification (termed 'course rationale') was in place. Procedures are in place to monitor the standard of assessment and to record assessment outcomes, and this is supported by effective internal verification. Internal verification is supported by regular standards meetings of the assessment and internal verifier teams. The Quality Nominee for Pearson acts as a Lead Internal Verifier. Effective use is also made of standards verifiers and external examiner reports.

1.22 Any issues raised in Pearson Annual Academic Management Reports are discussed within QSC meetings. Staff at these meetings decide the actions to be taken, and targets for completion. Any changes to course structure, module content or learning outcomes proposed by programme leaders are reviewed internally by the Head of Academics and the Principal. Staff advised the team that the Head of Academics and Principal were both involved in the planning and development of new programmes.

1.23 Students are made aware of their responsibilities, intended learning outcomes, how they will be assessed, the criteria they are assessed against, and the awarding organisation for their qualification. This is described in both the Student Handbook and course specifications. Students stated that they are aware of where to find course information and that these details are also provided within the information packs they had received at induction. Details of the HND in Business, and the Diploma in Management offered by the College are also available to students, staff, alumni and prospective students on the College website.

1.24 The College maintains records of the programmes that it delivers and, on completion, students are provided with a detailed formal record of their studies in

accordance with College policies on the provision of student records. AMRs from Pearson confirmed that the College has a set of procedures in place to monitor the standard of assessment and record assessment outcomes. ATHE also described internal verification processes as 'very robust'. These procedures are supported by internal verification and second-marking policies.

1.25 Although the ultimate responsibility for academic standards rests with the relevant awarding organisation, the College has successfully put in place its own processes to uphold and affiliate with the requirements of Pearson and ATHE. Programme information is made available to staff, students, prospective students and alumni, and therefore Expectation A2.2 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

1.26 Responsibility for the formal academic approval of all programmes rests with the awarding organisations. Through their own approval processes, the awarding organisations ensure that new programmes meet UK threshold academic standards. These arrangements would allow Expectation A3.1 to be met.

1.27 The team examined documentation including awarding organisation approval and centre monitoring reports, programme specifications, student handbooks, external examiner reports, staff training records, minutes of meetings, and policy documents. In addition, meetings were held with the Principal, senior and teaching staff and students.

1.28 Pearson's overview of academic standards during the College's Centre Annual Monitoring Visit in 2015 confirms that these are secure. The College has effectively implemented changes to address actions arising from the monitoring visit, for example the timely registration of students with the awarding organisation. As the basis for centre approval in 2015, ATHE relied on College evidence that related to the Higher National programme. At the time of this review, an annual health check visit by ATHE is pending, thus ensuring ongoing monitoring of standards.

1.29 The Quality Assurance Policy sets out guidance on outline procedures for the development and approval of new programmes by the College, in conjunction with its awarding organisation partners.

1.30 Responsibility for the selection of qualifications and partner awarding organisations rests with the Principal and senior managers. Pearson and ATHE delegate the selection of optional units, the development of any centre-designed modules, and the initial assessment of learning outcomes for all units to the College. To date, the College has not designed any bespoke units for awarding organisation approval in order to meet local needs. Decisions relating to the selection of units, teachers and programme delivery plans rest with the Programme Leader and teaching team at the Academic Committee. During the review, students implied that they had had the opportunity for choice in selecting optional units for the Higher National programme; however, no evidence to support this was seen by the team.

1.31 Staff and students are well supported to ensure knowledge and understanding of the awarding organisation requirements for upholding academic standards. For example, teachers have attended training from Pearson, and the Programme Leader for the ATHE Diploma has attended external training. Awarding organisation programme specifications are readily available for students and staff in programme handbooks, via the VLE, and summarised on the College website. Programme information includes appropriate details relating to standards, for example unit titles and codes, credit weightings, and FHEQ levels. Staff and students confirm their understanding and use of this information, as does the external Standards Verifier.

1.32 The team considers that, on balance, the College's procedures for setting and articulating academic standards in the design and planning of academic programmes operate effectively under the aegis of its awarding organisations. It concludes that Expectation A3.1 is met and the associated 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

1.33 The awarding organisations confirm whether the programmes delivered by the College meet threshold standards through their own approval processes, and confirm whether these meet Qualifications and Credit Framework requirements. Unit specifications provided by the awarding organisations state the learning outcomes to be assessed.

1.34 In order to gain credit, students need to demonstrate achievement through approved assessment. For the Higher National programme, the College has been responsible for writing assessments to meet the awarding organisations' intended learning outcomes and assessment criteria. For the first year of the Level 6 Diploma programme the College is currently using assessments provided by ATHE.

1.35 The Academic Assessment and Internal Verification Policy guides staff and students through the College's principles and procedures relating to assessment. In conjunction with this policy, a regular cycle and process for the internal standardisation of assessment is implemented and published.

1.36 The internal verification of assessment design and decisions by teachers assures achievement of learning outcomes. Following this, external scrutiny by the awarding organisations through standards verification or external examination ensures that assessment procedures and practices align with UK threshold academic standards. The QAA Concerns Report (2015) recommended that the College should 'ensure that the policy for internal verification is clearly defined, documented and implemented'. The review team found that the policy is fit for purpose, known and applied by teachers. The Standards Verifier for Pearson confirmed effective verification in 2015. There is no evidence yet available to report on practices with the ATHE programme.

1.37 The College has committee structures to monitor and review its assessment processes and compliance with awarding organisation requirements. The Standardisation Committee checks that the design, approval and monitoring of assessment strategies meet academic standards. A cycle of assessment boards is run to review student achievement throughout a programme and prior to claiming certification. These frameworks would allow Expectation A3.2 to be met.

1.38 To test this Expectation the team examined a range of documentary evidence provided by the College including programme specifications, standards verifier reports, and College assessment regulations. The team also discussed arrangements with managers, teachers, and students.

1.39 Externality, through the oversight of the Higher National programme by Pearson, is effective. Although certification for the HND in Business was blocked in 2015 due to late registration of students, the Standards Verifier confirmed the achievement of suitable

learning outcomes and the accurate assessment of these. Assessment and verification have not yet taken place on the ATHE programme. However, evidence reviewed for the Pearson programme confirms that arrangements for marking assessments, and the internal verification of assessment, align with awarding organisations requirements. The decision of the College to use assessment briefs issued by ATHE for the first year of the programme provides the team with confidence that assessment will be issued to ensure that academic standards, and an outcomes-based approach to the Level 6 Diploma, will be secured.

1.40 Steps being taken to further raise staff understanding of external frameworks, to secure academic standards, include the mapping of the Quality Code into some policies, a staff development session, and the appointment of a senior member of staff who is an external examiner for ATHE. Staff confirm that these arrangements are supportive.

1.41 It is evident that the College has taken positive action to address some of the requirements relating to policies and procedures identified in the action plan following the QAA Concerns Report. For example, the Academic Assessment and Internal Verification Policy explicitly details responsibilities and process, and is readily available to staff and students through the VLE. A policy to address academic malpractice and misconduct has been published. The College refers to an internal tracking system for the review of policy documents. Minutes of the QSC include references to the updating of some policies. However, it is not clear that a systematic and rigorous monitoring of policy review has been undertaken. For example, a number of policy documents have not been updated to schedule including the Academic Assessment and Internal Verification Policy (see Part C).

1.42 There has been no academic delivery at the College since 2014-15; therefore, it is not possible for the College to demonstrate the implementation and effectiveness of any revised policies relating to standards, or for the College to monitor their effectiveness adequately. In light of this the team **recommends** that the College should develop further actions resulting from the QAA Concerns Report April 2015 in order to review and monitor rigorously the effectiveness and consistency of policies and procedures.

1.43 The published annual cycle of verification and standardisation provides appropriate mechanisms for staff to monitor and assure academic standards effectively. Standardisation activity is minuted and used primarily by the programme team to improve practice. However, the review team found little evidence of how the outcomes from these meetings are reported and monitored throughout the College committee structure. The decision to verify a 100 per cent sample of assessment on the newly introduced ATHE diploma is welcomed by the team.

1.44 A programme of termly assessment boards is used to review students' results prior to claiming certification from Pearson. Scrutiny of minutes and outcomes data used during these boards indicates that only results from retained students are considered and that formal analysis and reporting of student outcomes throughout the committee structure is limited.

1.45 Effective oversight of standards is undertaken by the awarding organisations, the team therefore concludes that Expectation A3.2 is met. The associated level of risk is moderate because quality assurance procedures are broadly adequate, but have some shortcomings in terms of the rigour with which they are applied.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

1.46 Academic standards are assured through the approval processes set by the awarding organisations who share responsibility with the College for annual monitoring and periodic review. Pearson undertakes an annual academic management review, and ATHE undertakes an annual Centre Health Check; both report formally to the College. The QSC is responsible for the oversight of outcomes from reviews. These procedures would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.47 Internal processes for monitoring and review rely mainly on reporting within College committees and on an ACCR.

1.48 The team examined the College's response to actions arising from the annual Academic Management Review in 2015, minutes of committee meetings, and samples of the College's monitoring and review procedures. The team also held meetings with the Principal, senior staff and teachers.

1.49 The College has responded appropriately to the actions arising from the Pearson Academic Management Review (2015). As a helpful mechanism to enable monitoring and review of the programme and the College's management practices, the report identifies good practice, including the provision of study skills support for students. The report also confirms that standards had been met while setting actions. These include the need to rationalise policies relating to assessment. The review team found evidence of effective response in the publication of the comprehensive policy on assessment and internal verification.

1.50 Further external confirmation of standards through sampling students' work and staff assessment is provided by Pearson through standards verification. When appropriate, this will be provided by ATHE through external examination. The most recent reports from Pearson confirmed the appropriateness of assessment and threshold standards, but applied certification blocks to the College. Subsequently, the College was subject to concerns checks undertaken by Pearson. The issues raised pertained in the main to the management of student registration and certification claims, as well as the late submission of student work. The review team recognises that appropriate actions taken by the College, with ongoing monitoring by members of the QSC, have been effective in improving the quality of students' experiences at the College.

1.51 The team concludes that Expectation A3.3 is met, and that, as there are external and internal procedures for annual monitoring and review, 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

1.52 The responsibility for engaging external and independent expertise largely rests with the awarding organisation. Pearson and ATHE undertake external examination in the form of standards verification to check that College assessment decisions meet national standards.

1.53 Reference to external benchmarks and reference points feature in the College action plan through the use of external consultants. There is also reference to the use of the Quality Code in the development of a variety of policies and procedures. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

1.54 The team considered evidence including the SED, Pearson AMRs, the ATHE Health Check Report, the Quality Assurance Policy, ACCR meeting minutes, course handbooks, programme specifications, and accreditation certificates. The team also held meetings with staff and students.

1.55 For the Pearson programmes, a standards verifier, who is a subject expert, was allocated to conduct sampling of assessed student work and provide verbal feedback and a formal report. This identifies good practice and areas for development and gives guidance on how to improve delivery. The report was considered as part of the annual monitoring process by QSC.

1.56 The team asked for evidence in the supporting documentation and at meetings with staff, of any College external links with industry representatives. However, staff informed the team that there were as yet no formal links established, and no formal plans for the introduction of placement or work-based learning. There was discussion of links with other higher education institutions through senior staff with experience in higher education, and via ATHE, to be exploited in the event of the College developing programmes with other awarding organisations. However, as yet, there are no formal plans.

1.57 Currently, the College does not design and develop its own programmes, and it has not found a need to engage external expertise in this area.

1.58 The team considers that the College makes effective use of independent external expertise in addressing the requirements of its awarding organisation in respect of assessment processes and the award of credit. The team concludes, therefore, that Expectation A3.4 is met and the associated level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

1.59 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

1.60 All seven of the Expectations for this judgement area are met and the associated level of risk is low in five areas with moderate risk in two areas. There are three recommendations in this judgement area with no features of good practice or affirmations. Moreover, there are no features of good practice, recommendations or affirmations located elsewhere that relate to this judgement area.

1.61 The team notes that the primary responsibility for much of this judgement area lies not with the College but with its awarding organisations. The College has good relationships with its awarding partners and responds appropriately to their requirements. The College has internal policies and systems to ensure that it can meet the requirements of the awarding organisations. The College has policies and processes to maintain academic standards, and staff and students understand these standards. Given that the majority of Expectations in this judgement area are met with low risk, the team concludes that the maintenance of academic standards of awards offered by the College on behalf of its awarding organisations **meets** UK expectations.

2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

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

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

Findings

2.1 The College considers that its awarding organisations have responsibility for the design, development and approval of the programmes that the College offers. Although possible through Pearson, to date the College has not gained approval for any Centre-designed units to meet local needs.

2.2 The Quality Assurance Policy makes reference to the introduction of a process for the development and approval of new programmes. This allocates responsibilities for various aspects of the process to staff and managers.

2.3 Current students have access to the ATHE website through hyperlinks in the programme handbook and via the VLE. In this way they can access course content, including the range of core and optional units to be studied. These processes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.4 In testing the Expectation the team met students, staff and managers, and examined evidence provided by the College, including the Quality Assurance Policy, the staff handbook, awarding organisation approvals, programme handbooks, minutes of the Programme Quality Assurance Committee, the VLE, and awarding organisation websites.

2.5 The outline plans for the introduction of an internal process for the design, development and approval of new programmes involve consideration and decision making at different levels throughout the College. Ultimate responsibility for the approval of awarding organisations and programmes rests with the Board of Trustees. Members of the Programme Quality Assurance Committee select programme content and optional units, escalating their choices for consideration by managers and finally by the Principal, or his representative, for decisions relating to aspects such as resources. The review team found no evidence of a curriculum-planning cycle to align and support the College's strategic aims. While the team recognises the acceptability of a programme development process, initiated by either teachers or managers, that incorporates flexibility and opportunity, it found the previous and proposed processes to be unclear, disjointed and insufficiently linked with the organisation's strategic plan and aim of developing university partnerships.

2.6 The Quality Assurance Policy was reviewed in May 2015, since when the Level 6 Diploma has been designed and developed for delivery commencing in February 2016. However, the team was not shown evidence of the published planning process in operation.

2.7 Minutes of staff meetings show that for the Higher National programme teachers selected the optional units for delivery and self-selected which units to teach, undertaking this on a termly basis. There was no indication when the complete delivery plan and structure of the programme was considered in order to ensure a well-structured programme of learning. Similarly, the optional units for the Level 6 Diploma have been selected by teaching staff and advertised to students. However, during meetings, students and staff indicated that there is some degree of flexibility and personalisation in selecting optional

units. Staff informed the team that the Principal or Head of Academics selects optional units. Managers also told the team that student feedback and employer requirements also influence option choices. However, there was no evidence to support this. The team found this process to be unclear.

2.8 Other than through the awarding organisations, the team was not shown evidence to demonstrate the use of market research and the involvement of employers or external subject specialists in the design, development and approval of College programmes. Consequently, it was not evident how College programmes are aligned to meet local employer needs. Staff and managers confirm that employer engagement is underdeveloped. In addition, staff demonstrate limited understanding of how to engage with employers to develop curriculum design, and the team found no evidence of the consideration of equality and diversity matters in curriculum design. Students and staff confirmed that the rationale for introducing the Level 6 Diploma was to provide a progression route for students from Level 5 who did not feel particularly comfortable with progressing to university.

2.9 In consideration of the above, the review team **recommends** that the College should design and implement a comprehensive and rigorous process for the internal approval of new programmes.

2.10 In summary, the planned process sets an appropriate foundation for the College to increase the current level of formality in programme design, development and approval. However, the team found the College's processes for the design, development and approval of programmes to be overly reliant on awarding organisation processes, and to lack sufficient formality, rigour and clarity. In light of this, the team concludes that Expectation B1 is not met and the risk is moderate.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

Findings

2.11 Recruitment procedures are detailed in the College's Recruitment and Admissions Policy and on the College website. The policy sets out the College's strategic approach to recruitment and admissions, detailing the criteria for acceptance on its courses, accreditation of prior learning and consideration of diversity. The College makes clear its commitment to reasonable adjustments for any student with a disability or special educational need. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.12 The team tested the Expectation by examining the effectiveness of policies and procedures to recruit learners, including the College website, the College Recruitment and Admissions Policy, and the Academic Assessment and Internal Verification Policy. The team met staff responsible for admissions and discussed the recruitment and admissions experience with students.

2.13 There is a clear admissions process. Prospective students can apply for courses by downloading an application form from the College website. At the visit, the Operations Manager and Head of Administration confirmed their responsibility for admissions. The Principal confirmed that he is responsible for checking prospective students' qualifications. A Student Welfare Officer is available to assist prospective students in making an informed decision. In the event of any changes to the programme to which they had applied, staff at review affirmed their plans to email and call students should any unforeseen modifications arise.

2.14 The April 2015 QAA Concerns Report found evidence of some students being admitted without clearly documented evidence that they had met the course entry requirements. Records of student performance suggested that students were not suitable candidates for the course. The Concerns team found insufficient evidence that the English testing procedure for applicants was consistent or well documented.

2.15 Revised admissions records have features designed to improve the tracking of students' performance in English and Maths diagnostic tests and at interview. Basic student recruitment and selection data is tracked using a spreadsheet document. However, diagnostic assessments, for entry onto HND courses provided as evidence by the College showed students passing tests despite a poor understanding of the written English tasks, poor spelling, grammar and punctuation. Markers made little or no attempt to alter the errors made within the assessments. A separate document rated candidates from 'Needs Improvement' to 'Excellent'. The majority scored 'Good' or better irrespective of performance. Areas within the application form to record interview transcripts seen by the team at review were in many cases incomplete, missing or left blank.

2.16 Prospective students cannot appeal their application decision and the College Complaints Procedure is not made available until induction. Successful candidates are sent an acceptance letter along with a copy of the College terms and conditions. Staff at review stated that unsuccessful candidates receive a telephone call from the College. Staff specified that the candidate could take the entry tests again if they wished.

2.17 Student and staff handbooks contain all relevant course information and this is conveyed to students at induction. Students at review trusted that the materials available to them before starting their courses were accurate, and were happy with the information they had received prior to starting their course. The team found several inaccuracies in induction documents for students. These errors could potentially cause difficulties in prospective students' transition on the course. See recommendations under Part C.

2.18 Staff stated that they had not interviewed or tested applicants for the ATHE course in Management as they were returning learners from the College's Pearson HND Business course. This is in breach of its own admissions policy. When examining applicants' January 2016 ATHE application forms to the College, the team found several examples where students had been admitted without clear evidence that they had met the English language requirements specified by the course. Although the College claims to validate each candidate's eligibility in accordance with the relevant awarding organisation's entry requirements, areas on the application form confirming that proof of English language proficiency had been received and checked were left blank or incomplete. While the team recognises that the ATHE students are returning learners to the College, a robust system for checking these requirements must be in place. The team therefore **recommends** that the College adheres consistently and rigorously to the application of the Recruitment and Admissions Policy, to ensure that the principles of fair admission for all students are applied.

2.19 In conclusion, a fair admissions system should qualify higher education providers to select students who are able to complete the programme. The College has not clearly documented the procedures for admitting students, and has not confirmed that all students admitted to the programme are suitably qualified to study, in English, at higher education level. The review team concludes that the Expectation is not met. The level of risk is moderate due to the College's lack of rigour in the application of its own recruitment, selection and admissions policies in terms of a fair admissions process for potential students.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

2.20 The College has, as a main focus of the strategic plan, 'To develop a higher education curriculum offer that meets the higher education skills needs of local employers and the community through partnership working'. There is also a Learning and Teaching Strategy which has four strategic objectives, statements on quality assurance and statements of intent on student development. There are statements of commitment on physical and human resources, and recruitment and retention within the Strategy.

2.21 The College employs appropriately qualified staff and has a Staff Recruitment Policy. The policy sets out the procedures used in the recruitment of academic staff and it provides ongoing support through its staff development and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) Policy. There is a staff handbook that supports staff through the provision of information on College processes and procedures. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.22 The team scrutinised these strategic documents, including the Learning and Teaching Policy, Quality Assurance Policy and the Students' Handbook. The team also scrutinised several sets of minutes provided for various committees. These included the Board (22/6/15, 1/15, 3/15); SRC (7/14, 9/14, 10/14, 3/15); Resource Committee (8/13, 7/14, 9/14, 6/15); Programme Quality Assurance Committee (8/13, 10/13, 12/13, 2/14, 4/14, 6/14, 10/14, 8/15); Senior Management (2/14, 6/14, 2/15, 7/15); Academic Committee (6/15); QSC (4/15, 5/15, 6/15, 7/15, 8/15, 9/15, 10/15, 11/15); and Academic Committee (2/14, 6/14, 9/14).

2.23 The College states that the Academic Committee has an important role in the enhancement of the learning opportunities. The terms of reference for this committee do not have this responsibility listed, although the minutes reveal discussions on staff appraisal and CPD, with a view to improving teaching. The College also specifies a role for the Administrative Committee in managing administrative support. Again, there are no detailed terms of reference provided for the committee and it is difficult to determine its effectiveness.

2.24 The Staff Recruitment Policy sets out in some detail the procedures used in the recruitment of academic staff. The policy also describes a process for deciding whether new staff appointments are required and this references the College Development plan. The team was informed by staff that the processes that they undertook as part of their recruitment were broadly in line with the policy. There is an expectation by the College that members of academic staff have, or are working towards, a formal teaching qualification. Inspection of staff CPD files and discussions with staff confirmed that this is the case.

2.25 The College states that it recognises the importance of developing well-qualified staff, and it provides ongoing support through its staff development and CPD Policy. This describes the staff induction process, a system of annual staff appraisal (staff development and review scheme), and the planning and recording of staff development activity. Inspection of the CPD files, scrutiny of a staff CDP log and discussions between the team and

members of staff confirmed the occurrence of various forms of CPD identified as part of the staff appraisal process.

2.26 The quality of teaching is monitored through teaching observations undertaken by senior staff. The teaching observations are conducted by a core team, and areas of good practice and improvement are shared and action plans developed. These actions plans are monitored quarterly by senior staff. The observations by senior staff are being supplemented by a peer observation of teaching scheme. Good practice is also shared through informal team meetings and via programme committee meetings. The team found evidence of the implementation of these processes through inspection of the documentation and through discussions with staff. The students whom the team met expressed satisfaction with the teaching and support that they received.

2.27 The staff handbook supports staff through the provision of information on College processes and procedures. This is a clear and comprehensive document and its usefulness was confirmed in meetings with staff.

2.28 The team asked staff how they ensured that students are enabled to develop as independent learners. This was particularly important for the students moving from their previous Level 4/5 studies to the new Level 6 programme. A range of ideas was specified, including greater use of group presentations and individual seminar presentations, but no clear coordinated strategy was presented. The team inspected lesson plans provided and did not find evidence of clear strategies to help students develop as independent learners. As a consequence of the above, the team **recommends** that the College should develop a strategic approach to staff development to enable the effective planning and delivery of higher education.

2.29 Non-staffing resources to support teaching and learning are discussed at the Resources Committee. As with a number of committees, there are no detailed terms of reference. The sets of minutes refer to discussions on a range of physical resources, including classroom accommodation, student social areas, the library and IT provision.

2.30 The students whom the team met were broadly satisfied with the library and other resources. They reported that they had raised issues concerning accommodation and other resources in the past and that, where feasible, the College had addressed their concerns.

2.31 The team was given the opportunity to inspect the VLE. The system had not yet been populated for the ATHE course, although discussions with staff indicated that the main use of the system was for the repository of course and related material. However, there were plans to extend the use through the collection of assignments, the use of quizzes and other teaching tools. Students whom the team met were satisfied with their experiences of the VLE.

2.32 The team concludes that Expectation B3 is met. However, the insufficient emphasis or priority given to the approach to staff development to enable the effective planning and delivery of higher education suggests that the level of associated risk is therefore moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement

Findings

2.33 There are a variety of support mechanisms and resources for students. A Student Services team provides pastoral and welfare support to students. The Student Welfare Officer and Student Services Manager are the main sources of information and advice for students, providing pastoral, welfare and careers advice and support. Information for students detailing this support is available from a number of sources, including the Student Handbook, the College website, and the VLE.

2.34 The team considered evidence including student and course handbooks, minutes of QSC meetings and minutes of the SRC. The team also had meetings with staff and students.

2.35 The minutes of the SRC show that various issues concerning the learning environment and student support are considered. They also illustrate consideration of previous meeting minutes and actions. At the time of the review, this was the only meeting that had consistent student representation and students felt that this representation system was effective.

2.36 The team discussed the availability of various forms of support with students. The students confirmed that they had access to personal tutors for both academic and pastoral support and that this was backed up by central welfare services. The students were highly complimentary about the friendly atmosphere that enabled mature and returning learners to have confidence to approach staff. They are also impressed by the support provided by the student welfare section. Discussions with teaching staff confirmed the personal tutor support system, and staff also consider that it works well. The team was told of counselling services provided by the welfare section, but it was acknowledged that, with no formally trained counsellors on the staff, these were referral services.

2.37 The team asked about the monitoring of student progress. There were aspects of this at the assessment board; there were spreadsheets on student results produced and a progression tracking sheet, and aspects of monitoring are referred to in the annual monitoring report template. However, it was not clear from discussions with staff how these documents and reports are coordinated and fed through the Governance structure to the senior committees. The team therefore **recommends** that the College should revise the approach to monitoring student progression at module and course level in order to ensure full consideration of retention and achievement.

2.38 The team concludes that Expectation B4 is met. However, shortcomings in terms of the rigour of the monitoring of student progression indicate that insufficient emphasis is given to assuring appropriate student progression. The level of associated risk is therefore moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student Engagement

Findings

2.39 Students have various opportunities to engage in feedback and quality assurance. These include the opportunity to provide regular feedback to improve all aspects of College life and the opportunity for student representatives to participate in academic meetings with staff.

2.40 In testing this Expectation the team examined Attendance Committee meeting minutes, SRC and Management meeting minutes, Resource Committee meeting minutes, the Student Handbook, and the Quality Assurance Policy. The team also discussed student engagement opportunities with staff and students. The processes for students to be engaged individually through representation, and collectively with staff at committee meetings, in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience would allow Expectation B5 to be met.

2.41 Student representatives from previous years outlined the nomination process. They described receiving student representative training via electronic slideshow presentations. This included details of three committees that the student representatives may attend, their composition and frequency. Students are encouraged to engage in discussions with staff and to participate in committee meetings, particularly if there are likely to be significant changes to the curriculum, unit structure, or modules on offer.

2.42 Students stated that the representative system worked well and that they are able to make their views known via a variety of feedback options. Students talked about the personal tutor system, student representatives, the suggestions box at reception and the Student Welfare Officer. When issues have been raised in the past by representatives at student welfare meetings, staff have been helpful, giving timescales and discussing the students' problems. The management team is described as being easily approachable, either at reception or by booking an appointment.

2.43 The Student Welfare Officer role has been created to offer students advice, guidance and information to assist in the resolution of course and application problems, signposting to external organisations to assist with tutorials, registration and examination entries, ID badges, and updating student handbooks as necessary. The Student Welfare Policy states that the Student Welfare Officer is part of the College Registry Department to help new students with their arrival, and any day-to-day or pastoral concerns. Staff confirmed that, though not qualified, the Student Welfare Officer also provides basic counselling.

2.44 The College states in its Learning and Teaching Policy that students are given several structured opportunities to provide feedback. The College uses its own feedback forms to monitor student opinions regarding the teaching-learning environment, course content, administration and resources, on a five-item 'Likert scale'. Course modules are evaluated at the end of every teaching session.

2.45 The Student Committee also provides students with methods to interact directly with staff. Meeting minutes are disseminated to all students on a noticeboard. When students do raise concerns at meetings, staff make efforts to respond to these issues. Responding to student concerns was also described in the Resource Committee minutes, where improving

the recreational and eating area for students and the provision of low-cost, healthier food options was discussed.

2.46 Student representative training indicated that students could attend the Management and Students Welfare Resource Committee, SRC and Academic Committee meetings. However, students' attendance and representation at these committees has been minimal. No students attended Management and Student Welfare Resource Committee meetings between June 2014 and June 2015, despite these being listed in training as a meeting that they could attend.

2.47 Plans to expand informal student representatives into a formal Students' Union are detailed in the Quality and Academic Standards Meeting minutes for April 2015, in the 2015-18 Strategic Plan and in the Statement on Enhancement, providing that student numbers are adequate. The College has recognised that the current system is somewhat informal and has plans to formalise the structure and give members specific titles. The review team **affirms** the steps being taken to introduce a Students' Union as numbers increase.

2.48 The Student Representative system is not referenced in either the previous or current ATHE Student Handbook, so it is unclear how students are made aware of their representatives. Although students' attendance is inconsistent, the team recognises that the College encourages student representation at a number of committees. However, there is no official recognition of the work done by the student representatives or official guidance as to how students can engage as partners within the learning process. In addition, the effectiveness of student engagement and the representative system as a whole is not regularly monitored or maintained. The team therefore **recommends** that the College should develop systems to engage students formally as partners in their learning.

2.49 Therefore, although Expectation B5 is met, the level of risk is moderate, due to the insufficient emphasis given to student engagement within documentation, and lack of formal recognition of student representatives in the enhancement of their learning.

Expectation: Met

Level of risk: Moderate

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

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

Findings

2.50 The College's policy and procedures for the management and assurance of assessment are articulated in the Academic Assessment and Internal Verification Policy, the Learning and Teaching Policy, and staff and student handbooks. A schedule of assessment boards is held to review and confirm student achievement. Pearson and ATHE regulations align with those of the College.

2.51 In its first year of delivery of the Level 6 diploma programme the College is using assessments designed by the awarding organisation, thus ensuring alignment to external requirements. In addition, policies and procedures for the management of assessment offences, the application of reasonable adjustments and special considerations, and the recognition of prior learning are described in the Academic Misconduct Policy - Plagiarism, Malpractice Policy and Procedure, Reasonable Adjustment and Special Consideration, and Recruitment and Admissions policies. These arrangements would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.52 The team tested the Expectation by considering the evidence including the policy and procedure documents, student handbooks, samples of assignment briefs and assessed student work, assessment and internal verification records, reports from Pearson, minutes of assessment boards and standardisation meetings. The team also talked to staff and students. The team also focused on the effectiveness of the College's responses to actions pertaining to assessment arising from the QAA Concerns Report (2015).

2.53 The Concerns Report required the College to implement improvements to the clarity, consistency and recording of assessment regulations and procedures, while ensuring that these are understood by all parties and are implemented 'scrupulously and rigorously'. Specific actions related to setting assignments, internal verification, academic malpractice, and formative assessment.

2.54 As the College is using awarding organisation assessment briefs, and as at the time of this review no teaching or assessment has commenced, the review team are unable to comment on current arrangements for the quality assurance of assessment design and decisions. However, evidence from the Standards Verifier for the Higher National and the College indicates that roles and responsibilities for the verification of assessment are clear, effective and accurate in assuring standards, with the Head of Academics holding ultimate responsibility for the internal verification of assessment. Students spoke of good quality, helpful assignment briefs, stating that they find class discussions relating to these useful.

2.55 A published calendar of verification activities and a chart of individual teacher responsibilities ensure clarity for all staff involved. Likewise, a regular programme of standardisation of assessment practice is published. Minutes from standardisation meetings indicate that useful discussion occurs on broad issues relating to assessment arising from students' work rather than a detailed record of actual standardisation activity through comparing teachers' and students' work. However, staff confirm that they share and review each other's work.

2.56 Through study skills sessions and the use of plagiarism-detection software in conjunction with assessment submission via the VLE, the College recognises its responsibility to deter incidences of plagiarism in students' work for the Higher National programme. Students confirmed their knowledge of this system. This approach is being further strengthened through the use of different detection software directly linked to the ATHE website. However, when testing the clarity and consistency of documentation and staff's understanding of the management of plagiarism the review team found ambiguities. For example, one group of teachers knew of the change in use of software, while another group described both systems being in use. Teachers also described different procedures and penalties for managing incidences of plagiarism, with some stating that students would be subject to immediate action on detection of a defined percentage of plagiarism, and others describing a system whereby students are given a 'second chance'. Neither scenario aligns with the Academic Misconduct Policy (Plagiarism). The team noted that within the two policies relating to malpractice and misconduct, staff titles are referred to that do not match those on the College's organisational chart, for example a dean and directors. Furthermore, details relating to penalties for plagiarism vary across documents. On examining a sample record of a plagiarism and collusion meeting, the team noted that this had not been convened in line with stated requirements, in that teachers rather than senior staff had managed the meeting and outcome. The team **recommends** that the College ensures consistency, clarity and accuracy of all information relating to assessment regulations.

2.57 When the review team explored the issues of assessment resubmission and formative feedback, it found more ambiguity and uncertainty within documentation and among staff regarding policy and practice. The assessment calendar and verification/standardisation plan states that students have one submission deadline for multiple assessments each term, followed by one referral submission deadline of varying length. Alongside this the assignment brief template provides one final and one formative submission deadline. Although students confirmed how helpful formative feedback had been, there were discrepancies between students and different groups of staff as to their understanding of the regulations for formative feedback. For example: managers confirmed that students have one opportunity for formative feedback prior to summative submission; students stated that they might have one or two opportunities for draft submission; one group of staff said that students had three formative attempts, while the other group stated that the policy permitted at least two attempts. The team came to the view that this situation poses questions of equitability for students and risks for assuring academic standards. The team therefore **recommends** that the College ensures that assessment regulations are applied rigorously and equitably.

2.58 Although the Academic Assessment and Internal Verification Policy clearly articulates the College's assessment regulations, in testing the consistency of these across documentation, the review team found numerous discrepancies in information. Ambiguity was also evident in the understanding of key policies by staff and students.

2.59 Staff spoke confidently about the variety of assessment methods, such as presentations, reports and projects. Students confirmed that they were satisfied with this range and with the opportunities to link their studies with self-selected, work-based scenarios.

2.60 Through examination of reports from Pearson and samples of assessment feedback, the review team found that the quality of assessment feedback is variable. For example, many of the examples scrutinised reiterated the assessment criteria as opposed to indicating how future work could be improved, and some examples contained errors in the use of personal pronouns. Students from the 2014-15 cohort confirmed that they found the amount and quality of formative feedback very helpful in confirming achievement and indicating ways for improvement, but mentioned that summative feedback came too late to

influence future performance. The College is providing suitable support and development for staff to address this through training on formative feedback.

2.61 Arrangements for convening termly assessment boards are explicit and are published in staff and student handbooks. Separate boards are held to consider late assessment submissions. The review team found that, although boards involve the review of student results, much of the recorded discussion focuses on broader issues relating to assessment, such as malpractice, rather than formally signing-off results for all students, including fails and referrals (see A3.2). The team also noted anomalies in the contents of some historic minutes, for example staff who were recorded as being both present and absent, and text repeated across different meetings. In the absence of more recent records of assessment boards, the team is unable to confirm whether or not such anomalies have been rectified.

2.62 The College procedure for the recognition of prior learning is guided by the awarding organisation requirements. To date this has not been applied. Overall, the review team found ambiguity and inconsistencies in documentation, and staff and students' understanding and application of College regulations relating in particular to plagiarism and assessment submission. This, together with a lack of formal confirmation of all student outcomes during assessment boards, and previous awarding organisation certification blocks, leads the review team to conclude that Expectation B6 is not met. The team recognises the progress that the College has made in improving arrangements in aspects of assessment such as internal verification. However, as no assessment is currently taking place it is not possible to evaluate the effectiveness of these. As a consequence, the level of associated risk is moderate due to some shortcomings in the way assessment procedures are carried out.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining

Findings

2.63 Pearson is responsible for defining the role of external examiners and for their appointment, training and recognition. External examiners undertake standards verification through sampling of assessed work and check that timely and effective internal verification has been carried out on assessment decisions and feedback to students. The College is responsible for communicating with external examiners regarding the samples of assessed work to be provided, arrangements for their visits, and for responding to external examiner reports.

2.64 The College has internal systems for verification and for receiving and responding to external examiners' reports. Course coordinators receive the external verifier reports and respond to any recommendations and action points made. These systems allow the Expectation to be met.

2.65 The team reviewed a number of documents, including the Pearson verifier's report and the annual report. Meetings were held with senior staff, academic staff and students.

2.66 The Pearson reports are discussed at programme quality assurance meetings. Outcomes from the programme meetings are reported to the Academic Committee and they also inform the annual monitoring report. The minutes from the Academic Committee refer to the internal verification process. Internal verification is supported by regular standards meetings of the assessment and internal verifier teams.

2.67 The College responds to the external examiner's report with an action plan via the AMR and then monitors the progress made on the actions.

2.68 In line with standard procedure, Pearson and ATHE are responsible for the appointment of the external examiners. They provide an annual report following the inspection and verification of the inspection of student work. These are comprehensive, supportive and clear in their requirements of the provider. The Pearson and ATHE external reports also demonstrate that the College adheres to, and is aware of, the frameworks and regulations. The Pearson 2013-14 AMR confirmed that an accurate programme specification was in place.

2.69 The team met senior and academic staff. They confirmed the processes described in College documentation and evidenced in the reports.

2.70 The team found that the College makes effective use of external examiners in line with the requirements of its awarding organisations. The team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and the risk is deemed to be 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

2.71 The College relies on its awarding organisations for the periodic review of programmes through annual monitoring. There is no College system for periodic review.

2.72 A system of internal monitoring, ACCR, has recently been introduced to replace a previous process of annual monitoring. The programme leader is central to this, with responsibility for writing the report using a standardised template, and for presenting this for approval at an annual ACCR meeting. The team did, however, note some ambiguity in College documentation as to which committee received the example report in 2015. ACCR involves consideration of student feedback, external examiner reports, and statistical data. Data at module level is supplied from central sources by the Head of Operations. The Head of Academics is responsible for monitoring programmes. The team considers that the arrangements for monitoring and review of programmes would allow the Expectation to be met.

2.73 To test this Expectation the team evaluated the College's arrangements for annual monitoring. It considered the Quality Assurance Policy, the ACCR Report for Higher National Business, and committee records. The team also spoke with students and staff, and reviewed central data sources.

2.74 In 2015 Pearson identified concerns at the College. These related to the high number of student withdrawals, late registrations and certification claims. Evidence presented to the team confirms that the College took these concerns seriously, monitoring progress against actions appropriately. Actions taken to address issues relating to awarding organisation registrations have been effective. For example, registration fees for students currently studying the Level 6 Diploma have been collected at enrolment and registrations have been completed within five days of this. In addition, a checking system has been introduced by members of the administrative team who complete registrations.

2.75 The College considers that it is over-reliant on awarding organisations and is in the process of developing its own single quality assurance system. The system of external annual monitoring is seen to be central to this as a driver for improvement. The College's strategic plan extends from 2015 to 2018. In order to fulfil its strategic aims, while ensuring the programmes that the College offers are fit for purpose, current and of good quality, the review team **recommends** that the College should devise and implement a process for the periodic review of programmes.

2.76 The team found the ACCR report to be a suitable mechanism for annual programme review, which, together with a formal presentation of the report to senior managers, provides a suitable process for ensuring that monitoring oversight is maintained. As the Level 6 Diploma programme is yet to start, the reports presented as evidence were for the dormant Higher National programme. The team cannot therefore comment on the effectiveness of a complete review cycle by tracking to see how actions arising from the report have been addressed.

2.77 A review of the effectiveness of the ACCR by the College has resulted in a revised template that includes more emphasis on data analysis. From the example presented, the

review team agrees with members of the QSC that the quality of the annual report could improve further as staff become more familiar with the process. Reports will benefit from increased detail, analysis and evaluation, including an impact assessment of actions taken in the year prior to the start of the report. Analysis of students' feedback, the Standards Verifier's report, and student statistical data is slight, with no clear evidence to show how it is used to inform planning. Although central data sources record achievement at unit level for use at assessment boards, the achievement data considered in the ACCR report for the Higher National programme relates only to award level for students who were retained and achieved, and does not consider factors such as retention or progression. Teaching staff have limited ongoing access to central student achievement data, thereby restricting their ability to review and monitor performance data other than at assessment boards.

2.78 The team recognises the steps that the College has taken to improve the ACCR and **recommends** that it continues to further develop and embed the ACCR process to incorporate detailed analysis of statistical information and student feedback.

2.79 On the basis of the above evidence, the review team concludes that Expectation B8 is met, but because of the absence of a system of periodic review and insufficient emphasis on the embedding and strengthening of the ACCR, the level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

Quality Code, Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints

2.80 Students can make a complaint using the Student Complaints Form. This details the options that students have for making a complaint, either informally with their course tutor, or formally by completing the Complaints Form. Students have the option to make an anonymous complaint, as adding their personal details to the form is optional.

2.81 If a student is unhappy with a grade they can ask the lecturer for further clarification of the decision. The lecturer can then provide clarification using the assessment criteria for the assignment. If a student feels that their work has not been marked correctly they can appeal in writing to the internal verifier or programme course leader, using the Appeal Against Assessment Decision Form. The name of the internal verifier is claimed to be specified in the programme handbook; however, the team could find no evidence of this detail. If still unsatisfied, students are invited to follow the appeals procedure stipulated by the awarding organisation.

2.82 Information regarding the Complaints Policy can be accessed from a number of sources, namely the Staff Handbook, Student Handbook, the College website, VLE and at student representative meetings. Both students and staff are informed about the Complaints Policy in inductions at the start of the year. Staff are provided with support and guidance on handling complaints in staff training, during meetings and in the staff handbook.

2.83 The complaints procedures and timescales are documented, and are designed to provide a resolution at the earliest possible opportunity. The College aims to resolve informal complaints within five working days and formal complaints within 15 working days. Academic appeals must be received within two weeks of publication of the final results. The College aims to resolve appeals within four weeks. These actions would allow Expectation B9 to be met.

2.84 In testing the Expectation the team examined the Complaints Policy, the Student Complaints Form, and the academic appeal guidance within the Academic Assessment and Internal Verification Policy and the ATHE Handbook. The team also met academic staff, professional staff and students.

2.85 Due to the absence of any formal academic complaints or appeals, it is difficult for the College to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of its appeal and complaints procedures. Students at review described having approached staff informally with any difficulties, rather than through formalised means. While all students were aware of how to appeal their grade, none had submitted an academic appeal. Nevertheless, the College has set out plans within the Quality Assurance Policy to review and evaluate its own actions in the event of an academic appeal or formal complaint.

2.86 Before a student makes a formal complaint they are encouraged to seek the advice of the Student Representative Panel, their tutor or the Student Welfare Officer. The Welfare Officer coordinates the student complaint procedure and ensures no conflict of interest between staff members and the matter of the student's complaint. If a formal complaint cannot be resolved by a department head then a Complaints Panel will attempt to reach a resolution. This consists of the Head of Administration, the Head of Quality Assurance and the College Principal. If a resolution cannot be reached, the student has the right to contact the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.

2.87 The Appeals section detailed within the ATHE Student Handbook recommends that students first contact their Academic Head or Director of Studies. However, this does not correspond to the guidance for academic appeals given within the Academic Assessment and Internal Verification Policy, where students are instead advised to contact their lecturer. Staff described students meeting the internal verifier after 10 days, then the appeal being referred to the Head of Academics and Head of Administration. This guidance lacks consistency and has the potential to confuse and complicate appeals. For this reason, the team **recommends** that the College ensures that the process of academic appeals is clearly and consistently communicated to staff and students.

2.88 The College's appeals and complaints policies provide a straightforward overview of formal and informal procedures for making a complaint or academic appeal. Although there is a lack of consistency between some documents, these procedures are fair, accessible and timely and the College has described future plans to monitor and evaluate progress. Therefore, Expectation B9 is met and the level of risk is low.

Expectation: Met
Level of risk: Low

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

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

Findings

2.89 The College does not work with any other organisations other than with its awarding organisations. Therefore this Expectation is not applicable.

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

2.90 The College does not offer research degrees, therefore this Expectation is not applicable.

The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.91 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

2.92 Of the nine applicable Expectations for this judgement area (the College has no engagement with Expectations B10 and B11), two are met with low risk (Expectations B7 and B9). Four are met but with moderate risk (Expectations B3, B4, B5 and B8). Three are not met, with a moderate risk (Expectations B1, B2 and B6). The moderate risk in Expectation B1 centres around the internal approval process for new programmes; the moderate risk in Expectation B2 relates to the College's Recruitment and Admissions Policy; and the moderate risk in Expectation B6 centres around adherence to the College's assessment regulations.

2.93 There are eight recommendations associated with this judgement area. These concern the design and implementation of a process for internal approval of new programmes (Expectation B1); adherence to the College's Recruitment and Admissions Policy (Expectation B2); the development of a strategy and associated staff development programme to assist in the development of students as independent learners (Expectation B3); ensuring that planning for learning is appropriate for Level 6 (Expectation B3); revision of the approach to monitoring student progression (Expectation B4); the development of a system for student engagement (Expectation B5); ensuring consistency of all information relating to assessment regulations (B6); further development of the ACCR process (Expectation B8); ensuring clarity and consistency of appeals documentation; (B9) and ensuring a transparent and accessible appeals process for student admissions is in place (Expectation B9).

2.94 There is one affirmation in this judgement area, located in Expectation B5, which concerns the steps being taken to implement plans for a Students' Union as numbers increase. The team found no examples of good practice.

2.95 The team notes that while two Expectations in this judgment area are met with low risk, four Expectations are met with moderate risk, and crucially, three are not met, with moderate risk due to insufficient priority or emphasis given to assuring standards of quality in the College's planning processes (Expectations B1, B2 and B6). The team therefore concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities at the College **requires improvement to meet** 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 has produced information and resources for prospective students, current students and staff. Information is accessible via the College website, with details regarding admissions, facilities, and links to the relevant awarding organisations. The VLE can be accessed via the College website and features downloadable forms including the Complaints Procedure, Attendance Policy, Student Welfare Support Policy, Malpractice and Plagiarism policies. The College mission, strategy and overall vision is specified within the College's Strategic Plan, and is detailed on the College website. In assessing that information is fit for purpose, trustworthy and suitable, the review team considered College publications, including the Strategic Plan, Public Information Policy, Student Handbook and the College website. The team met staff and students and was given a demonstration of the College VLE.

3.2 Information for prospective students regarding application and admissions is available on the College website, with links to the relevant pages and criteria on the respective ATHE and Pearson websites. Brief information regarding the learning environment is available to both prospective and current students, indicating that the College offers a library and computer lab. An example of advertisement flyers for the ATHE Diploma in Management course and Pearson Edexcel HND in Business was provided to the review team. Both respectively detail the eligibility criteria for the course and the support available to students.

3.3 At enrolment and on commencement of their studies, students are provided with the Students' Handbook, access to material relating to their programme and information about what is expected of them as students, including the policies and procedures that apply to them.

3.4 Information about the College's arrangements for academic standards, quality assurance and enhancement are detailed in the Quality Assurance Policy. Although the respective awarding organisations, ATHE and Pearson, are responsible for the definitive record of each programme, as the provider the College sets out what students can expect of the programmes. This includes making complaints, and academic appeals procedures accessible on the VLE, as well as information regarding academic misconduct and plagiarism. On completion of their studies, students are provided with a formal record of their studies and achievements, in accordance with College policies regarding student records.

3.5 The College does not make students aware within its published documentation how they can engage as partners with the College. No reference to student representation is made either within the student BTEC or ATHE handbook, on the College website or the VLE. This is covered in more detail under Expectation B5: Student Engagement.

3.6 The April 2015 Action Plan, produced in response to the QAA Concerns report, listed several actions in reference to information provision. It was recommended that the

College ensure that all information provided for prospective students was comprehensive and accurate.

3.7 Although students met by the review team were happy with the information provided to them before starting their course, the review team found a number of inaccuracies in the information provided to students within the induction pack. The ATHE Induction Pack made numerous references to Merit and Distinction grades, that although applicable to Pearson BTEC programs, are not possible with the Pass or Fail grading on the ATHE Management course. The induction pack also stated that failing to submit an assignment on time would lead to a student's grade being capped, and that they would only be eligible for a Pass. The Action Plan stated that from the end of May 2015, marketing materials and the College website were to be clearly dated to confirm the validity of the information. However, examples of flyers and marketing materials provided to the team were not obviously dated.

3.8 Many internal and external information signs at the College make reference to, and have the logo for, 3D Morden College. During meetings, several staff members confirmed that they had acted as Principal and staff for 3D Morden College in addition to AA Hamilton, but that courses were no longer running.

3.9 Staff at review were confused as to who was responsible for the accuracy of the College website and the College's published content, naming the Head of Academics and the Operations Manager. The 2015 Action Plan also recommended that checks were carried out to ensure that the Admission Policy contained the correct information before any information was made public. These would be checked in accordance with the College Publications Policy and procedure. Staff were also unsure who checked content prior to publication and where ultimate responsibility for the accuracy of published information lay, naming the Operations Manager and the Chairman of Trustees. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College develop procedures for checking that information is fit for purpose, accurate and trustworthy.

3.10 The team concludes that the College's informal approach to information production and scrutiny lacks the rigour required to ensure an objective and accurate reflection of its learning opportunities. Staff are unsure as to who is ultimately responsible for ensuring the accuracy of published information, and as a result the review team found a number of errors within published College documents. Therefore, Expectation C is not met. The level of associated risk is moderate due to the College's lack of clarity about responsibilities, and lack of rigour in the application of quality assurance procedures to information.

Expectation: Not Met
Level of risk: Moderate

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

3.11 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

3.12 The team concludes that although the quality of information about learning opportunities available to students does not present a serious risk at present, it could lead to a serious risk over time.

3.13 Expectation C is not met due to the lack of clarity in the provision of information for students. The associated level of risk is moderate due to the lack of clarity about the responsibilities for checking that information is fit for purpose, accurate and trustworthy. There is one recommendation in this judgement area, relating to the identification of procedures and responsibilities for checking the accuracy and currency of information.

3.14 In summary, the Expectation is not met and the level of risk is moderate due to the underdeveloped plans in terms of the organisation's responsibilities for checking that information provided for students is fit for purpose, accurate and trustworthy. The team therefore concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities at the College **requires improvement to meet** UK expectations.

4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

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

Findings

4.1 The Director of Standards and Enhancement is responsible for leading on the enhancement of student learning opportunities and quality improvement. This role encompasses all aspects of the quality of the provision at the College, working with external stakeholders, and is executed through his leadership of the QSC. Other specific responsibilities include working with the Head of Academics and the Head of Administration in developing, implementing, coordinating, and managing aspects of enhancement; learners' committees; and, with the Head of Academics, administering the Academic and Misconduct Infringement Committee.

4.2 Commitment to raising standards and the quality of the educational provision and to the empowerment of staff through training and development are emphasised in the staff handbook. As part of this commitment a range of processes are used as mechanisms for enhancement. These include staff training and development, staff appraisals, teaching observations, student surveys, a student representative committee, monitoring and review. However, there is an absence of evidence to demonstrate the strategic linking and monitoring of the impact of these mechanisms throughout the organisation.

4.3 The team examined evidence provided by the College, including a statement on enhancement, the Quality Assurance Policy, and committee minutes. Meetings were also held with students, staff and managers to test the understanding of enhancement and the integration and monitoring of the College's improvement processes for collective oversight.

4.4 Staff and managers confirmed that approaches to the identification and dissemination of good practice in teaching and learning activities is not routine. Academic staff described a process for the systematic sharing of good practice during team meetings each week. However, the review team found no evidence to support this routine activity, and consider the supporting examples of good practice in schemes of work and lesson plans that were provided to be insufficiently detailed and inappropriate for study at Level 6, therefore demonstrating no evidence of improvement processes.

4.5 Understanding by staff and managers of the term 'enhancement', as applied in the Expectation, is limited. There is no evidence of the routine consideration of enhancement throughout the committee structure. When asked to provide examples of enhancements that had been made, staff and students tended to focus on routine issues relating to physical resources such as the library, a leaking roof, and computers. Minutes of the SRC and discussions with staff and students indicate that the College takes a responsive role to students' requests. Other than the SRC student attendance at, and membership of, College committees is not necessarily automatic. For example, students 'may be' invited to the QSC each term. Student membership does not extend to trustee level.

4.6 Although mentioned in the staff handbook, engagement with industry is minimal. During meetings, staff understanding of the need for industry updating was restricted to undertaking training. Senior staff confirmed that, as an enhancement opportunity, employer engagement is underdeveloped.

4.7 As there have been no students in College since 2014-15, and as the appointment of the Director of Standards and Enhancement was made in August 2015, the College's

ability to demonstrate the effectiveness of its current plans and approaches to enhancement has been hindered. Future plans to monitor enhancement include the development of a set of key performance indicators and the establishment of a Students' Union when sufficient student numbers warrant this.

4.8 As a consequence of these findings, the team **recommends** that the College develop and disseminate a deliberate, strategic and organisationally led approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities that is embedded at all levels of the organisation.

4.9 The review team concludes that the College does not meet the Expectation due to the lack of mechanisms for enhancement and the lack of opportunities for staff and students throughout all levels of the organisation to become involved. As the College operates a set of routine quality assurance activities, the level of risk is moderate.

Expectation: Not met
Level of risk: Moderate

The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.10 In reaching its judgement, the team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook.

4.11 The single Expectation is not met and the associated risk is moderate. The College has some processes for the improvement of learning opportunities in place but these are largely resource-related, for example, improved access to online journals, rather than deliberate strategic attempts by the College to enhance the students' learning opportunities. The risk is moderate because there are some shortcomings in terms of the rigour with which these are applied.

4.12 There are no features of good practice in this judgement area. There is one recommendation relating to the development and dissemination of a deliberate, strategic and organisationally led approach to the enhancement of student learning opportunities, which is embedded at all levels of the organisation.

4.13 There is one affirmation relating to the steps being taken to introduce a Students' Union as numbers increase.

4.14 Given that the Expectation is not met and the risk is moderate, because there are some shortcomings in terms of the rigour with which attempts to enhance student learning opportunities are applied, the team concludes that the enhancement of student learning opportunities at the College **requires improvement to meet** UK expectations.

5 Commentary on the Theme: Digital Literacy

Findings

5.1 The College chose Digital Literacy as its main theme, but could provide no evidence of its implementation at review. Students questioned had no knowledge of digital literacy beyond the basic IT skills training offered by the College. Staff at review stated that digital literacy was at a very early stage of development and had yet to be implemented in any way.

5.2 The team was provided with a Statement on Digital Literacy. This described how, in the future, the College hopes to use the University of Illinois's definition of digital literacy to develop use, awareness and understanding of digital literacy. An image from the Jisc website was included, illustrating the seven elements model of digital literacy.

5.3 The College has a library and IT Laboratory with 55 PCs. Currently, the College has no links to academic journals or eBooks, aside from a minority of free, publicly available previews of textbook pages. Hyperlinks to these previews are provided on the VLE. Only selected and at times disjointed pages within chapters are available to view, with the majority of book pages excluded on copyright grounds.

5.4 Students can view their timetable and academic calendar and submit their work online via the VLE. Staff at review described having switched from paid-for plagiarism detection software to a free-to-use programme recommended and provided by ATHE. Teaching staff use the VLE to upload unit and module materials for students and to provide feedback from assignments.

5.5 The January 2015 ATHE report found a good range of computing and learning resources available to students. The VLEs were described as safe, accessible and reliable for use. Likewise, Pearson found the quality of digital resources to be acceptable, describing them as 'just adequate' for the size of the College cohort at the time.

5.6 In conclusion, the team found that while there are prospective plans to develop an understanding and awareness of digital literacy for future cohorts, the College is not currently promoting the concept or practice of digital literacy at this time.

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 22-25 of the [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\) handbook](#)

If you require formal definitions of other terms please refer to the section on assuring standards and quality:

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.

Awarding organisation

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

Blended learning

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

Credit(s)

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

Degree-awarding body

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

Distance learning

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

See also **blended learning**.

Dual award or double award

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

e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning.

Enhancement

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

Expectations

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

Flexible and distributed learning

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

See also **distance learning**.

Framework

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

Framework for higher education qualifications

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

Good practice

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

Learning opportunities

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

Learning outcomes

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

Multiple awards

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

Operational definition

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

Programme (of study)

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

Programme specifications

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

Quality Code

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

Reference points

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

Self-evaluation document

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

Subject Benchmark Statement

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

Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)

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

Threshold academic standard

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

Virtual learning environment (VLE)

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

Widening participation

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

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